

1941



1942

THE SHACKLED STATUE *by* BERKELEY LIVINGSTON

fantastic

ADVENTURES

JANUARY

25¢

IN CANADA 30¢



THE DEVIL'S PIGS

By Don Wilcox

This time you'll listen to ME, Sonny Boy!

1 **MOMMA WAS LOSING PATIENCE WITH ME AGAIN.** She says: "I'm getting plenty sick of you looking like Flaky Joe, Hair's Horrible Example! And I'm tired of you spending money for a lot of junk that doesn't help. You'd never listen to me who has been a nurse most of her life, but you'll listen this time, Sonny Boy!"



2 **"THIS PROVES WHAT I'VE TOLD YOU** for months," she went on. "You've got a case of infectious dandruff that ought to have repeated Listerine Antiseptic treatment and persistent massage. I've seen the records on the Lambert research, and I know what Listerine Antiseptic can do in killing the 'bottle bacillus.' And so, Bahy, we're starting right now!"



3 **EVERY MORNING AND NIGHT SHE HERDED ME** into the bathroom and doused on Listerine Antiseptic. Then she followed it with a swell, vigorous massage. Boy! Did my scalp feel like a million. And the way those ugly flakes and scales began to disappear is nobody's business. What a treatment!

4 **"YOU'RE ALMOST HUMAN AGAIN,"** she said a few weeks after, "and your hair looks like it used to. After this, maybe you'll listen to Momma when she tells you that you ought to use Listerine Antiseptic, every time you wash your hair, as a precaution against the infection coming back." Will I listen? You said it!



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THESE common little symptoms may mean that you're in for infectious dandruff.

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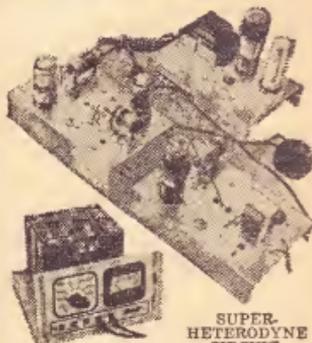
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ADVENTURES



STORIES

- THE DEVIL'S PIGS** (Short—8,000) By Don Wilcox 12
 Illustrated by Virgil Finlay
War was over . . . and the war makers became subjects for experiment in a super-scientific laboratory.
- INVASION OF THE RAINDROPS**
 (Novelet—14,000) By Edwin Benson 26
 Illustrated by Jay Jackson
It rained drops as big as buckets; in each drop the face of a lovely girl . . . calling compellingly.
- THE SHACKLED STATUE**
 (Short—6,500) By Berkeley Livingston 52
 Illustrated by William Latz
This was the oddest thing Windy had ever seen—a statue with chains on it; and not just for effect!
- FREDDIE FUNK'S FOREST FORGE**
 (Short—7,900) By Leroy Yerxa 66
 Illustrated by J. Allen St. John
He was a living symbol of the armament industry; the god of flame and forge so necessary to war.
- THE OBSERVER** (Short—6,000) By Robert Moore Williams . . . 80
 Illustrated by Roger Shephardson
The army intelligence tests had dug up many very clever soldiers—but none to equal this man!
- A YEAR FROM TONIGHT**
 (Short—7,900) By Dorothy Quick 92
 Illustrated by James Devereux
No one had lived in the castle for many years—yet tonight it blazed with light . . . and with danger!
- THE CANNONBALL ROAD**
 (Short—6,000) By Wallace West 108
 Illustrated by H. G. McCauley
The cannonball road is famous in American history—but that's where it belonged; not in 1944!
- TAGGART'S TERRIBLE TURBAN**
 (Novelet—30,000) By Don Wilcox 122
 Illustrated by Magarian
Ordinarily you say a person wearing a turban is a screwball—this time it was the other way around.
- THE MIRACLE OF DR. BEAUJEAN**
 (Short—7,500) By Curtis Pechtel 176
 Illustrated by Ned Hadley
In the hills of India Dr. Beaujean performed a hideous operation—and terror stalked the jungle!

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones illustrating a scene from "The Devil's Pigs"
Back cover painting by James B. Settles depicting the "Kite Ship of the Moon"

JANUARY
1945

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VOLUME 7
NUMBER 1

Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WANT to know how we make up an issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES? Well, here's how this one was made up . . .

First, artist H. Gibson Jones brought in a cover which Herman Bollin, our art director, hought with a nod of approval (and boy, does that mean it's good!). Next, Don Wilcox came into the office and looked the cover over, said, "That gives me an idea." Eventually the idea became a manuscript in our files. Which is where the make-up begins . . .

COMES the day we ask ourselves "What's next on the schedule?" The schedule (a monthly pain in the neck delivered to us by Herh Morganroth, who is the best production man you ever heard of), tells us "Fantastic Adventures." So we turn to the file of covers, yank one out and note that it has a story to fit. We get the story from the file, note the wordage, then select at random (according to word lengths) sufficient manuscripts to fill the issue—which is a total of 100,000 words. We naturally try to select, too, with a view toward variety of subject and author, although sometimes we duplicate authors, just as we have in Wilcox's case in this issue.

OUR next move is to call in Howard Browne, our able assistant editor, and say in a very tired voice, "Howard, here's a hundred thousand words, probably all very badly punctuated—seeing as how Yerxa and Livingston are included. See what you can make of them." When we say that, we mean that Howard is to get busy and edit them. Needless to say, Howard is the lad who can do it!

NOW, having exhausted ourselves, we relax reflectively and conclude that these stories will need illustrations. Rousing ourselves, we discover to our delight that we had all but one of the stories previously illustrated, and cuts are all made. Perfect! We won't have a thing to do to get this issue to hed!

EXCEPT . . . write the editorial; wade through seven or eight hundred letters from readers and select those to go in the reader's column, and because our secretary is on vacation, retype them 50 characters wide (that's how wide our column is) and add our comments. When we have enough lines to fill the column we find we've written 5,000 words! Then comes the galley proofs. Howard and your editor paste them up, then your editor

writes the subheads and captions to fit the dizzy (cross that out) excellent layouts the art department has made. When we get stuck with a really tough one, Howard does it. All this finished, we find ghastly holes all over the book. Fillers! Yep, the file again! We got 'em, by the hundreds, all typed up 50 characters to the line. More sub-heads, layouts, etc. Then the contents pages, made up last, copied from a tremendous list where each page and its progress from blank paper to finished proof has been recorded. On this list are many columns with dates stamped in them, indicating where each sheet is at all times. Lastly the proof-reading, which is the reason we are considering going to the oculist at long last and admitting we need glasses and that our hoast we can read numbers on hox cars a mile away is sheer fantasy (we could do it in the past!).

MEANWHILE the art department has murdered our titles because they don't fit on the cover. So we have to have them reset for the top of each page, and have to re-plate the contents page because we were fool enough to shoot it out before the "last minute." After the magazine is on the press, Mr. Davis, the editor, observes a proof and expresses an opinion that an illustration stinks! This is when we are lucky—we only have to hold the presses and replate four pages. When we are unlucky, a story stinks. Then we go back and start from scratch!

ASKING ourselves whether we wrote this to fill space, the answer comes out no. You see, our readers are constantly coming up to visit us at the office, and these are the things they want to know and see in operation. We believe you will be interested in sharing their knowledge. So there it is, the life of an editor!

IN this issue we have two yarns by Don Wilcox, both of them very unusual. "The Devil's Pigs" is a tremendous indictment of the German war criminals, and a lesson for the future. It would be well for us to take "The Devil's Pigs" literally! The other is a true fantasy that cannot fail to delight you.

BERKELEY LIVINGSTON'S "The Shackled Statue" reminds us of "Pygmalion," but it has a new twist to it that strikes us as being mighty clever. You'll go for it.

(Concluded on page 8)

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Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Concluded from page 6)

WALLACE WEST returns again to prove he is a master craftsman, and also knows how to bring those eerie chills to your spine. Travel with him down Washington's "Cannonball Road" to victory for Americans in two ages.

ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS, still finding time to pound them out in the air force, has done one of his very best, called "The Observer," which is one you won't be able to put down once you've finished the first page!

ANOTHER lady writer joins our ranks! Dorothy Quick does a neat one with "A Year From Tonight," and we do mean neat. This one has all the flavor and delight of "The Ghost Goes West" which made a classic movie.

WHEN we mention "The Miracle of Dr. Beaujean" we come to an author new to science fiction, new to fiction. This is his first story, and maybe we bought it at a time when we were terribly overstocked because of paper shortages just because Curtis Pechtel is a patient at Muirdale Sanatorium in Waukesha, Wisconsin, where your editor spent nearly a year himself recovering from an almost fatal attack of intestinal flu. Your editor was the only survivor of a ward of eighteen persons, and what we went through there will never be forgotten. The parallel here is the fact that we wrote our first story there also! However, when Howard Browne proofread this story, he made a special trip into our private office to say it was the best story he'd proof-read in many a week! So there you are, sentiment or no, you can't take any credit from a courageous beginner!

EDWIN BENSON . . . for crying out loud, Edwin, we thought you'd died! After all these years, a manuscript! . . . presents "Invasion of the Raindrops," a fascinating little interplanetary fantasy without space ships. This one does all its traveling in a raindrop, and you'll like it, we predict.

LET'S see now, is that all? Seems to us there was another yarn in this issue . . . Oh, well, let it go. If you find it, read it. You'll probably appreciate us not spoiling the plot for you and having a chance to express your own opinion without a lot of prodding by us!

NOW for a little tip on a story to appear in our companion magazine, *Amazing Stories*, on sale December 8 and dated March. It is a 36,000 word story called "I Remember Lemuria!" and is unique for this reason: The author, Richard S. Shaver, seriously says the story is taken from *memory*, and relates the adventures of a semi-synthetic man named Mutan Mion 12,000 years ago in ancient Lemuria, which, says Shaver, was not on the surface of Earth, but *inside*, in great caverns which still exist!

NATURALLY, we present this story as fiction, but we add here that Mr. Shaver has convinced us that his claim is true, and he has given us some very amazing facts which we are scientifically checking—with results that are beginning to stagger us slightly. However, we ask that you read this story, first of many, and keep up with what we confidently say will be the most sensational scoop that has ever been offered to the science fiction fantasy fan insofar as story value is concerned, and probably even more sensational in the scientific facts that are being uncovered. Mr. Shaver's mention of these underground city-caves of Lemuria includes the statement that he himself has been there—and has seen others by weird scientific means that we intend to disclose later, when we have checked them.

WE don't ask you to believe a word of this, only to get that issue and read the story. Then you can draw your own conclusions.

ALTHOUGH the item we are going to insert here should go in *Amazing Stories*, it concerns the active fan groups who read all fantasy magazines, and a time element is involved—so here it is. Recently it came to our attention that Lt. William Lawrence Hamling had plagiarized a story called "The Man Who Spoke Too Late" in our September issue of *Amazing Stories*. This is untrue. The story in question was originally submitted to this editor some years back, but was not sufficiently polished for acceptance. Mr. Hamling, who is the author, then gave permission to a fan magazine (more properly a mimeographed sheet circulated among a group of fans numbering perhaps 50) to print the story. However, he gave them no other favors, retaining all rights and copyright. So, when we bought the story for publication, we knew its history; and those fans who jumped to conclusions, because the fan magazine published under a pen name, ought to have investigated before they jumped. A charge of plagiarism is a serious thing to a writer—and Bill Hamling is one of the finest young men we know, and one of the most promising youngsters on our roster. We predict that many of his stories, to appear regularly in these magazines, will thrill you with their excellence. And further, whenever we want to put something valuable in a safe place, we give it to Bill Hamling.

—Rap.



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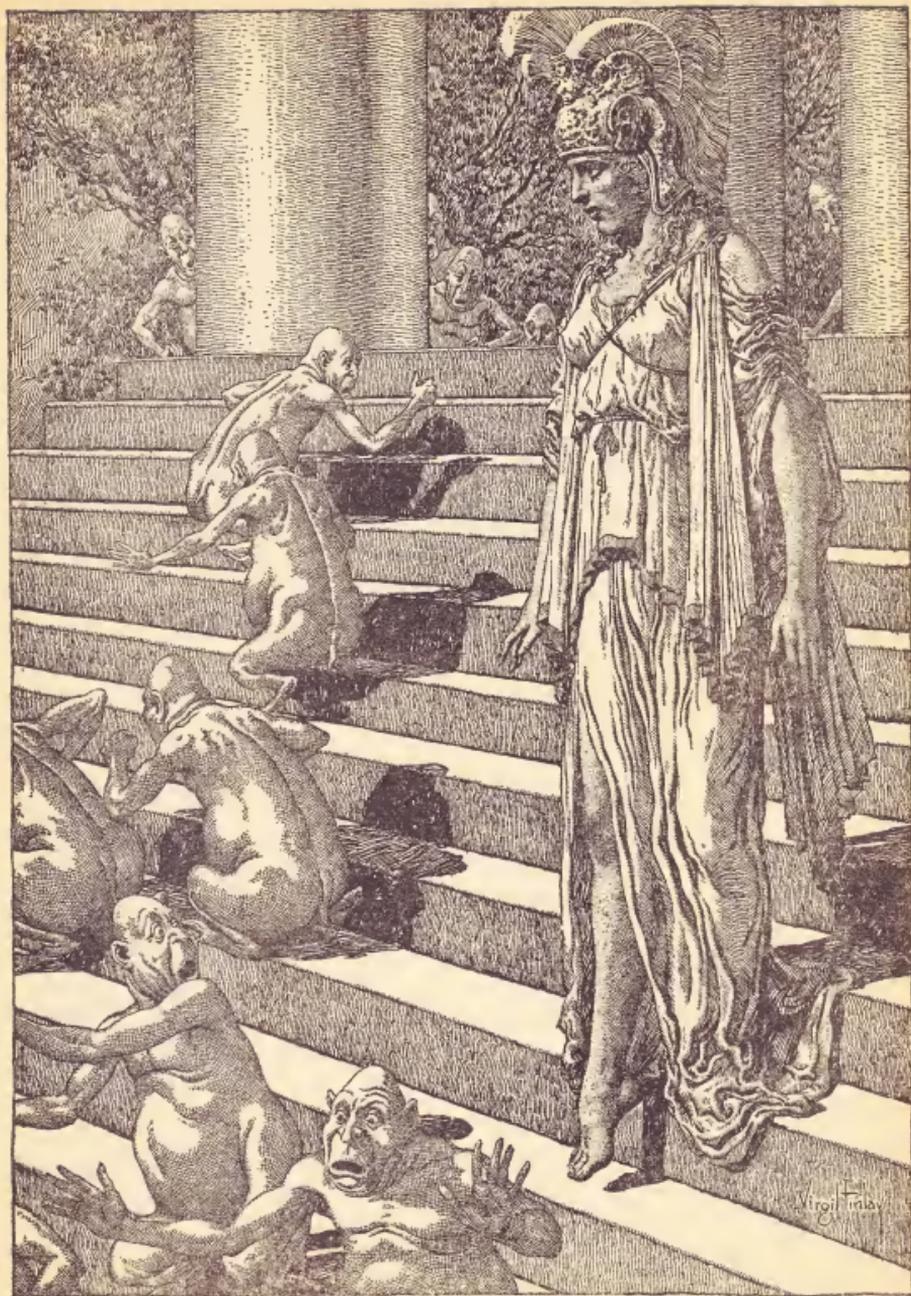
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The degenerates scurried fearfully from her path

THE DEVIL'S PIGS

By DON WILCOX

**The Himmlers and Hitlers of tomorrow
were guinea pigs in a fantastic laboratory of
rehabilitation that led to . . . something else!**

ONE year has passed since we began this experiment, and the boss has asked me to jot down a few informal notes to supplement the day-to-day records* of the scientists. As chief of the guards, I have accumulated a few ideas about these eighty German prisoners. The boss—that is, the director of the Longevity Department of the Ivanoff Laboratories—believes that these prisoners may live a hundred and fifty years or more. If so, a brief summary, year by year, of their habits of living should be of considerable value.

It is now February 2, 1946. The first of the prisoners was smuggled into the laboratories just a year ago today. This particular German was designated Hitler-22-E. This means that he was an official directly under Hitler, twenty-two places from the top. His mustache resembles Hitler's and it is obvious that he imitates Hitler's manner in every way he can. From the first day that we dragged him through the

rear entrance and he kicked a panel out of a door, he has been the most savage and obstreperous of prisoners.

Hitler-22-E has assumed an air of importance among the other seventy-nine prisoners, partly because of his prison name. Most of the group were directly under Himmler. Of these, Himmler-7-H, who was only seven places removed from that chief of wholesale murder, is a bitter rival of Hitler-22-E. It's a wonder these two haven't succeeded in murdering one another.

Our prison guards must take credit for coming through this first year with seventy-six of their original eighty still alive. The complete lack of any tools, eating utensils, sticks or stones, has left the inmates with nothing but their bare hands for fighting.

Even so, two of them were killed in a tooth and nail scramble after one of the scientists absent-mindedly tossed a cigaret stub through the bars. Three Boches of the four incarcerated in that particular pen dived for the treasure. The cigaret was stamped out, but the scrap went on. The guards thought they had it under control; but it smoldered as a quarrel for a week. Then one night it broke out with a wild cry and cursing. Before the guards won silence with their guns, one of the Himmler boys had achieved it by his

* The accompanying excerpts have been selected from a series of journals extending over a period of more than eleven centuries, preserved by the Ivanoff Laboratory of Human Experimentation. These papers present to the public, for the first time, the story of eighty high German officials who escaped execution, following the Second World War of the 20th Century, and became prisoners, viz., laboratory subjects, of the Department of Longevity in the Laboratories of Ivánoff, Soviet Russia.

fine art of strangling. We carried out two corpses. After that we arranged for a pen for each prisoner.

The other two dead of the original eighty were suicides. It seems that they heard the rumor from the staff discussions that they were in for a very slow death. So they chose shortcuts.

These four bodies were, of course, given thorough post mortems by the Longevity Department.

This brings me to state what every member of the laboratory staff knows: that the intention is *to use these high German officials as guinea pigs*.

WHEN they escaped execution at the hands of the Allied War Council, they ran right into the Ivanoff Laboratories' traps set for them. While they are still being sought all over Europe and elsewhere, we are keeping them here in secret. Undoubtedly our plan was not concocted out of scientific zeal alone. The old motive of revenge is strong with all of us.

And why shouldn't it be? Several of our biologists and chemists and bacteriologists know the horrors of the old German concentration camp. Several have suffered worse than death at the hands of these very inmates.

"If we could keep them alive for a thousand years," one of the doctors said during the first month of the experiment, "we couldn't make them suffer enough to pay for their crimes against the world."

And that's the way most of us feel.

The prisoners are being fed on rations and treated to some of the questionable comforts of their own recent concentration camps. They're being spared the unsanitary conditions and the worms in the food. Their lot is better, on the whole, than the fates of most of our people they imprisoned.

But there is one special treatment

here. Each inmate is periodically given a shot of this *longevity serum* prepared from juices from the digestive tract of carp.

The longevity serum may or may not succeed in keeping these prisoners alive one hundred and fifty years or more. The doctors who examined the four corpses found their conditions satisfactory.

Meanwhile, my guards are keeping the remaining seventy-six guinea pigs in solitary confinement and taking no chances.—J. G., *Chief of the Guards*.

FROM THE SECOND ANNUAL REPORT, Feb. 2, 1947: That most savage of all the prisoners, Hitler-22-E, inflicted a severe bite on the hand of a guard six weeks ago. It occurred when three guards were attempting to shave the prisoner's Hitlerian mustache as a disciplinary measure. Infection resulted from the bite, but the guard is recovering.

The Allied War Council has been apprised of the capture of our original 80 Boche officers, and has granted an approval of the laboratory plan, subject to certain restrictions.

The public, it is agreed, will not be informed, owing to the danger of trouble from other Axis criminals who are still at large.

It was voted, during the past year, that women scientists should be prohibited from approaching the grounds of the secret prison. There is something bestial about most of these seventy-six inmates.

"Heil Hitler," the old habitual salute, still echoes around these premises. The penalty is to lose a meal; but the parrot-like war cry is still as automatic with some of these boys as their craving for food.

The carp extract which keeps them alive is said to be very potent stuff. . . .

—J. G., *Chief of the Guards.*

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH ANNUAL REPORT, February 1, 2095: As one of the chiefs of guards wrote a century and a half ago, the longevity serum is very potent stuff. Seventy of the original eighty prisoners from the Second World War are still very much alive. Their prison routine apparently agrees with them. There have been no outbreaks of consequence in the past five years.

This low muttering of "Heil Hitler," akin to a curse in their manner of uttering it, seems impossible to eradicate.

One of the prisoners, 22-E, claims that his name is Hitler. Another, 7-H, insists that he is Himmler; but a score of others likewise claim this name. The staff of the Longevity Department recently reviewed some motion pictures depicting the acts of Hitler, Himmler, and some of their aides.

"Obviously these inmates who call themselves Hitler and Himmler are lying," our chief of guards said. "There's no resemblance."

"They don't resemble anyone, even themselves," said one of the doctors. And to prove his point he produced some photographs taken when the prisoners first came to this institution a century and a half ago.

They are changing in appearance, unquestionably. If they live another fifty years—and it seems that they might—their earlier human traits may be completely modified.—R. V. V., *Director, Dep't. of Longevity.*

FROM THE ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT: February 1, 2100: The gang leader, Hitler-22-E, has had to be removed out of hearing of the others. He was keeping up his incessant, "Heil Hitler," and was aggravating a nervous

affliction in one of the other Hitler officers.

The doctors have investigated records in search of the nature of this affliction. They have found that the nervous prisoner, whose official prison name was Hitler-30-E, originally came from the same locality as his tormentor. The "E" of the name stood for a geographical location. But so far this does not explain why 30-E should throw his hands across his face in an attitude of fright whenever he hears anyone shout the old German phrase.

Women scientists have petitioned for the right to visit this secret prison, but their request has not been granted.—R. V. V., *Director, Dep't. of Longevity.*

FROM THE THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT: February 1, 2300. As I pen these lines, my thoughts are full of curious memories in connection with my work in these laboratories. This is the fifty-fifth time that I have written an annual report, for I took over this office more than half a century ago.

I have enjoyed working with these creatures called Boches, in the same sense that a zoo keeper might enjoy feeding and caring for his lions, bears, and monkeys. These Boches always attract big crowds, especially on Sundays. In all modesty, I beg to take credit for changing their routine prison life. As follows:

When I took over the directorship, all sixty-two of them were being kept in solitary confinement, and the public wasn't allowed to know anything about them.

"The public has a right to be entertained," I declared to the board of directors. "My first reform will be to throw the gates wide open and let the public come in and see what we are doing."

The effect of this policy has been to advertise the success of the longevity idea. A great many persons are buying the serum today for their own use.

"If such low semi-human specimens as these Boche officials can be made to live more than three and a half centuries," wrote the editor of the Moscow Star, "why shouldn't the best of our young manhood and womanhood be exposed to the same treatment, to enjoy the blessing of a long life?"

The rights and wrongs of this question haven't been settled as yet. Newspapers, public debates, and television controversies are raging today as to whether such prolonged life is desirable.

"Consider the case of Alex T., the Director of Longevity," one of the Kiev doctors said in his New Year's speech. (Alex T. refers to me, the present director.) "If Alex T. had been born in the twentieth century instead of the twenty-third, he would have known all about the war in which these Boches were guilty of perpetrating so much inhumanity against man.

"If Alex T. had come lived then, and had taken the serum, and had come down through the centuries with these prisoners, would he have been the kindly, warm-hearted director that we know today? No. He would have been a man with a heart of hatred for these prisoners.

"The hatred that should have died with the 20th century would still be alive."

I felt highly complimented over these remarks, naturally. But my job carries certain requirements, and for this series of records I hasten to add that, officially speaking, I am aware that these sixty-two creatures were once the world's dangerous criminals. As such they must always be guarded closely.

Officially speaking, I despise them. I

took an oath to despise them when I accepted this position; I also made a brief survey of the movies which were supposed to rekindle the hatred of every new generation. These movies, incidentally, furnished a certain amount of comedy for my travelling companions on my round-the-world tour. It isn't easy to mix the pleasure of travel with the pain of instilling one's self with an official hatred. But at any rate I have fulfilled this requirement.

Some people may think I am too lenient. I have allowed the prisoners to talk. Although they are bestial in appearance and to some extent in habits, they are more vociferous in their speech than the most ill-mannered normal people of today.

In fact, they are not above shouting all manner of insults at the passing crowds. Some of their remarks, especially those of 22-E, and 7-H, are highly obscene.

I have begged the crowds to excuse these surly cat-calls as typical actions of caged beasts.

But there are many objections, particularly from the women visitors—

(Note: This 355th annual report was left incomplete, owing to the sudden arrest of Alex T. He was convicted for negligence of duty. Meanwhile, more petitions from the public, particularly from women's organizations, have demanded reforms in the conduct of this prison.)

SUMMARY OF REFORMS, from the 356th Annual Report, Feb. 1, 2301.

A thorough study of old photographs and movies has been made, proving that the features of these prisoners have changed radically since World War II.

Their bones are shortening. Their ears are growing more pointed. Their legs are shorter and less often straightened. They show a definite tendency

to crouch.

The public is still admitted three days a week, but each prisoner can only be seen through the glass of his individual cage front. None of his bellicose jabber reaches the ears of the passing throngs.

Each prisoner has been closely analyzed for his present personality trait. Hitler-22-E is the most hateful and troublesome of the group. He is never approached by less than four guards at a time, well armed, as a matter of accident prevention.

Himmler-7-H, although generally less talkative than most, is regarded as the most treacherous.

Hitler-30-E is the most docile, and still easily intimidated, especially by 22-E's shouts and snarls and Boche war cries.

All sixty-two prisoners have been brought into a guarded room, one at a time, and made to listen to a recital of their war offenses against innocent people. Their acts of unprovoked brutality were thrown in their faces.

Each in turn was asked whether he felt any remorse for his crimes.

Hitler-22-E and twenty others reacted with defiance. They would do it again if they had the chance.

"Maybe a hundred years from now you'll be ready to change your tune. . . . Another hundred years of the concentration camp? How would you like that?"

"Let us out in a hundred years and we'll show you," Hitler-22-E said. "We'll blow up the world with the biggest war you ever saw."

Twenty others were almost as incorrigible.

Of the remaining forty-one, all but one were completely silent and expressionless in the face of these charges. And since we applied no torture measures to force them to talk, they got

away with their silence—a silence which at present can have no interpretations.

Yet in the silence of these forty, lies our hope that these centuries of time may be working a change for the better in the characters of these criminals.

Still, if the doctors are correct in their theory *that the carp extract tends to exaggerate one's physical characteristics that most nearly match his mental and moral nature*, we have no reason to be optimistic. Every year these creatures look a little less like men, a little more like skulking beasts. Their prison clothes fail to disguise this slow transformation.

One of the sixty-two, whose reactions were not described above, was Himmler-7-H. He is in a class by himself—the only one who professed to any remorse and sorrow over his deeds of long ago.

"My one hope," he said to us in a confidential manner, "is that I will live long enough to make up, somehow, for all the evil I have done. I want you to help me."

The words sounded good, but there was the devil's light in his eyes. Not one of us believed him.—A. A. A., *Director, Longevity Department, Ivanoff Laboratories, Feb. 1, 2301.*

(EDITOR'S NOTE: In the next six or seven hundred annual reports there are to be found two parallel threads of interest, both too complicated to be included in this brief compilation, but too important to be passed over:

One concerns the political situation of the country and its reverberations upon the administration of the Longevity prison.

Through the 25th century, the women, as a distinct political party, were rising in power. Many Russian cities became completely dominated by the women's party, and eventually the

board of directors of the Ivanoff Laboratories went female.

Dozens of annual reports pictured the struggle involved here. The startling thing was, judged by standards of past centuries, that the women's party charged the male administrators with being soft, too unimaginative in its treatment of the Boche prisoners, too unappreciative of the mistreatment innocent people suffered at their hands.

The other thread of interest weaving in and out of the many annual reports concerns the baffling case of Himmler-7-H. *Was he an innocent man, mistakenly identified as a Himmler officer?*

Between 2400 and 2900 this prisoner has continually protested his innocence. Nine hundred years is a long time for an innocent man to be kept in prison.

Unfortunately, there was no one alive by the end of the 29th century who could look back more than 200 years (the state has placed a limit on the use of the longevity serum, so that no one is now allowed to live more than two centuries, with the exception of these human guinea pigs) and therefore none could testify from personal experience whether Himmler-7-H's story had any basis in fact.

His story is that one of the directors of the 23rd century agreed to check back through the records to see whether he, 7-H, was not innocent. The director went through the old evidence and was forced to conclude that 7-H *was* innocent and had been taken through an error. However, the director quickly covered his findings and even went to the pains of rewriting some of the old records, falsifying them so that 7-H would always be thought guilty.

This was, of course, simply 7-H's story. But the details were so complete as to disturb the laboratory staff. A lot of investigating followed, and it seems

evident that Himmler-7-H was a model prisoner all the while. Since he and his fellow prisoners were the only ones who could testify from personal observations of nine or ten centuries in the past, they enjoyed considerable advantage in building up this legend of a prisoner's innocence.

The facts were still in question at the end of the 29th century, and by that time the women scientists were at the helm, with their own program of prison administration.)

FROM THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE YEAR 3000:

The men have named this the Hard-Boiled Era.

We women have enforced the laws to the very last punctuation mark.

The future directors of this prison may judge for themselves whether we have executed our duties efficiently.

As manager of the 37 Boche guinea pigs for the past ten years, I, Olga K., wish to report the following items of interest:

The last wave of suicides, recorded more than two hundred years ago, resulted in dropping the prison requirement of clothing for prisoners. This was because most of the suicides were performed by hanging or stranglings from ropes made of clothing.

However, in the past two centuries the no-clothing policy has never been officially sanctioned; not until our Hard-Boiled Era swept the country and took over these laboratories.

We, the women officials of the prison, have officially prohibited the Boche inmates from having clothing or any other goods or properties which might obstruct the progress of this experiment in lengthening life. They're going to live long and like it.

We have decreed that they don't need clothes. They're not human beings.

Under my directorship, it has been officially declared that *they are non-human animals*.

Human beings may—and generally do—require clothes. Animals don't. Our scientific findings determined that these Boche creatures deserved to go naked.

How did we arrive at this scientific conclusion? During my first year as manager I compared, for the laboratory board, the century-by-century photographs of these prisoners. The gradual physical changes that have come about through the past ten centuries are phenomenal. We agreed that this slow but sure transformation has been continually toward a *physical form that expressed the twentieth century characters of these beasts*.

After ten centuries they had definitely acquired the looks that fit their acts of the nineteen-forties.

ACCORDINGLY, Madam Marie J. of the prison board drafted the famous resolution which stated that according to the photographs of February 1, 2945, one thousand years after their imprisonment, they were by all physical standards *animals, not men*.

These details were noted in that resolution:

Their heads bore some resemblance to human heads; but so do the heads of many monkeys and apes.

Their speech resembled that of human beings; but so does that of parrots. The frequent repetition of "Heil Hitler" was noted as a distinctly parrot-like trait.

Their bones had shortened and changed in proportions through the years. Their hind legs had become adapted to an animal-like crouch comparable to that of a dog.

Their bellies had become puffed, their skin was weather-toughened. Their

tail-bones were developed into actual tails like those of pigs.

Their talk, still reminiscent of some of the phonograph records of Hitler's speeches, was made up of snarls and grunts and all manner of barking and hissing, not unlike that of the wart-hog in combat.

Their heads and faces have lost their individuality through the ravages of time and the tell-tale exaggeration of the longevity serum. Their heads have acquired pointed tops like pinhead idiots, their faces are typed with lines of fear, suspicion, terror, and skulking. The cruelty of their eyes is that of the savage beast.

Nakedness has brought no sense of shame; for the consciences that might have nurtured some sense of decency or respect for civilized conventions were warped and calloused and ground into nothing long before their war deeds were committed.

So much for the evidences that these creatures were now animals, deserving to be treated as nothing else.

We continue to handle these creatures as we would manage a prison of poison snakes.

In the line of experiments, we have made 20 trials at adapting their social life to that of other animals: all were unsuccessful.

We placed pigs in cages adjacent to theirs and observed the reactions. The pigs would not associate with them.

Dogs, whose loyalty to mankind is proverbial, reacted toward these Boches creatures as if they were mad hyenas.

These conclusions do not deny, however, that the Boche creatures possess one very disturbing trait, namely, a great amount of thinking power, compared to that of other animals, which might even be called intelligence. Still, can we of this enlightened if hard-boiled age, looking back on their war

deeds, consider their thinking processes to be intelligent or even rational when they failed to heed the most elementary moral principles of the civilized world?

These are a rare species, thanks to Mother Nature. They began life with the forms of men, but their minds and hearts were of the Devil, and now we have these visible evidences that they became beasts to the very core.

If this judgment of our Hard-Boiled Age sounds severe to future historians, let them know that we, the laboratory board (all women) are glad to take full responsibility. (Signed)

Olga K., 3000 A.D.

FROM THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE YEAR 3045:

OTHER entries of past centuries have made reference to Hitler-22-E, Hitler-30-E, and Himmler-7-H. At this date these three are still easily distinguishable, although — as Olga K. noted forty-five years ago—all of these beasts have grown to be very much alike.

I have just walked around the prison square under the mid-afternoon sun. For the most part, all is quiet. The prisoners are napping in their separate cells. They may be seen through the glass fronts, but one does not hear them snoring or mumbling in their sleep or padding back and forth across the floor unless one walks through the inner corridors. I took this walk again today.

I passed the guards in the course of my rounds. They were attending to business. With an injection needle built into the end of a spear-like staff they were administering the longevity serum to each of the inmates, none of whom trouble themselves to offer any resistance.

Himmler-7-H has been very quiet

and orderly for almost half a century. There was a time, according to the records, that he almost bluffed the staff into accepting his claims of innocence. But the Hard-Boiled Era put an end to that foolishness. Olga K. had recordings made through the nights of this culprit's sleep-talk. It was discovered that when he was alone he would mumble all sorts of treacherous plans, and in his half sleep he would gloat over the days when he ordered men and women shot down and babies trampled, and houses plundered and burned.

Olga K. had these recordings played back to him one day, and that stopped Himmler-7-H cold. Although he admitted nothing, he lapsed into a long silence.

Recently he expressed only one sentiment, that of hatred for the original Hitler. "Hitler put us here . . . Hitler put us here . . . Hitler . . . Hitler . . . the plague!"

His words no doubt find their way around to other inmates. Though they are seldom brought together, they have invented ways of exchanging ideas.

Take the methods of Hitler-22-E, for example.

The thud of tramping feet is one that carries along the prison floor, and Hitler-22-E is very fond of starting a series of such noises. We have found that when he jumps to his feet and starts pounding the wall, it is his way of telling the others that the original Hitler is coming. Then everyone along the line must jump to his feet. The sounds of thudding feet spread both ways around the rectangular block of cells.

When Hitler-22-E knows that visitors or officials are watching him he will put on a show of rallying soldiers to his command. He will leap around like a kangaroo, and huff and puff and snarl, beat his naked arms against the

glass, and make the most hideous faces of any animal in captivity.

In contrast, Hitler-30-E never indulges in any antics of attack. He still ducks for cover, as if from bombs, but it is doubtful whether he knows why he ducks. His memory is very dim, if not completely blacked out. His whole attitude is that of fear and skulking. He hates and ignores Hitler-22-E, and will never join in the tramping or thumping of feet when Hitler-22-E starts one of his mad rallies. Probably there is an old jealousy here that has been nursed since their pre-laboratory days.

I have just returned to the office, and I find on my desk a petition from the women farmers, complaining about the name that has been given these Boche laboratory specimens.

"There is no fairness in calling them 'pigs' or any other name referring to swine," the petition reads. "We who are in the honorable business of raising hogs resent having our good stock maligned."

I shall reply with a public statement that these creatures are not, strictly speaking, pigs; nor have they ever been classed as such, officially. However, I doubt whether this statement will have much effect. The popular phrase, "the Devil's own pigs," has caught on. It will probably stick.

The petition recalls certain experiments which Olga K. and her associates tried 45 years ago, and I will refer to them in my reply to these proud farmers.

According to the record, the "meanest, scrawniest, black-leggiest pigs that could be found were also placed in cages adjacent to those of the inmates. But the scrubby farm animals scorned the Berlin beasts, and turned up their noses in a distinctly snooty manner."

One final note must be added to this annual report. Some men assert that

the Hard-Boiled Era is passing and that the women are not managing as efficiently as they used to. We stoutly deny this. We are in power and we intend to stay. (Signed) *Madam L.*, 3045 A.D.

The Temple of Athena
Grecian Gardens
West Ivanoff Suburbs
June 1, 3100

THIS is Katherine Z. reporting. I have some important things to say. To begin with, I state confidently that any future historian who looks into the events of this century is sure to find me.

I am a charter member of the Society for the Uplift of the Uncultured; a member of the League for the Dissemination of Classical Literature; a contributor to the All-European Foundation of Ancient Music.

I am the president of the Liberators of the Downtrodden; and third vice-president of the Volunteer Solicitors for the Cure of the Incurables; and for the past score of years I have been the First Advisor to the Committee for the Restoration of Greek Esthetics.

It is this last title which accounts for my official address, the beautiful Grecian Gardens.

Let there be no mistake about it, the Hard-Boiled Era is gone.

We truly effeminate women who dwell in cultural clouds have driven out those cold, mannish women, such as Olga K. and Madam L., who would like to make men think our sex is cruel and unsentimental.

We have brought the world back to flowers and music and the appreciation of the classics.

As I sit here at this bright mahogany desk, basking in the glow of a desk light of pure gold, I can hear the slow, measured *tramp, tramp, tramp*, of one of my most unfortunate subjects, a creature

who was once a proud Boche, but was made a wretch through the tortures of prison life.

This is our poor, aged Himmler-7-H. He has volunteered to keep guard over the prisoners living quarters.

As I listen to the slow, steady tread of his feet, I am reminded that he has a soul.

An old and withered soul, no doubt, scarred and toughened by the ravages of time. But nevertheless a soul that we women of this new era of culture believe is well worth saving.

I have made Himmler-7-H my confidential friend.

—And—if I may breathe a personal secret into the lines of this confidential journal—*he likes me.*

Himmler-7-H is my own favorite of all these poor, misshapen, Godforsaken creatures for whom I have become the fairy godmother. I have talked with him. I think he understands what I mean to do for him and his poor, hunched, weatherbeaten, starved and naked brothers.

I am bringing them back to their rightful dignity as proud and noble human beings.

I love them. There, I have said it. I *must* love them, for I have such an overabundance of good will toward all of Nature's unfortunate children that I cannot slight anyone, not even these poor creatures.

They were meant to be men. I am convinced of that from my study of the old pictures. Which reminds me of a little story about myself that I must tell.

ABOUT seven years ago my darling friend Minya V. spoke up in a meeting and said, "If we elect Katherine Z. as president of the Liberators of the Downtrodden, we shall soon see the most unfortunate people in the

country rescued from their plight."

The crowd applauded, and I took a drink of pink tea, not saying whether I would be willing to accept the presidency.

Then someone asked, "Just who are the most unfortunate people in the country?"

Just to be nasty, the retiring president said, "The Boche prisoners at the Ivanoff Laboratories. I'd like to see anyone liberate them."

And then my friend Minya V. spoke up, "If anyone in the world can do it, Katherine can. Her sympathies are boundless."

Some of them laughed. They didn't think this could be a serious challenge, since these poor creatures have been called animals, not men.

But those who laughed have lived to see a lot of changes. In all modesty I state that I have surprised a lot of people in the past seven years by becoming director of what was once a laboratory *prison*—horrid word!—and by launching a program of kindness toward these poor creatures. *Kindness and affection.*

Now at last I have virtually achieved the impossible.

Tomorrow is the great day, a milestone among the turning centuries.

Tomorrow it will happen, and my success will be complete.

Tomorrow night when I enter this office, turn on this golden light, sit down to this mahogany desk, my heart will be filled to overflowing with the blessings of this victory.

Tomorrow night I shall record—

But first I must set down a few further notes about Minya and my staff and our restoration of the essence of Greek civilization. And I must explain what has been done during these past seven years for poor Himmler-7-H, and Hitler-22-E, and the twenty-three oth-

ers who have survived the cruel years.

If you are going to rebuild the world's most downtrodden creatures isn't it logical that you must fill them with the best things that life has to offer? Elevating things, such as poetry.

At the outset I sent questionnaires to several of my societies, asking, in substance, "What are the finest things in all this life?"

The answers came back. I called Minya in and read them to her.

"Our classical music . . . Our classical art . . . Our beautiful ancient architecture, especially that of the Greeks . . . Poems in the classic tradition . . . Mythology . . . The ancient Greek ideals of beauty and goodness . . ."

MINYA was at once enthusiastic. "Of course those are the finest things. I should know. Didn't I contribute twenty thousand international dollars to help build the replicas of Greek temples?"

"I am going to feed these good things to the unfortunate Boches," I said. "I'm going to remove them from their cells and give them a place in the Grecian Gardens. There, day after day, I am going to enrichen their lives with these things of culture."

Minya looked at me with a half frightened stare. "Isn't that casting pearls before swine?"

"Don't talk that way," I said. "Why are we the noble creatures we are? Because we have filled our lives with beauty."

"But the Boches—after all the years they've gone the other way—"

"Have faith," I said. "I have already laid plans to bring them the ideal environment. I'll arrange for them to have one of the most beautiful Greek temples."

"My twenty thousand international dollars!" Minya gasped.

"You'll go down in history for this good deed. You'll have helped to lift them out of a prison into a laboratory of beauty. There they will have the best of food, as much social life together as they wish for, the best of care—"

"Oh, that's ideal!" Again she was enthusiastic.

"And all day long the guards, dressed like Grecian gods, will see to their comforts, and smile at them and talk to them. And someday when I'm sure they're learning to appreciate these blessings, I myself will dress as a Grecian goddess and walk among them."

"Oh, Katherine, do be careful," Minya warned.

"But first they must be lifted to our cultural plane. I will install radio speakers throughout the grounds, so that all day long they may listen to the most beautiful poetry—"

"Well, not too much poetry, Katherine, you know—"

"And philosophies and symphonies—"

"Don't misunderstand me, Katherine. I appreciate good poetry—"

"And lectures on classical art and architecture."

"I mean, too much poetry is too much poetry. And lectures, they can be overdone—"

"We'll give them the best, Minya, and have the pleasure of watching them blossom out into the handsome, highly civilized, highly cultural men that Nature must have intended them to be."

That was my boast, and I have gone through with it in these past seven years to make it good.

The results have been most wonderful to see. Not perfect, oh, no. These creatures have been supercharged with terrors for so long that they have hardly begun to outgrow their timidity when I call to them through the microphone.

It is true that they are so very shy

they always run and hide when I walk along the outside of the high steel fence. And I have never yet quite dared to walk into the pen among them. But this must be done.

It must be done to convince them they have nothing to fear from me.

I wish that I could have talked with each one before tomorrow. If each could have listened to the beauty of my voice, and looked unafraid upon the beauty of my face and Grecian-goddess costume—in which I have been told that the loveliness of my form is most innocently but strikingly displayed—then I would feel perfectly confident in this event that is about to take place.

For tomorrow, at high noon, I shall enter the gates of their garden, *unescorted and unarmed*. I shall walk down the temple steps, speaking to them fearlessly, as one human being to another.

They know that this is going to happen. Through the loud speakers I have talked with them hour after hour, gently, sweetly, sympathetically. I have counselled with them not to be afraid of me. With me to lead them, they will never again have cause to fear.

How do I know that they are ready for this momentous occasion? Because I have talked with two of them—my friend Himmler-7-H, and his very good friend Hitler-22-E.

These two have given me such wonderful cooperation that my entire program of uplift has progressed much faster than I could have hoped.

They are my messengers from the twenty-three silent ones. Through their willingness to talk in quiet, confident whispers with each of the twenty-three, day after day, they have brought back every reassurance that all of these unfortunate creatures are beginning to trust me. Perhaps even to love me, just a little.

For only today, as I stood near the

fence, Himmler hopped over to me on his crooked legs. His tortured yellow face looked up at me, and his wry wrinkled mouth spoke these words:

"We are ready for you."

AN ADDITIONAL NOTE CONCERNING THE ABOVE ENTRY IN THE SERIES OF ANNUAL REPORTS:

Ivanoff Laboratories, June 10, 3100.

—The tragic death of Katherine Z., beloved idealist and famous social worker, occurred at sixteen minutes past twelve, noon, June 2nd.

A crowd of several thousand persons watched her walk through the gate and into the open temple, to descend, with the confident step and striking poise and dignity that have always been characteristically hers.

At first it appeared that the shrunken, yellow creatures were filled with shame that one so innocent and beautiful should walk into their evil presence. Their arms flew back in terror, their fingers distended, their faces were wrenched with the pain of the Devil's own workings. In agony of warped and twisted brains and bones and muscles they crawled away. They hopped and bounded and ran out of sight, as only guilty creatures could do.

Katherine Z. followed, calling to them gently. Heedless of the protests of many persons outside the fence, she followed them around to the farther side of the temple. Then the people could no longer see her.

But they heard her scream . . . and they knew!

A fire truck, waiting at a little distance, sirened through the crowd, plunged through the fence, and raced around the side of the temple. We thousands of spectators started in through the break.

But even as the truck roared around

the white stone portico, we of the crowd fell back with one awful gasp of horror. Two of the Nazi beasts came running up between the pillars—Himmler-7-H and Hitler-22-E. One of them held the bloody, nail-clawed mass of Katherine's head in his hands. The other had an arm.

Others of the demon mob followed. The scene was too awful to be described. Suffice it to say that their deepest instincts, kept dormant for more than eleven centuries, had suddenly galvanized into action . . . Whether automatically or by their leaders' plan, no one may ever know. It had been so long—so long since they had had a chance to kill an innocent person.

Some observers declared that one creature, Hitler-30-E, seized the helmet Katherine had worn, and succeeded in chasing down and killing Hitler-22-E, before he himself fell victim to the gases.

The gas attack from the first police car that followed the fire siren was highly effective. Within a matter of ten minutes after the four police cars closed in on the scene, every last one of the Devil's own pigs went down.

The Ivanoff Laboratories did not hesitate to sign the prisoners over to the state.

As a matter of formal legal procedure, a brief court action ensued. The sentence imposed back in the year 1945 upon all twenty-five of the beasts—together with fifty-five others who had fallen by the wayside—was invoked.

Executions took place within the hour.

MANY and sundry were the excited comments and suggestions that have come in from all parts of the world. Even after more than eleven centuries of imprisonment, that these deathless old criminals should finally be erased with painless death gas has seemed much too humane to many historians and civic leaders the world over.

In the provinces around Ivanoff there is now a growing political revolt, entirely peaceful but nevertheless momentous, against the women's remaining in power. The next elections are certain to see the men's party back at the helm. Some of the cultural reconstructions may suffer from this revolt. Even such dyed-in-the-classics socialites as Minya V., who helped to buy the temple for the Boche inmates, was quoted as saying the women have carried culture programs too far.

The doctors will take their time about examining the bodies of these long-lived creatures. But when they are through, the final disposition of the bodies is a settled matter.

The numberless freak offers are being ignored, of course: as for example the one which came in today from a fertilizer company offering a fair price per pound for the job lot. Our committee answered in kind, stating that these bodies must never be used for fertilizer for fear of polluting the soil.

The bodies are to be burned, the ashes are to be locked in a steel chest and dropped down into the deepest crevice in the deepest sea.—*Temporary Director, Ivanoff Laboratories, June 10, 3100.*



New

ENLARGEMENT

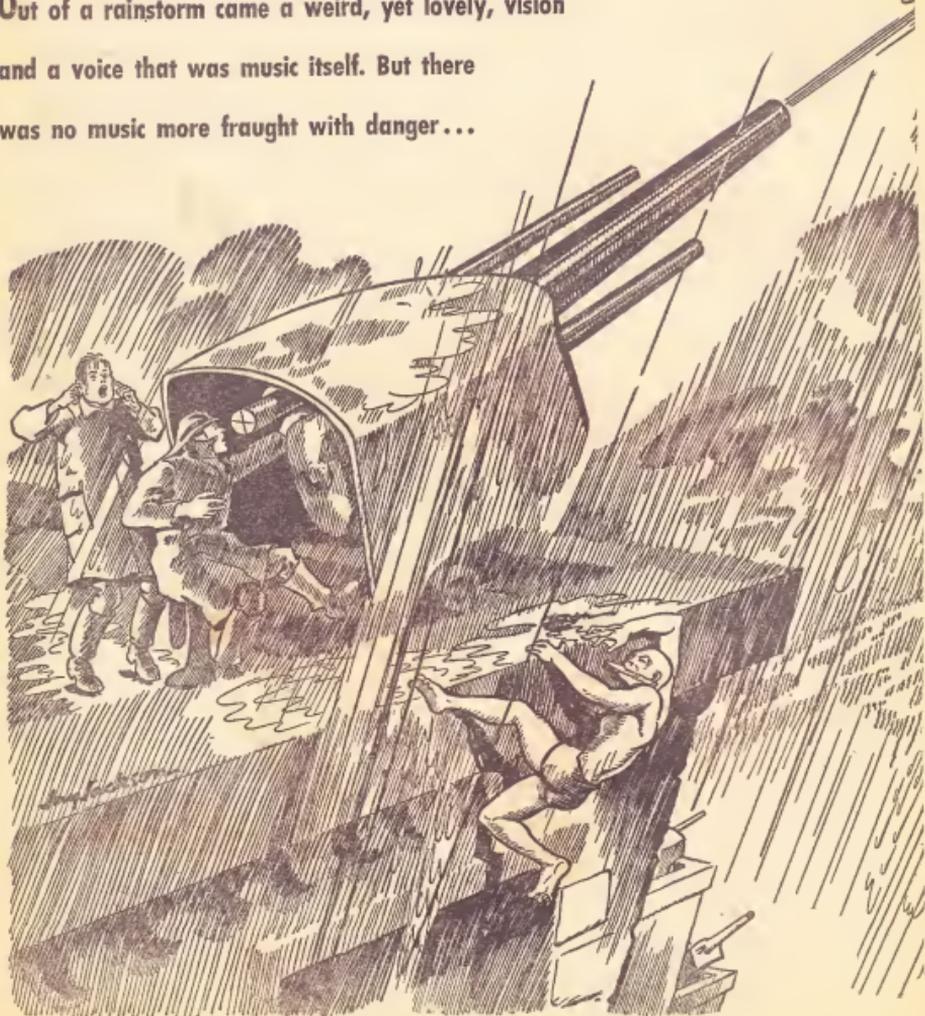
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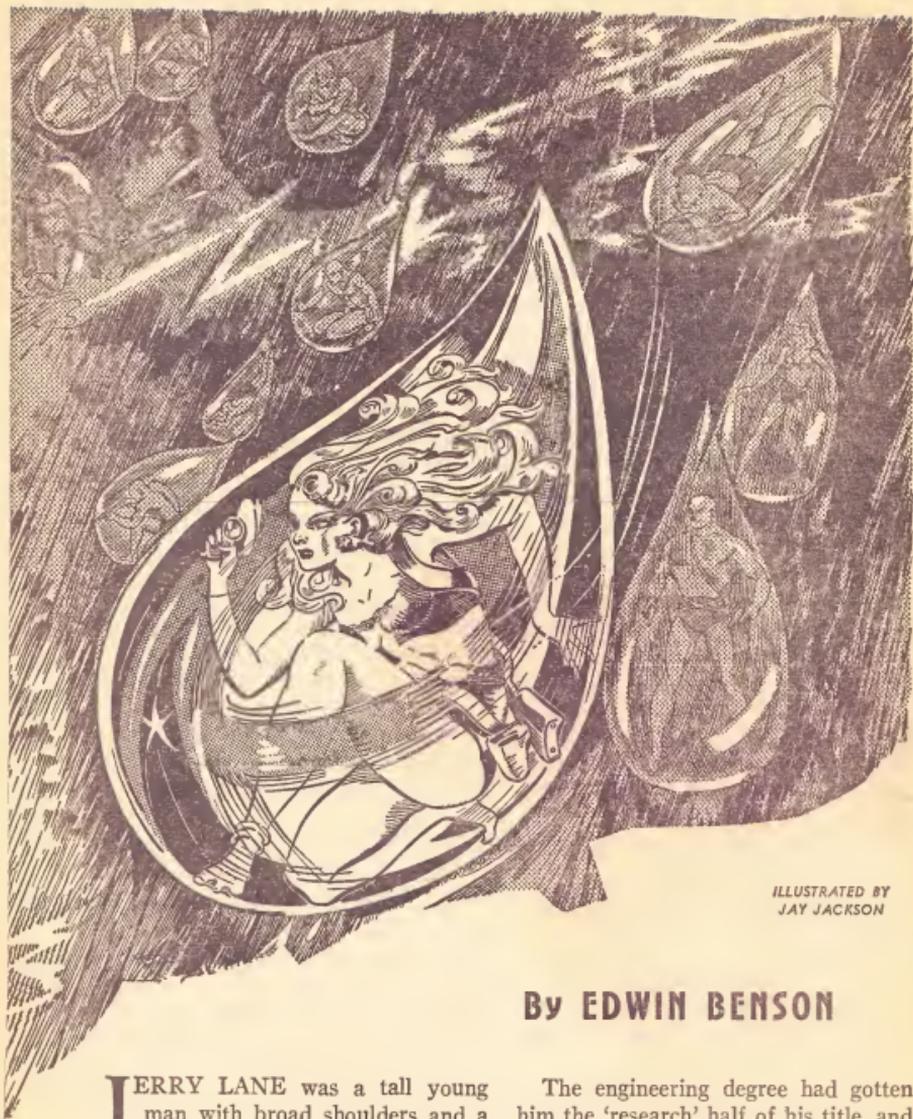
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DEAN STUDIOS, Dept. 933, 241 W. 7th St., Des Moines, Iowa

INVASION of the RAINDROPS

Out of a rainstorm came a weird, yet lovely, vision
and a voice that was music itself. But there
was no music more fraught with danger...



The electric cannon fired in terrific, but hopelessly futile bursts



ILLUSTRATED BY
JAY JACKSON

By EDWIN BENSON

JERRY LANE was a tall young man with broad shoulders and a degree in radio engineering from a respectable Midwestern college.

These qualifications had gotten him a job with the Allied Broadcasting Company as a research field worker, testing reception in various parts of the city of Chicago.

The engineering degree had gotten him the 'research' half of his title, and his broad shoulders had been responsible for the second half 'field worker'.

A field worker was a man who carried practically an entire broadcasting station around on his back eight hours a day, and only engineers who had made at least one All-American team

could possibly qualify for the job.

On this particular morning as Jerry stood on the busy corners of State and Washington, he was gloomily thinking of another quality a man needed in order to want the job of a research field worker.

And that was, in the private and profane opinion of Jerry Lane, a complete lack of common sense, intelligence and the normal brain power given to eight-year-old children, and senators.

Jerry's unhappy frame of mind was the result of an assignment that had sent him staggering across Chicago's busy Loop during the rush hour, when every scrambling pedestrian apparently had but one mission in life, that being to crash into Jerry, step solidly on both of his insteps and then bolt away, snarling profane insults.

He had stopped finally at State and Washington to wait for a street car. He set his grip beside him and shifted the equipment on his back to a more comfortable position. The long steel rod that served as antenna extended high above his head, its gleaming tip swaying back and forth with every movement he made. He felt acutely like the Man from Mars.

Two urchins stopped and surveyed him in silent awe.

"What'cha doin', Mister?" one of them finally asked.

Jerry sighed. "I am waiting for a street car," he said patiently.

"Aw, yez ain't!" the second protested. "Come on, what'cher doin', Mister?"

Jerry regarded them with quiet dislike until they went away, snickering behind their hands and peering back at him as if he were something directly from Ripley.

Eventually the street car came along.

The conductor, a florid-faced, paunchy Irishman, with bright blue

eyes, regarded Jerry with interest.

"And where do you think you're goin'?" he asked.

Jerry put one foot on the step of the car and picked up his grip. "I'm going to ride across the Loop," he said. "Do I need a passport?"

The conductor scratched his head and reached for the bell cord.

"Well, come along then," he said. "But why don't you get yourself a truck to carry all that junk in?"

"I usually do," Jerry said grimly, "but I mislaid it somewhere and I can't find it. If you see it, lemme know. It's painted bright yellow, answers to the name of Mike and likes peanuts."

"Likes peanuts, does it?" the conductor muttered. He shook his head slowly. "Are you sure you ain't been drinkin'?"

Jerry grabbed the iron rod and swung onto the rear platform of the car. "I never drink," he said.

He set his heavy grip down and straightened up wearily.

Several things happened very quickly then and he was never quite able to figure out their order of occurrence.

FIRST of all there was a blinding flash of light and a roar and crackle of zig-zagging sparks slashing about his head.

"Glory to be to Heaven!" the conductor shouted piously.

Jerry twisted and peered upward. He saw that the long aerial rod attached to the equipment on his back had somehow wormed through the open rear window of the car and had established contact with the charged trolley.

The lights were still flashing brilliantly about and the crackling thunder of electricity was growing in volume.

All of this was Jerry's fault. He should have lowered the rod before

climbing on the platform of the car. The rod was constructed like a telescope and could be compressed to a foot in length.

"Do something, man!" the conductor shouted, tugging enthusiastically, but ineffectually, at the bell cord. "Do you want to blow us all up?"

Jerry was twisting about in a desperate attempt to dislodge the aerial rod, but it seemed to have become stuck in the connecting joint of the trolley. Every time he moved there was a fresh barrage of forking flashes, and another hiss and crackle of angry electricity.

The passengers on the car were standing in their seats, peering in terror at the exhibition. Panic was in their faces.

At that moment Jerry became aware of another voice.

The loudspeaker receiver of his apparatus was open, and from it poured a voice, strangely soft and appealing, speaking absolutely unintelligible words.

The language the voice was using was completely foreign to Jerry. He had never heard nor even imagined anything similar to it in his life. He was so startled by this flood of strange words pouring through his receiver that he forgot for the moment the crashing display of electric currents he had created.

He flicked open his sending switch.

"Hello, hello," he snapped. "Who is it? I can't understand you. We're getting a lot of static."

The voice ceased speaking for an instant. Then it started again, excitedly, speaking with desperate speed and urgency. But the words were completely beyond Jerry's comprehension.

"I can't understand you!" he shouted.

"Are you going crazy?" the conductor shouted in his ear. He evidently

hadn't heard the strange voice over the roar of the electricity. "Who're you babbling to, man?"

"I don't know," Jerry said. "Somebody's cut in on my apparatus. I can hear a voice but I can't understand the language."

"So, it's voices you're hearin', is it?" the conductor cried. "I thought you looked kind of crazy the minute I laid eyes on you. Now untangle that devil's equipment of yours and get off me car."

"I'm no crazier than you are," Jerry said, "but I guess that's not saying a lot. I tell you a strange voice has cut in on my set. Here listen for yourself. Maybe it's Gaelic."

He handed the ear phones to the conductor, but the strange voice had suddenly ceased.

"That's the quietest Gaelic I've ever heard," the conductor snapped, with belligerent sarcasm. "Now get off me car. I don't know why I should be punished with the likes of you. I quit drinkin' to get away from the pink elephants, but I think I prefer them to this sort of shennannigans."

Jerry opened his mouth to reply to this blast, but before he could say a word it started to rain.

ORDINARILY it would take more than a summer shower to stop Jerry from speaking but this rain was different.

It struck with devastating suddenness. Drops the size of footballs cannonaded against the top and sides of the car with a sound like the dropping of overripe pumpkins.

The street car actually trembled under the barrage of water.

"Merciful Heaven!" the conductor shouted, as the drenching torrential rain swept in the open door of the car.

Jerry twisted about and the move-

ment pulled the aerial rod free from the trolley. The sputtering blaze of electricity died away, but the mighty torrent of rain continued, practically flooding the car.

The size of the drops was incredible. Some of them were six inches in diameter and they struck the car and the pavement with a soggy crash.

Jerry stared at the flood in dazed disbelief. He had never seen anything like it in his lifetime, but he realized that this was a day of upsets and that practically anything could be expected.

He wouldn't have been surprised if he saw pink elephants riding in the mammoth rain drops.

A huge drop flashed past him, not a foot away, and Jerry's brain suddenly reeled dizzily as he had a good look at the immense globule of water. There was a tiny figure inside the drop. The exquisitely formed figure of a beautiful girl was definitely visible in the globule of water as it hurtled past him and smacked into the street.

She had been sitting cross-legged in the rain drop, smiling as she flashed past his startled vision.

Jerry shook his head frantically. This was too much.

The conductor suddenly gripped his arm, jerking him about.

"Am I going crazy?" he shouted in Jerry's ear.

He was pointing to the barrage of huge drops that were descending, and when Jerry turned and followed his pointing finger, he saw that each drop seemed to have a tiny human occupant.

The figures in the drops were clearly visible. Some were standing, some were sitting, some were smiling and others were frowning grimly. They were attired in strange barbaric costumes that half concealed and half revealed their perfectly proportioned bodies.

Jerry passed a trembling hand over

his forehead. He turned to the conductor who was watching the passing parade of tiny figures with a ludicrous expression of astonishment on his round, red features.

"Do you see the same thing I think I do?" Jerry said feebly.

The conductor shook his head grimly.

"I'm not admittin' anything," he said. "I used to see things like that at the foot of me bed every morning, but not since I swore off Irish whiskey."

The rain was slackening. As abruptly as it had started the drenching torrent of huge drops was stopping. In ten seconds the last of the drops had flashed down to the street. That was all.

Jerry looked out the door of the car. The street and sidewalk in the immediate vicinity of the car was flooded to a depth of six inches, but the rain seemed to have fallen only in the small area of the car. The street ahead and behind the car was perfectly dry.

"Well, I'll be darned!" Jerry gasped. From the looks of things it appeared as if the street car had been a target for this bombardment of out-sized drops of rain.

The conductor jerked the bell-cord and the car started to move.

"Wait a minute," Jerry yelled. "I'm getting off."

"This is the last straw," the conductor shouted. "Get off and good riddance. I quit drinkin' so I could have some peace with me wife, but a man can only stand so much. Rain drops with the little people in 'em, screwy crack-pots like yourself who try and blow up me car. It's too much I tell you. I'm going to stay drunk for a week and then throw a welcome home party for the pink elephants. It'll be a pleasure to resume their acquaintance. Now git off me car!"

"Thank you for practically noth-

ing," Jerry said, swinging down to the street. "Say hello to the elephants for me."

The conductor jerked the bell-cord and the car careened off down the street, swaying angrily.

JERRY picked up his grip and walked to the curb. He looked cautiously and apprehensively at the rain-flooded street.

Was he going crazy?

But he *had* seen tiny figures in the rain drops, and so had the conductor. Where were they now? He had half expected to see them sitting on the curb swinging their feet in the water that was flowing along the gutter.

But there was no sign of the tiny figures he had either seen or imagined. The water was—well, just water. He noticed a tin can in the gutter then and he saw that it was filled to the brim with the rain water. He peered into it, but the water was perfectly clear and unoccupied.

Jerry scratched his head again. There was something damned funny about this thing and his curiosity was aroused. He stood in the street for several minutes, scratching his head and frowning.

Finally he picked up the can of water. He realized that he was behaving in a very silly, illogical manner, but he also knew that he would not have a moment's peace until he had at least *tried* to get to the core of this mysterious business.

What he would find in the can of water he couldn't even guess. Probably nothing. But the whole crazy business was tied-up with the rain drops in some way, and with a whole can full of those rain drops to analyze, he might find something that would lead him to a solution.

With the tin can in one hand, his

grip in the other, and his radio set on his back, he set out for the long walk home. He was determined to walk. He would never ride another street car again.

CHAPTER II

The Vision in the Water

JERRY lived in a small rooming house on the near north side. He had fitted a small storeroom in the basement as a laboratory and he spent most of his spare time there, tinkering with his experiments in electronics and radio.

When he reached home he felt like a pack mule that had put in a sixteen-hour day. He went directly to his make-shift laboratory and deposited his paraphernalia with a relieved sigh.

He set the can of rain water on the lab table and eased the radio set off his back and dumped it on the floor. He mopped his perspiring face and took off his coat.

He was a little puzzled as to how to begin. There wasn't much one could do with water, except drink it or pour it down a drain.

Cautiously he stuck a finger into the water. It seemed strangely cold and solid. There was something in its frigid consistency that was completely alien to normal rain water. Jerry had never felt anything like it and he felt a peculiar excitement stirring him.

Possibly the water was of much greater density than normal rain, which might have accounted for the size of the drops.

He poured the water into a large cone-shaped glass beaker and turned on a powerful light directly above it.

With the aid of this illumination he could see tiny swirling specks drifting in the water. The water was

strangely clear and these small bits of matter floated lazily in its calm translucence with a slight circular motion. The water seemed alive, with a strange peculiar life that was impossible to define.

Jerry pulled a stool up to the table and sat down. He lit a cigarette and stared thoughtfully at the beaker of water. For several minutes the effect of slowly moving, circling specks of matter was continued and then, slowly and with a peculiar sense of inevitability, the tiny whorls of flickering matter began to resolve into a definite pattern.

The shape the specks gradually began to assume was at first puzzling and incomprehensible to Jerry, but as seconds ticked away the shape forming in the glass beaker took on hazy but recognizable dimensions.

Jerry's eyes widened incredulously. His cigarette dropped from nerveless fingers.

For the image forming in the depths of the clear water was the face of a beautiful girl!

Her eyes of a deep, aquamarine blue regarded him steadily from under thin, fine brows. There was vague, tremulous smile on her full lips that might have been caused by the gentle motion of the water. Her hair, long and fair, swayed and streamed in lazy, glorious folds, framing her exquisite features with a shifting, cloud-like halo.

Jerry rose slowly to his feet, unconscious that he was moving. His heart was hammering with numbing power against his body.

The whole thing was incredible. His throat was dry and face felt stiff and wooden. But he was unable to remove his eyes from the face of the girl in the shimmering water. There was a clouded, questioning look in her eyes, a look that expressed a mute and hopeless appeal;

a look that seemed to go through him with its intensity and voiceless anguish.

"You must help me!

JERRY jerked and stared about the room. No one had spoken, but the words had seemed to drum into his brain with desperate emphasis.

His glance turned slowly, questioningly to the face of the girl in the glinting water.

"Am I going mad?" he whispered to the silence.

A thought burned into his brain.

"It is I, Wa-Nec, who seeks your help. You must listen to me and believe."

Jerry's fingers tightened on the edge of the table. His mind seemed on the brink of madness. He glared frantically, desperately about the familiar lab, trying terribly to establish himself with anything real and concrete.

The thought sprang into his brain, seeming to stand before his mind's eyes in symbols of fiery red.

"You must come with me. I need your help."

Jerry forced himself to meet the gaze of the girl, whose face had materialized in the beaker of rain water.

"Are you communicating with me?" he said hoarsely. "Or am I gibbering like an idiot in an empty room? God—"

"I am speaking to you through your thoughts. I, Wa-Nec, am imploring you for help. You must help me. Thousands of innocents will perish unless you come to my aid."

"What can I do?" Jerry asked. His voice seemed far away, as if it were coming to his ears across an immeasurable chasm.

"I must have your electrical apparatus. You must bring it to me. There is no time to lose."

Jerry's brain seemed to be locked in

a vise. A gray fog swirled in his head and the image of the girl's face was a misty picture before his eyes. He seemed trapped, paralyzed, unable to move or think of his own volition.

"What must I do?" he said, and his voice was weak and hoarse.

"Come with me!"

The thought was an insistent, drumming beat at his temples.

Jerry leaned forward until his face was inches from the shadowy, troubled eyes of the girl.

"Where?" he murmured thickly.

"It is not far. Strap your equipment on your back. I will tell you how you can come to me."

Numbly, dazedly, Jerry lifted the radio receiving and sending apparatus from the floor and strapped it over his shoulders. His movements were automatic, as if there was no questioning or resisting the commands of the girl.

Facing the vial of water, his eyes riveted to the great glowing eyes of the girl he waited, hypnotized by the weirdness and beauty of her exquisite features and the hair that flowed about her head in a foaming, filmy cloud.

He was conscious of a peculiar feeling of excitement and expectancy; but at the same time every instinct in his body was clamoring against what he was doing. There was promise and fascination in the full curving lips that were parted slightly, but there was danger in the deep, mysterious depths of the girl's incredibly blue eyes.

"You must come with me!"

The command was strong and decisive. It throbbed in his brain with stunning impact. And in the power and authority of that voiceless command, and in his own feeling of helpless, fatalistic compliance, he realized with terror that his will was succumbing to that nameless, soundless voice that was commanding him to blind, sub-

missive obedience.

"No!" he cried. He stepped back from the image of the girl, instinctively throwing his hands before his face.

"You must come with me!"

The command robbed him of all powers of resistance. The image of the girl's face was swirling mistily before his eyes and like a man entranced, he moved toward her, blindly, helplessly.

He heard a sudden roaring sound in his ears and then a dark, enveloping mantle of blackness settled over his consciousness. A bitterly cold suction rushed past him, drawing him up in a howling, screeching vacuum.

Then cold, frigid blackness claimed him.

CHAPTER III

Another World

HOW long his consciousness drifted in the enveloping cloud of cold darkness, he had no way of knowing. His first sensation of returning awareness was slow and gradual. There was a faint rift of white in the darkness that surrounded him and then he felt himself floating, buoyantly, lightly, as if he were comfortably cushioned in a fleecy cloud that was drifting slowly before soft winds.

The sensation was gloriously pleasant and comfortable and for several moments he lay quietly, eyes closed, as consciousness came back to him, slowly, completely.

And then he was almost afraid to open his eyes. He remembered with sudden sharp clarity the scene in his laboratory and all of the incredibly bizarre events that had led up to it. For an instant he felt a peculiar sense of terror. Where was he? What had

happened?

These questions were hammering at his mind for answers.

There was nothing to do but open his eyes and start looking for those answers.

Cautiously, slowly, Jerry opened his eyes.

The first thing that his gaze encountered was a high, arched ceiling that seemed to stretch beyond the limits of his vision on all sides. The substance of which the ceiling was constructed gleamed with a pale opalescent light that showered a soft illumination over the spacious room.

His hands moved experimentally on either side of him, running over soft silken cushions that were as light to his touch as the down of feathers.

For several moments he lay motionless, while his mind churned with a dozen speculations. He knew nothing of what had actually happened to him, except that he was lying on a soft couch in a vast room, apparently in luxurious surroundings.

He felt in excellent shape. His brain was still slightly fogged from the mysterious events that had taken place recently, but physically he was all right.

He started to sit up, but to his surprise, he was unable to do so. Glancing down he saw that soft silken bonds were strapped over his knees and chest, pinioning him comfortably but quite firmly to the soft couch.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said explosively.

"Please do not be angry."

No one had spoken, but Jerry started as the voiceless thought was planted with pleading force in his mind.

This was the same sensation he had experienced in his laboratory, when the voiceless thought had emanated

from the image of the girl in the swirling depths of the rain water. But while that mental communication had seemed to be bridging vast, unimaginable distances, the thought now was disturbingly near.

As if in response to his confused thoughts, a wordless command burned into his brain.

"Turn your head and look at me, Man of Earth. I am close to you."

Jerry twisted about and stared in amazement at the girl who was sitting at the head of the couch regarding him with glowing inscrutable eyes.

SHE was the same girl whose face he had seen in the mysterious depths of rain water. There could be no doubt of that, for it would have been an impossible coincidence for such loveliness to have a duplicate. Her wide aquamarine blue eyes were solemn under fine, gracefully arched brows and her full red lips were parted slightly, revealing even white teeth.

There was a peculiar expression of worried intentness on her exquisitely formed features as she regarded him thoughtfully.

Jerry's amazement faded. 'It was replaced by a hot, healthy anger.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded.

He twisted ineffectually against the soft bonds that held him firmly to the couch and glared at the girl.

Her full lips curved in a long, slow smile. She stood up, walked to the side of the couch and sat down again, close to him.

Jerry saw then that she moved with a lithe grace that emphasized the smooth, flowing lines of her slender body. She wore an abbreviated costume, consisting of a blouse and knee length shorts, made of a strange soft material that was like spun glass. Her narrow feet were encased in soft slip-

pers that were secured by straps about her ankles.

The soft illumination of the room fell on her bare arms and legs, suffusing the ivory whiteness of her skin with a warm, glowing tint.

She leaned closer to him, smiling faintly.

"Do not be angry with me," her thoughts came to him with gentle insistence. "Possibly I have taken advantage of you, but it was necessary to save the lives of many innocent people. I hope you will forgive me for bringing you here against your will."

Jerry felt in no mood to forgive anyone. His eyes swung about the vast, softly lighted room, luxurious beyond imagining with carpetings and drapes and then he turned his eyes back to the girl. His jaw had hardened stubbornly.

"I am not an unreasonable person," he said, "but I'd like to know where the hell I am. Also how I got here. Also who the blazes you are and what your game is. And, if you feel so charitably inclined, I'd like to get out of this strait jacket."

The girl smiled slightly. Her hands fumbled with small buckles at the edge of the couch and Jerry felt the straps at his knees and chest loosen. He sat up and ran a hand through his tousled hair. He felt slightly better already.

"Thanks," he said.

The girl smiled at him, but her eyes were serious.

"I will tell you what you wish to know. You are on the planet Venus. You were brought here across the void of space by the power of my will. I am the ruler of a small, peaceful band of Venusians, who are facing extinction at the hands of one who wishes to control and subjugate all the people of this planet. We desperately needed your electrical equipment and radio apparatus. That is why I formed a con-

tact with you and then took possession of your will and brought you here."

Jerry listened incredulously to this information and only one thing the girl said made any impression on him. That was her preposterous statement that he was on the planet of Venus!

He regarded her with a hard smile.

"I may look like a complete simpleton," he said, "but I'm not ready yet to start swallowing fairy tales. I don't know what your game is but I'm not the sucker you obviously think I am."

He swung his legs off the couch and stood up.

"I'm getting out of this joint right now," he snapped.

The girl stood up with a smooth, lithe motion and put her hand on his arm. Her eyes were dark and troubled against the whiteness of her face.

"You must believe me. You will only cause trouble for yourself if you refuse. There is no escape from here and my word is absolute and final. Please do not force me to prove that to you."

Jerry shook her hand from his arm with an angry gesture.

"The only thing I want from you is my portable transmitter and directions to the nearest exit," he said. "Don't think your hospitality hasn't been charming—because it hasn't!"

THE girl drew herself up stiffly and there were flashing lights of anger in the depths of her eyes.

"You will find that I give the orders here, Earthman. I needed you and your electrical apparatus. I have explained that much to you. I have asked you to understand why I acted as I did, but if you persist in this stupid attitude you have assumed, you will force me to become unpleasant."

Jerry stepped close to the girl and grabbed her arms in his big hands. He was surprised at the steel strength in her

slim body as she fought furiously against his grip.

"I don't want to hurt you," he said, holding her firmly in spite of her struggles. "This is just a little demonstration that I'm not taking orders from you or anyone else in this crack-pot place. I'm leaving right now and I'm taking you along to show me the way."

"Let me go!" the girl's furious command seemed to explode in his head. "You're acting like a fool! You're only going to cause trouble for yourself."

"I'm good at that," Jerry smiled sarcastically into her furious eyes. "So you may as well make up your mind to be a good girl and escort me to the nearest exit."

The girl twisted away from him and cried out in a loud, clear voice. And Jerry immediately recognized the soft, modulated timbre of her voice as the one he had heard in his transmitter on the street car, when the aerial of his set had precipitated an electrical explosion.

That strange voice, speaking words completely unintelligible to him, had belonged to this girl he now held struggling in his arms.

But he had no time to realize more, for at that instant a door swung open at one end of the vast room, and through it poured a dozen strangely clad figures.

"Release me! You have no chance against my guards!"

The girl's command contained an urgent, pleading undertone; and wonderingly, Jerry dropped his hands from the girl's arms. He knew there was no chance of standing off this charging horde single-handed, but the pleading insistence in the girl's voice was bewildering. There was no reason she should feel sorry for him; she would probably be happy at the prospect of his immediate and unpleasant death.

Why she should bother warning him was puzzling, unless she wanted to

keep him alive for some purpose of her own.

The girl held up her arm as the guards arrived. They came to a stop, facing her. Several verbal exchanges passed between them with bewildering rapidity.

The apparent leader of the guards was thick-shouldered and squatly built. His eyes were set in deep sockets; there was a noticeable web-work of skin between his flat, powerful fingers and under each arm-pit there was a narrow slit in the coarse flesh of his body.

He wore a short tunic that fell to the middle of his thighs and his feet were shod in heavy boots. He carried what was obviously a weapon in his short, powerful arms. The instrument was bulky and crudely constructed, but it had a peculiarly effective look. A heavy drum, almost a foot in diameter, was attached to a wooden stock which led to a gleaming barrel.

This barrel, Jerry noticed with a certain degree of uneasiness, was pointed unwaveringly at his own stomach. The other guards carried similar weapons and they possessed the same physical peculiarities as did their leader, but none of them was quite as vicious and ugly in appearance.

The rattling conversation that had been progressing between the guards and the girl suddenly ceased. And she turned to Jerry with a haughty, imperious gesture.

"I have saved your life. Wun-Tay, the leader of my corps of guards, is quite eager to blow a few pellets of compressed water through your skull, but I have ordered him to imprison you, until I decide what will be done with you."

"That's very kind of you," Jerry said, with heavy sarcasm. He didn't relish being indebted to this girl for anything. He glanced at the leader of her guards

with a bitter smile. "Wun-Tay looks like just the type who'd enjoy killing an unarmed man, while he's got a dozen or so of his boys around to back him up."

THE squat, dark-skinned leader of the girl's guards moved forward belligerently. There was a puzzled angry frown on his lowering face, as if he knew he were being discussed unflatteringly.

The girl held up her hand and spoke softly to him.

He shuffled backward, but his piggish eyes were blazing hotly, and the barrel of his gun centered on Jerry's forehead meaningly.

The girl swung to Jerry, her eyes flashing in anger.

"You are trying my patience, Man of Earth. If you make an enemy of Wun-Tay you will regret it. I have tried to make you understand why I brought you here, but you have refused to listen. I could have killed you as you lay unconscious, but—" she made a curiously helpless gesture and turned half away from him, "I—I thought, I hoped, that you might help us when you learned of what we are fighting. We need your electrical equipment, but my men do not understand it completely and—"

"And you want me to explain things to them," Jerry finished the sentence for her, with an ironic grin. "So that's the cute little scheme that you've hatched in that beautiful little head of yours, is it? Very nice, I must say. You kidnap me from my laboratory, drag me off to this place, feed me a fantastic line of hokum and then expect me to fall on my knees at the chance of helping you out of whatever mess you've gotten yourself into."

His eyes were bitter as he regarded her beautiful features, now strangely soft and defenseless.

"Well, it's no dice," he said flatly. "I don't know what kind of a game you're playing, little lady, but whatever it is, you can include me out. You can lock me away till Hell freezes over, but you won't get any information from me on that walky-talky of mine. Just figure it out for yourself. And when you get yourself completely stuck maybe you'll realize that gangster methods just aren't getting the best results any more."

The girl made a slight gesture to her guards when he finished talking. Three of them moved determinedly toward him, their strange weapons cocked over their arms.

Jerry waited for them, impassively. There was nothing else he could do; he didn't intend to throw away his life in a futile attack on these armed thugs.

But he was becoming more bewildered every instant. He couldn't account for the queer unhuman appearance of these creatures, who acted as guards for the ravishingly beautiful red-haired girl.

The webwork visible between their curiously splayed fingers was certainly not characteristic of a human being; and the strange slits under their armpits looked as if they might be gills of some sort.

There were no irregularities of this type apparent in the exquisitely molded form of the girl. She was as perfectly fashioned in every respect as any girl he had ever seen in his life. As a matter of fact, she was more so.

But these strange creatures who spoke her queer liquid tongue and who obeyed her every command, were definitely not human. Jerry *felt* that, as the three guards approached and took positions beside him. Looking at their flat dull faces and deep-set eyes gave him a peculiar chill.

They were not necessarily sub-human

types, but he felt certain that they were of a completely different development than any human he had ever known. There was a quality of stolidity about them, that seemed to be bred into the very fibre of their being.

The girl was different. She was volatile and alive, a blend of ice and fire that was exciting and dangerous. He knew that he reacted strongly toward her, and he felt a curious attraction to her, but he was stubbornly determined not to allow that strange feeling to interfere for an instant with his conduct.

He would have liked to please her. He would have enjoyed saying or doing something that would bring a quick, grateful smile to her face or light her marvelous eyes with pleasure.

But he hardened his jaw stubbornly. He knew he was right in refusing to help her. And that realization gave him strength.

THE girl was looking at him steadily. There was no anger in her face, only an impassive resignation.

"I am sorry you feel as you do. But there is now nothing that can be done about that."

She made another slight gesture to the guards who stood beside him and they closed together and secured his arms.

Jerry shuddered involuntarily at the touch of their webbed hands. There was something clammy and damp in the feel of their skin that lifted the hackles at his neck.

One of the guards stepped behind him and Jerry felt the muzzle of his strange weapon prodding gently, but insistently, in the small of his back.

There was nothing he could do but start marching.

The remainder of the guards swung in behind him, but Wun-Tay, their brutal leader, marched beside him, leer-

ing at him from the corner of his eye, and looking, Jerry thought, thoroughly anxious to use the bulky weapon that nestled in the crook of his arm.

When they reached the double doors that had opened from the smooth seamless wall of the room, they halted for an instant. Jerry looked over his shoulder and he saw the red-haired girl was standing in the center of the vast hall, holding herself straight and tall.

Her small head was flung back and her hair cascaded in a glorious flaming stream to her shoulders. There was a steel-hard quality in the square set of her shoulder and the stiffness of her back.

Jerry smiled bitterly. She was like a diamond. Hard and cold and beautiful, glowing with an icy flame that could only sear and never warm.

And then as the guards started marching and he filed through the door, he noticed a strange thing. An odd shaft of light fell across the sculptured whiteness of the girl's face and he saw her cheeks were wet and that there were tears in the depths of her eyes.

The door closed behind him then and he was alone with Wun-Tay and the strange creatures who obeyed his commands.

CHAPTER IV

"Wun-Tay Is an Enemy!"

WUN-TAY looked at him for an instant and Jerry saw a deep evil cruelty in the little piggish eyes.

Wun-Tay hated him, of that he was sure.

But apparently the commands of the red-haired girl were sacred to him, for he growled an order deep in his short neck and immediately the column of guards began marching down the corridor that led away from the vast hall

they had just left.

Wun-Tay marched ahead of the creatures who surrounded Jerry. The corridor stretched ahead of them without end as far as he could see. But before they reached the end of it, Wun-Tay barked an order and they halted. A side door revealed a stairway that led down.

"Aha, the dungeons!" remarked Jerry. "Okay, me lad, down we go. But I warn you, there's liable to be a kidnaping rap in it for you."

Wun-Tay merely grunted, though his eyes held a gleam Jerry was sure could be nothing but malevolent.

It grew dark as they descended, and finally the procession halted before a barred door. It was open and Jerry stood on the threshold.

"Not a very comfortable dump . . ." he began. His observation was cut short by a terrific boot in the seat of his trousers which fairly lifted him into the prison room and deposited him ignominiously on the cold stone floor. The iron door behind him clanged shut.

Jerry clambered to his feet. He whirled to the door and leaped forward and glared at Wun-Tay, who was standing with his water-gun lifted menacingly.

"Damn you!" raged Jerry. "Just let me out of here, and by the living gods, I'll punch your filthy face to a pulp, squirt gun or no squirt gun!"

For answer Wun-Tay aimed his gun at the stone floor, pulled the trigger and there was a sharp *spat*. Stone chips flew from the floor, and a portion of the stone grew powdery white with impact, then swiftly darkened to a spot of wetness. Then Wun-Tay turned and led his guards up the stairs.

Jerry stared at him a little aghast, then looked at the spot on the floor.

"Man, that's some water pistol!" he muttered.

He saw a small cot along one wall and sat down on it reflectively. This was a matter that required a bit of thinking. One thing was sure, this wasn't Earth. That water gun proved that . . .

An hour later his reflections were interrupted by a peculiar shaking of the floor beneath his feet, then the distant sound of a roaring that seemed strangely like the beat of incredibly heavy rain-drops crashing through a leafy forest. Punctuating the roar there came the dull thud of what seemed to be an explosion, or perhaps the recoil of a giant siege gun. What it really was, Jerry could not tell—but one thing was now sure. No storm such as he now heard ever raged on Earth; unless perhaps the Deluge had been something like this!

IT MUST have been very early the next morning, before breakfast, when a guard came down to him again. Through the gloom Jerry could see that several of them wore bandages. Apparently they had been in a hard fight. Then that tumult during the storm the night before had been battle! Jerry wondered as they opened his cell door and gruffly uttered a command that was obviously an order to come out. But growing hunger—he hadn't eaten since noon yesterday (or was it the day before?) back on Earth—ousted all thoughts of any other nature.

"When do I eat?" he asked. "If this is a breakfast march, lead me to it, but fast."

Several more guttural commands came and he was marched back up the stairs, although this time there was a certain respect evident in the way they treated him. Jerry wondered why this was. Or was the reason something other than respect—just the fact that these guards were not the same guards that had taken him down the night before? Perhaps these were the Princess'

guards, and not those of Wun-Tay?

He found this assumption correct, because they led him straight back to Wane's apartment, and bowing respectfully before her, left him alone with her.

"Good morning, Miss High-hand," he said. "What's on your mind this morning—besides ordering me up a stack of wheats and a plate of ham and?"

She frowned, looked puzzled. "Stack of wheats . . . ?"

"Something to eat, sister," he said flatly. "I'm hungry, get it? I crave the necessities of life. Besides not liking your hotel, I don't like the service. Or do you intend to starve me?"

"Oh," she said with that peculiarly impossible to associate mental speech and lip movements. "I am so sorry. I will have food sent up immediately. . . ." She struck a gong and a servant appeared. She gave rapid orders and the servant left. "I have not eaten," she informed Jerry. "I will eat with you. It has been . . . a very bad night." She looked pale and worried and there were tired lines under her eyes.

"It was a bit noisy," admitted Jerry. "Can't you keep the people in the upper flat from jiving and cutting up the rugs? Cancel their lease . . . ?"

"I don't know what you are saying," she said simply. "But if you are criticizing me, I do not blame you. I deserve all the scorn you can heap upon my silly head . . ."

Jerry lifted his eyebrows. "Hey, now, sister, stow that kind of stuff! I'm not on any jury, and you aren't up for any counts as far as I'm concerned. I don't mean to slap you around for anything that's not my business. When I say anything critical, it concerns only myself and my presence here. If you get what I mean, I'm still waiting to be shipped home on the next flight of the ferry command."

"But you can't go home now," she

said. "I need you."

"That's fine!" he said. "This morning you need me. Last night all you wanted was my gimmick . . ."

"Your what?"

"My radio set."

"Oh. Yes, last night I believed that was what I needed. But it didn't work . . ."

"Naturally," said Jerry very patiently. "Look, sister, did you expect to tune in on Information Please with that set from way off here on Venus? The range of that thing isn't more than thirty miles. Earth must be at least twice that."

"You jest with me," she said, eyes downcast, fingers twisting. "It is many millions of miles across space to your planet."

"That far?" Jerry managed to look aghast, although he felt a temptation to grin sarcastically. "Hardly a sleeper jump . . ." Then he noticed how close to tears she was, and suddenly he didn't want to smile. "Look, Babe," he said abruptly. "Unload, will you? If there's anything bothering you, I'd like to hear it. Maybe we can reach some sort of an agreement."

SHE looked up with a visible effort. "First I must apologize for the way I have treated you. Then, I will try to explain everything so that you will understand my problem here.

"Some years ago, my father, the King, died. I was left to rule the country. We have ruled for many centuries, and our people were always happy. But recently, with the lessening of our numbers—I am now the last of my kind—the people have wanted to rule themselves . . ."

"Sounds reasonable to me," offered Jerry. "Why shouldn't they?"

"Do not accuse me of trying to go contrary to their will," she said. "I

have long felt that it was their right, and in fact, have drawn up an agreement to step out of my own accord and become one of them, with equal rights as a citizen. But they are not yet fitted to cope with our mutual enemies, the Roma. You see, the Roma are a people beyond the twilight belt from the rain country, who have long coveted our land where it does not always rain. They have battled us for centuries to take it away from us, and to enslave our people.

"That they have not succeeded has been through the efforts of my people, and most recently my father, whose electric guns have been sufficient to fight them off."

"Why can't your people handle the guns under their own rulership as well as under yours?"

"Their intelligence is absolutely incapable of understanding the guns. They cannot repair them once they are out of order."

"I still don't see . . ."

"It is their religion, too," she explained. "They not only cannot repair them, but they would not. Further, they would destroy the guns, if they were not constantly guarded by loyal soldiers. They worship the lightning, and it is the force of the lightning my father harnessed to these guns as the last resort to fight off the Roma."

"Today we have less than a dozen of the guns still in operation around the city bastions. Last night, for instance, two were put out of commission—their crews were killed by the Roma, and before loyal soldiers of Wun-Tay's guard could replace them, ignorant citizens wrecked them, maliciously, in their religious fervor, I am sure."

Jerry grunted. "Looks to me as though you were fighting a rather unappreciated war. Maybe these people would just as soon be slaves of the Roma, or perhaps just as content—

since their ability to rule themselves wisely would seem to be rather low, considering their superstitions and their intelligence. A people you have to defend against their will don't seem to be worth defending."

"Perhaps. But you are wrong about them in some respects. They are a simple, peace-loving people, and they have a future. They are a new species, and they are on their way up. If nothing happens to wipe them out, one day Venus will be populated by them, and who knows but what their science may grow to even greater stature than that of my own dying—dead—race? Many thousands of years we ruled, but the strain was not perfect, and it died away. Perhaps new blood would have saved us—but that, too, was obviated by what you call a superstition—a religious law against intermarriage. There are some that say my subjects are descendants of certain of my race who intermarried with the Roma, or perhaps with the Ice People of the north, who are hopelessly ignorant savages."

"Where's all this leading to?" asked Jerry.

A sound at the door brought a faint look of interest to the girl's drawn face. "Right now, to food," she said. "Let us eat. As we eat, I will try to continue."

JERRY was more than willing to agree, and in a moment he was vigorously chewing on a variety of fruits and vegetables whose appearance and taste in every respect were absolutely foreign to anything he had encountered in his life—but he soon discovered that his hunger was equal to his imagination, and he scarcely analyzed each new taste sensation.

She ate more sedately, and munched only a few fruits. Meantime she spoke on: "Last night there was a heavy raid

by the Roma raindrop squadrons . . .”

“Huh!” asked Jerry blankly, stopping in the middle of a bite. “Raindrop squadrons?”

“Yes. The Roma have mastered the secret of flight through the air in statically controlled bubbles which carry a negative charge of electricity that repels the earth. Thus, counterbalanced by their occupants, they are buoyant enough to float through the air—but only during a rainstorm. They are carried mainly by the wind, but the Roma can control the wind by magnetically charging the clouds of the storm and attracting or repelling them in any direction. Naturally the bubbles follow the clouds, since both have the same charges of electricity . . .”

“Naturally!” agreed Jerry. “Listen, you gotta show me that trick! No water bubble can hold up a human being! I’ve blown bubbles in my day, and believe me . . .”

“The water of your Earth is not like that of Venus,” she said. “Perhaps the nearest I can come to comparing is to refer to it as related to heavy water. Due to a peculiar atomic cohesion, similar in principle to the cohesion of molecules in your water, the surface tension of these bubbles—thus enabling them to resist breaking—is great enough to hold aloft not only a human being, but sizeable loads of equipment and weapons.”

“Okay, I’ll go along with that,” said Jerry, still looking incredulous. “Let’s get on with what happened last night.”

“Well, in the raid last night we lost heavily. We lost most by the destruction of those two guns. Now there is a breach in our defensive wall, and the Roma know it. When they return they will come through the breach and nothing we can do will stop them. The range of the other guns is not enough to permit us to cover all necessary de-

fenses.”

“I see,” said Jerry. “But I still don’t see where I come in, or where my little radio came in last night, or how it failed.”

She nibbled on another fruit. “Before my father died, he told me something about the electric gun which made me think. He revealed that actually it was not the artificial lightning of the gun that shattered the Raindrops of the enemy, because it was apparent that ordinary lightning, which is extremely heavy in all Venusian storms, would have done even worse havoc to the enemy; it was a peculiar vibration wave which he said was identical to your Earthian communication waves. The same waves you of Earth use for radio transmission.

“Thus, when I discovered this truth, I hit on the idea of building a generator of radio waves to supplant the guns. With such a weapon we could broadcast a wave which would instantly shatter all attacking Raindrops and eliminate all need for the electric guns. A twofold purpose would be served—the elimination of our danger from attack by the Roma, and the elimination of the religious objections of our own people. Radio waves are invisible, unknown to them. They would find no prejudice against the new weapon. And with such projectors, they would be forever safe to build their future.”

“Why didn’t you do that?”

“Because nowhere on Venus are the necessary metals to be found! We can never build a radio transmitter! Thus, the only thing left for me was to secure such a transmitter from Earth. The last few years I have devoted to unceasing efforts to transfer such a set from Earth, via the mental waves with which I trapped you. Only by a strange bit of luck and some power I don’t yet understand, did I succeed. I brought you

here, and with you, your transmitter."

HER voice had become low and hopeless. Jerry stared at her as she put down a bit of fruit as though it would have choked her to eat it.

"I had such high hopes . . . but the transmitter did not work! When I directed the radio waves at the enemy last night, nothing happened."

"I don't wonder," said Jerry. "That little set hasn't any more amperage than a pocket flash. It wouldn't bust an ordinary bubble back on my own world! I could have told you that yesterday, if you'd asked."

She looked at him tragically. "Then you can't help me? You can't make your transmitter work powerfully enough to create the effect needed to shatter the Raindrops?"

Jerry shrugged. "I guess that's it, kid. I'm sorry, but I can't for the life of me see how. The only other chance I can see is just null and void, because you yourself have said the necessary minerals just don't exist here to build a more powerful one. I could do it, but for that 'critical shortage.'"

"Then all hope is lost," she said heavily.

Jerry considered. "I don't like to be a wet blanket, but I think it's even worse than that."

"What do you mean?" She looked at him wide-eyed.

"I think you've got—well, shall I call it a situation?—in your own camp."

"You mean . . ."

"Yes. That jerk, Wun-Tay. I think he's after your hide—and he wouldn't be if he didn't have a good reason. I'm sure he wouldn't burn his own bridges behind him—so the natural supposition is that he has a few private bridges, maybe between him and the Roma, all nicely constructed."

"I am afraid you are right," she ad-

mitted. "I have long suspected him—and last night I suspected even more."

"How is that?"

"Two of the men arming the cannon which were destroyed were killed by a knife through their backs."

"What does that mean?" asked Jerry blankly.

"The Roma never use knives! They attack always with water pistols."

"You mean you thing Wun-Tay, or some of his gang, wanted those guns to be destroyed?"

"That is what I suspect."

Jerry got to his feet, wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and dusted off his trousers meticulously. "Maybe I can't build a transmitter powerful enough to smash those Raindrop Raiders, but by golly, I can throw a right cross that'll smash that plug-ugly's nose! And what better time than the present? Now that I'm stuck here . . ." Jerry paused in mid sentence and faced the girl. "Say! Am I stuck here?"

She got to her feet, her face pale and tragic. "No," she whispered, "I can send you back . . . any time."

"Great!" enthused Jerry. "I was beginning to forget myself . . ."

"Do you wish to go back . . . now?" she asked in a low voice.

Jerry's eyes gleamed. "Boy! Good old State and Madison. A nice jolt of Scotch at the Brass Rail!" He looked at the tears in her eyes and grinned. "Sure, baby, I want to go back; but don't rush me. That's one thing Jerry Lane can't be counted out of—a nice little scrap! And as I see it, the odds are about right—me against the Roma, and Wun-Tay! It oughta be just enough to even up a kick in the pants I'm still burned up about. So, if you don't mind, baby, I'll pass up the run-out powder for this time! I . . ."

He didn't go on, because all at once there was a sobbing bundle of soft

sweetness in his arms, and Jerry Lane, searching his soul, discovered he wasn't mad at that bundle of sweetness for shanghaiing him on the longest voyage on which an Earthman had ever gone.

CHAPTER V

Showdown with Wun-Tay

"THIS sorta puts a new light on things," said Jerry, looking down into her wet eyes minutes later. "We've got to break up the party for sure, now. And maybe we'd better get busy right away."

"What can we do?" Wa-Nee asked.

"First, how about taking me on a tour of the place, so I can see what kind of a setup we have? We will have to dream up something to fight off that next attack of the Roma."

"That will be tonight," said Wa-Nee hopelessly. "We'll be unable to do anything in so short a time."

"Tonight!" Jerry exclaimed in consternation. "Boy, that does put the heat on! But I don't quite agree that we can't do anything at all. There must be something . . ."

"You will see," she said tonelessly. "Come, I will show you what we have."

He followed her from the room and out into the street. This was the first time he had seen the city itself, and he stared in wonder. Here indeed was a curious mixture of the ancient and the modern.

The ancient portion consisted of tremendous buildings built of solid stone blocks, architected in unearthly designs. Here and there an artistic fresco or a magnificent statue was positive tribute to the art and culture of the race of which Wa-Nee was the last living representative.

The modern touch was expressed in

tiny dwellings of wood or stones, nestling incongruously in the shadows of the larger buildings, some built on the ruins of former edifices long since collapsed. Before these tiny dwellings naked children played, and ceased their play to stare in wonder at Jerry Lane and his queer clothing. Older ones stared with open hostility at Wa-Nee; and it was obvious that all through the city there was a mixture of feeling. Many of the people were pleasant to Wa-Nee, but most of those were the older ones.

The whole city, Jerry saw, was encircled by a massive stone wall, atop which, at intervals, were firm bastions on which huge, cumbersome, crude cannon were erected. They seemed multi-barreled, but upon seeing them closer, Jerry realized the barrels were not hollow, but solid, cast in one piece. Very obviously they fired no projectile.

"They discharge their lightning through the projecting barrels at the rain clouds, and in the process, they generate a local radio wave which smashes any bubble in the vicinity of the wall," explained Wa-Nee. "Spaced properly, they form a barrier around and over the city beyond which no bubble can float. However, now . . ." she pointed to a place on the wall where two guns lay in shattered wreckage ". . . there is a place where the Rain-drop Raiders may pass into the city without entering the field of the guns. That is why we will lose this final battle which will come with the rain tonight."

"Lose it, my eye!" exclaimed Jerry. "That gap isn't so big. I have a hunch my radio will generate enough waves to plug the gap. There's the answer to tonight, at least. Without a doubt the Roma will attack in force there. We can wait till they get directly over the wall, then give them every volt in

the batteries. If any get through, we should be able to cope with them with water guns. After all, it will be an even match in that respect. The Roma haven't got any weapons that you haven't told me about—or have they?"

She shook her head. "No. But I don't believe your radio will stop enough of them from getting through. We have only about two thousand fighting men, and they will attack with five times that many."

Jerry studied the wall, the gap, for a moment. "Well, it's a cinch they can't all crowd into that wave-free space at once. We'll plug the center of it with the transmitter, and I'm sure it'll work within a hundred yards or so of closing the whole gap. We've got to risk something—and they won't know about the transmitter, so they'll come directly through the center. We've got to take a chance they don't discover the free areas to either side, and also, that they may not be able to hit it squarely if they do discover it."

SHE nodded slightly. "There is a chance," she admitted. "But you have forgotten one thing."

"What is that?"

"They could fly in high enough to pass over the weak waves from the transmitter, then drop into the city behind it."

"Yes," said Jerry. "If they knew the transmitter was there! But they don't, so they'll come in low, for quick action. If they do, a couple hundred may go down, and the rest will beat it, not fully aware of what they have to cope with. That will give us at least another day—and we'll think of something else by then."

"I hope you're right," Wa-Nee answered doubtfully.

JERRY spent the greater part of the afternoon rigging up his set, measuring the wall, the distance between the effective electric cannons on each side of the gap, and finally he was satisfied that he had placed the mechanism in the most effective position.

He had barely finished with his work when a detail of men came up the street on the double, and at their head was the familiar figure of Wun-Tay. Jerry grimaced as he saw the evil-faced captain of the guards.

"So, my ugly friend," he muttered. "You finally show up. Wonder where you've been all day?"

Jerry stood with legs wide apart, looking down from the wall. There was a glint in his eye that could not be misunderstood. One glance he gave behind him, and grinned in satisfaction at what he saw. Then, slowly, he made his way down the stairs to the ground where he faced the ugly Wun-Tay.

Wun-Tay barked a command and several guards stepped forward.

Jerry raised a hand. "Hold it a minute, boys," he said grimly.

They stopped, hesitated, looked at Wun-Tay. That worthy came swaggering forward, gun in hand, stood directly before Jerry. Then, slowly, deliberately, he raised the sights of his weapon. Jerry dropped his hand.

Instantly a shout came from the top of the wall above him, and a row of heads appeared. Each head was behind a leveled water gun, and each gun was trained on Wun-Tay and his men.

"Those boys," remarked Jerry, although he knew Wun-Tay could not understand him, "are twenty of the best shots in the city who are strictly loyal to Wa-Nee. I can guarantee you they'll shoot to kill when next I

raise my hand."

Jerry knew that this was not a real showdown, if he did not force it, because Wun-Tay could come back later with hundreds of men on his side, and he had no doubt that under such pressure, in the face of certain defeat, the twenty on the wall would waver. Or, if they did not, they would all die.

Wun-Tay knew it too, for as he stared, his weapon dropped to his side. He shouted something up at the heads on the wall, then he faced Jerry with a snarl on his lips. He spouted a vitriolic series of sentences, then wheeled about on his heel and began to walk away.

"Wait a minute!" said Jerry loudly. "Not so fast, my fine-feathered friend."

Rapidly he stepped up behind the retreating Wun-Tay and planted a terrific kick in the seat of that worthy's dirty uniform. Wun-Tay literally rose into the air and came down with a smack that echoed to the wall-top. Loud laughs came from the wall, and a few surprised snickers came from Wun-Tay's own men.

A roar of anger came from Wun-Tay's lips as he rose from his ignominious position on the ground, and he came around fast, his gun whipping up. But Jerry was ready for him. Pivoting on the ball of his foot, he landed a terrific right cross on Wun-Tay's jaw.

Wun-Tay saw it coming, but he had no chance to evade it. Here was a type of fighting such as he had never seen. Nor did he get much time to study it—for ten seconds later a referee would have been started on a much longer count than Gene Tunney ever got! In short, Wun-Tay was out cold.

Jerry motioned contemptuously to Wun-Tay's guards. "Take that hunk of horse-meat outa here," he ordered. "And when you bring him to, have

him explain how it feels to buck up against Jerry Lane."

With that Jerry turned on his heel and walked away. When he was out of sight in the direction of the Princess' palace, he looked down at his knuckles and rubbed them ruefully. "Too bad it hurt me worse than it did him! Next time, if he wants any more, I'll give it to him in the solar plexus!"

It was while he was having the evening meal with Wa-Nee that Jerry realized his mistake—that he should have killed Wun-Tay as he lay there unconscious. A guard, breathless from his hasty dash to bring the news, told them both of Wun-Tay's departure to meet the attacking forces of the Roma. As Wa-Nee translated: "He says Wun-Tay has planned to aid the Roma tonight to conquer the city. He also says Wun-Tay sends a message direct to you."

"What sort of message?"

"He says the Roma will fly high tonight!" said Wa-Nee tragically.

Jerry swore explosively. He got to his feet and crossed to the window and looked out into the gathering darkness. On the horizon black clouds were tumbling up menacingly, presaging the night's storm.

CHAPTER VI

The Roma Attack

JERRY was drenched to the skin. He sat tensely beside his portable radio set, staring anxiously up at the black skies. Lightning lanced back and forth, revealing the contours of the clouds with startling clarity. It would be perfectly possible to see the invaders when they would come, floating swiftly in their fantastic water-bubbles.

Again and again Jerry checked the radio before him, then glanced morosely

upward. Only a few hundred yards up the radio waves would be so weak that passing bubbles could defy them and cross the barrier to land inside the city. Once enough of them landed they could overcome the defenders by sheer weight of numbers—and it would be all over.

Just exactly what he intended to do, Jerry didn't know. He had decided on one thing; he was going to stay here and battle it—although Wa-Nee had offered again to transport him back to Earth—even if it came to bare fists. There was always a chance, somehow, of winning. It was a matter of the breaks—and the breaks never come to the guy who quits before he's licked.

Somehow those breaks would come—and Jerry intended to be in there battling when they did come, so that he wouldn't miss them.

As he sat there thinking, he couldn't help picturing once more the teeming traffic which must at this very minute be making of State and Madison the maddest of all madlands. Not that he liked the picture too much—after all, a guy was a screwball to be milling around in a senseless mob like that, especially for the peanuts the radio station was paying him to risk life and limb to listen to their corny ham actors and even cornier commercials without even the solace of a comfortable chair next to a fireside to make it bearable.

Out here on Venus, where the most you could expect was a water pellet through your guts any minute, or some big bruiser strangling the life out of you, was more interesting by far—and you had a chance to fight back.

A particularly strong bolt of lightning made his ears ring when it smashed down into the jungle a quarter mile away. He winced and blinked.

"Bye-bye Jerry if one of those hits this nice little aerial rod of mine!" he said aloud. "It's a wonder it hasn't been hit yet!"

He grinned in remembrance as he pictured a time not so many days ago when he'd almost gotten a finishing jolt through that very same aerial rod . . . when he'd gotten it tangled in the trolley wire back there on Earth. The conductor's face had been a sight for sore eyes! The poor guy probably had to put up with plenty from his passengers, but that must have been the worst.

It had been Wa-Nee's voice, from millions of miles away, that he'd heard coming from his radio set on the platform of that street car. Millions of miles away—and ordinarily the range of the set was only a few miles . . .

Jerry sat bolt upright in the rain, and his face was tense with thinking. If he only had a good, powerful mobile set here, mounted in one of the station's swanky stations wagons, instead of his little peanut of a back-pack set! Then maybe when those raiding Romas came over they'd have gotten a little surprise.

"Wire!" yelled Jerry, jumping to his feet. "Wires. I gotta have a couple hundred feet of wire . . . !"

SEVERAL of the loyal guards, crouched near him in the rain, looked at him in surprise, and one of them came forward, head low against the beating drops. He said something in his language, and Jerry frowned.

"Get Wa-Nee," he said, waving his arms in his anxiety. "Run, you dim-bulb! Get the princess. Wa-Nee! Wa-Nee! Get her!"

The guard stared a second, then he turned and ran down the stairs leading to the ground. In a moment his loping figure disappeared in the direction of the palace.

"Good!" said Jerry, and rapidly

he began counting factors off on his fingers as he marshaled his plan in his mind.

Wa-Nee came instantly, clad in not much more than a 'transparent rain-proof garment that clung to her trim figure with startling effect. Her eyes were filled with worry.

"What is it?" her telepathed question came, accompanied by that weird illusion that her uncoordinated lip movements induced. "What is it, Jerry?"

"Wire!" he said quickly. "I've got to have some copper wire, maybe two or three hundred feet of it! It may mean the whole difference between . . ." he stopped as he saw the tragic look on her face. "What's the matter?"

"If you are asking for what I translate in my mind, there is none on this whole planet. We have no wire, as you call it."

He was thunderstruck. "No wire! What about those electric cannon? They must have some wire in them!"

"No," she shook her head. "Only glass tubes filled with water and acid, and storage batteries built into them. Storage batteries which get their power from the air."

Jerry gulped. He looked at the nearest electric cannon. "Glass tubes," he muttered. "Never get that done in time . . ."

He sat down, thinking deeply, then abruptly he leaped again to his feet. He tore open the back panel of the radio set, being careful to shield the resultant opening from the rain. Then he wrenched out a tightly-wound coil, snapped the cover back in place. Sitting down, he found the end of the very fine wire woven into the coil and began hastily to unwind it.

It was a wire scarcely thicker than horsehair, and its black strand looked pitifully inadequate as he unwound it.

He gave the end to Wa-Nee and directed her to retreat with it toward the cannon as he continued to unwind.

"Hope there's enough in this thing," he said fervently. "It's the short wave coil, and it won't be needed in the set for what it's intended to do."

At length he held only a plastic coil-blank in his hand, and looking up, he saw Wa-Nee standing beside the electric cannon, looking back at him over the intervening expanse of wall-top. "Long enough!" he exulted.

He tucked his end of the wire under the edge of the radio cabinet, then raced down to where Wa-Nee waited, wonder on her face. He took the fine wire gingerly from her fingers, then looked at the cannon.

"Show me where the battery terminals are," he directed.

She pointed to a plate that came off, and when he had removed it, he saw the glass tubes beneath. He found the terminal, broke the tube with his fist and fastened the wire and terminal tightly together. Then he raced back to his set, followed by Wa-Nee. Here he connected it with the cannon and then considered a moment. Abruptly he disconnected it from the coilpost, re-connected it to the aerial. Then he looked up at the sky once more.

"One second . . ." he muttered. "That's all I'll need—and maybe the wire will hold that long." He turned to Wa-Nee. "Did your father ever hint how much power those cannons shoot—how much voltage is in the storage batteries?"

She shook her head. "I don't know what you mean," she confessed. "But I remember the day I first contacted you—on your earth I saw such sparks as the cannons shoot. I do not know what caused them . . ."

Jerry's eyes lit. "That's what I wanted to hear!" he shouted. "Those

sparks, my dear lady, came from a street-car trolley wire! Come on, let's get over to that cannon. Give your men over there orders to let me handle it. I've got to be the one that fires it."

She looked at the radio set. "But what about this?"

"It will take care of itself—for one second, I hope," he said gently. "After that I don't think there will be enough left of its insides to make a watch-fob!"

"The Roma!" gasped Wa-Nee, suddenly pointing into the sky. "They come!"

JERRY took one look, then pelted back toward the electrical cannon. Here he paused, made a rapid survey, then stood waiting. Wa-Nee had waved away the gun crew, who now took up positions with their comrades along the wall, water-guns at the ready.

"Be ready for a scrap," said Jerry through stiff lips. "I'm going to hold the fire of this cannon until the Roma are directly over the gap—and over my radio set. Then I'm going to give it all the juice this thing has. If the wire we stretched will take the load for one second, I have hopes that the radio waves will be so strengthened—just as they were the day you contacted me—that they will reach out to smash the bubbles of all the attackers. If it does . . ."

"And if it doesn't?" she asked.

He turned to her, a peculiar look in his eyes. "If it doesn't, I guess a guy named Jerry Lane is going to spend the rest of his days being a slave to the Roma, and loving you for all he's worth."

She looked at him, and her eyes became wet. "That can never be," she said. "They would never allow me to live . . ."

"Then that settles it," he said. "They'll have to do it over the body of an Irish radioman! But somehow, I

have a hunch they won't!"

He took her in his arms and planted one long kiss on her lips, then turned to the cannon. Already the Roma were in range of the city, and all along the line lightning flashes came from cannon. But it was easy to see that they were going to do no harm. The Roma flying army was pouring forward in a great wedge that narrowed down to a single column a dozen bubbles wide, heading straight for the gap in the wall. In the lead Jerry could see the familiar form of the traitorous Wun-Tay, riding like his allies in a transparent bubble, a water-gun in his hand and an evil smile of anticipation on his coarse features. In some of the bubbles Jerry saw amazon-like women, and he looked grim. No wonder the Roma were so war-like—even the women were fighters!

All at once the battle began. Men on the walls began to fall as water pellets came from the guns of the attackers. The pellets were fired directly through the wall of the bubbles, which they did not shatter. Water, it seemed, was ineffective to break down the cohesion of the bubbles. But also, the men in the attacking force were dying as shots from the walls found targets inside the bubbles.

Wa-Nee, too, was firing a water-gun. Only Jerry remained inactive, tense, his fingers on the fire mechanism of the great electric cannon which would not itself fire when he depressed the firing key, because the contact had been broken. But the almost invisible wire stretched from the contact, off toward where his radio sat, invisible now in the darkness.

Jerry waited until the wave of invaders was directly over the gap in the wall, then with a yell of hopeful triumph he depressed the firing lever. . .

And nothing happened!

THROUGH the gap in the wall the invaders swarmed, and the battle became an inferno. As yet, no invaders tried to land, but floated to and fro over the city, shooting down the defenders from their vantage in the sky. Against the scudding clouds the Roma were difficult targets; but on the ground, Wa-Nee's subjects stood out almost constantly in the lightning glare and the glare from the still uselessly firing cannons.

Frantically Jerry searched for the trouble, following the little black wire along the wall-top, passing it through his fingers. All around him the battle raged, and several water pellets splintered the stone near him, but none found their mark. Suddenly he came to the broken section and uttered a prayer as he fumbled around for the other end. With a gasp of relief he found it, swiftly stripped the enamel off the wire with his thumbnail, and twisted the two ends together. The contact would be bad, but it had to be good enough!

Then he raced back toward the cannon. His eyes caught a glimpse of the battle raging, and he saw that it was now almost won by the Roma. Here and there dozens of Roma were floating down to land in the city, almost unopposed. The greater mass of them remained aloft, but he could see that the final charge downward was coming—and when it did . . . It would be final defeat!

He scarcely saw Wa-Nee's tragic face as he sprang to the cannon. He depressed the lever and a bright flash came from the wire terminal. For a moment a string of tiny lights seemed to leap toward his radio set, along the wall, then with a sputter the wire grew white-hot, melted, and all became dark again.

"Damn!" groaned Jerry. "The wire couldn't take it!"

Wa-Nee's eyes were on him with a strangely piercing intentness.

"Then we have lost," she said tragically.

Jerry looked up, then he blinked, and began to yell. "No!" he shouted. "No, we . . ." All at once he became aware of Wa-Nee's purpose. His eyes caught hers, and he felt his brain swim dizzily. Her eyes grew larger, seemed to become the whole universe. She was sending him back to Earth!

Desperately Jerry hurled himself forward, crashed into her, lifted her body in his arms, trying to break the hypnotic spell she was building in his brain. But he was too late . . .

There came a moment of whirling lights, then an instant of intense cold, and all at once, blackness and quiet and peace . . .

PEACE that seemed to last only a second—then suddenly it became a bedlam of noise: of honking taxi horns, of people rushing back and forth, shouldering him dazedly from one side of the walk to the other. The bright lights of the State-Lake marquee made him blink. A heavy-set woman crashed into him, kept on going like a battleship through a heavy sea.

"Wa-Nee!" yelled Jerry, despairingly. "Oh, for cripes sake . . . she sent me back . . . and just when . . ."

"Jerry!" came a frightened wail beside him, "Jerry, where are you?"

Jerry turned as though he had been shot. There stood Wa-Nee, terrified in the clutches of a policeman.

"Let her go!" Jerry yelled. "You big flatfoot, what you trying to do?"

"Listen, smart guy," said the policeman. "What she's wearing you don't wear on the streets. What's the idea. . . .?"

Jerry looked at Wa-Nee, then he gulped. "Sorry, officer," he said. "We

just came out for a breath of fresh air between shows. We're on the bill at the State-Lake—you know, girl-of-the-future, and stuff like that."

"Well, get back inside," snapped the officer, "and get some clothes on that dame besides that transparent oilcloth she's wearing. And say, don't tell me you think people will *swim* in outfits like that in the future!"

"Swim?" asked Jerry blankly.

"Yeah, she's all wet, and so are you!" said the policeman.

Jerry yanked Wa-Nee into the alley towards the stage door. "Yeah," he called back, "we got a tough act, and we perspire a lot!"

Inside the theater a doorman stopped them, and Jerry fished in his pocket for a bill. "Send for a cab, guy," he said "and keep the change. We walked below the wrong window . . ."

"Well, I'll be," said the attendant, then grinned and picked up his phone. "That's Chicago's alleys for you," he said. "I never walk through 'em myself."

Wa-Nee clung to Jerry, bewildered by what was going on. "Jerry!" she said. "My people. Oh why did you grab me?"

"Because I didn't intend to come back alone," said Jerry. "So I grabbed you. I figured if I came you'd just have to come along if I held on tight enough. And as for your people, they are free now to develop their civilization. I was just starting to yell for you to look, when you tried to shove me out of the picture. The radio *did* work. Every one of the Roma was on his way down to the ground—minus his bubble! We made a clean sweep of the whole darn army as far as I could see!"

Jerry shook a finger in her face. "And now that you're on Earth, you're staying. You are passé on Venus, and if I catch you pulling any more hypnotic tricks . . ."

She looked up at him. "Oh, Jerry, I won't. I promise . . ."

She kissed him, and he knew he could believe her.

The End

A JAPANESE FANTASY

FAR more optimistic than Alexander the Great who claimed there were no new worlds left to conquer, the Japanese, in spite of their tremendous if temporary conquests, are planning to add another great area to their Greater East Asia empire. The fact that this territory lies 200 feet below sea level does not deter Japan's scientists from their grandiose scheme.

The Nipponese news agency *Domei*, broadcasting on March 28 from Singapore, reported that these plans involve no less a task than the diking and draining of the sea between Australia and New Guinea, a surface of more than 180,000 square miles. "This sea," the scientist pointed out, "is nowhere more than two hundred feet deep. With a giant transmarine embankment, constructed from Cape York, Australia, to the New Guinea coast near Saibai Island, and from Arnhem Land to the New Guinea coast near Hendrik Island, there emerges a colossal shallow lake ready for reclamation. Two-thirds of this reclaimed land can be converted to cotton-growing, and one-third left unreclaimed as salt pans as well as for the generation of electric power. These

salt deposits will be able to yield three billion tons of salt per year.

"A canal will be constructed from the mountainous regions in New Guinea to irrigate the cotton fields. The annual output of unginned cotton will total 400 million piculs (one picul equals 136 lbs.). As northern Australia is climatically known as one of the best cotton-producing territories, it will not be difficult to increase the crops beyond that figure.

"At least 100 million persons will be required to carry out this task. Greater East Asia, however, can afford to concentrate manpower, with China contributing the greatest share. Experts estimate the cost of construction at between four and five billion yen; two billion for the eastern embankment which will be over 100 miles long; and two and one-half to three billion for the western embankment, which will be over two hundred miles long."

In his zeal the announcer forgot to mention that the south coast of New Guinea is in Allied hands, while the northern and western parts are being steadily cleared of remaining Japanese troops.—*C. S. Rice.*

THE SHACKLED STATUE

By **BERKELEY LIVINGSTON**

"I'LL take a tall, cold one."

The bartender's face split into a wide grin as he looked at the customer who had just ordered. Most people who saw "Windy" Weston for the first time did that. Some there were who laughed aloud. Stranger or friend, he was always greeted with a smile.

There wasn't anything very strange about that. There are some people who chase the dour gods of gloom. And Windy was a paragon of gloom chasers. It wasn't just his appearance . . . although that alone justified a hearty belly laugh. It was more the innate character of the man. About him there hovered an air of jollity; of colossal good humor.

Windy's round, butterball of a body was perched high on a stool in the Cozy Cocktail Corner, a small Loop tavern. He was decked out in one of his, as he called it, "creations"; a nightmare in large red and green checks.

He was so round a little man that no matter how closely he buttoned the jacket, haunch and paunch stuck out, fore and aft.

He sat there, his moon face with the innocent blue pop-eyes staring thirstily

at the bartender.

"I'll take a tall cold one," he reiterated.

The bartender said:

"You bet, chum," and filled the glass full of beer.

A look of peace and content made its appearance on Windy's face as he downed the beer in a single gulp.

"And I'll have another," he announced.

The second drink was broken off in a strangled gasp, however. For just as Windy had begun to pour the beer down his throat, a man, tall, dark and handsome, and carrying a bulky package, had attempted to seat himself on the stool next to Windy.

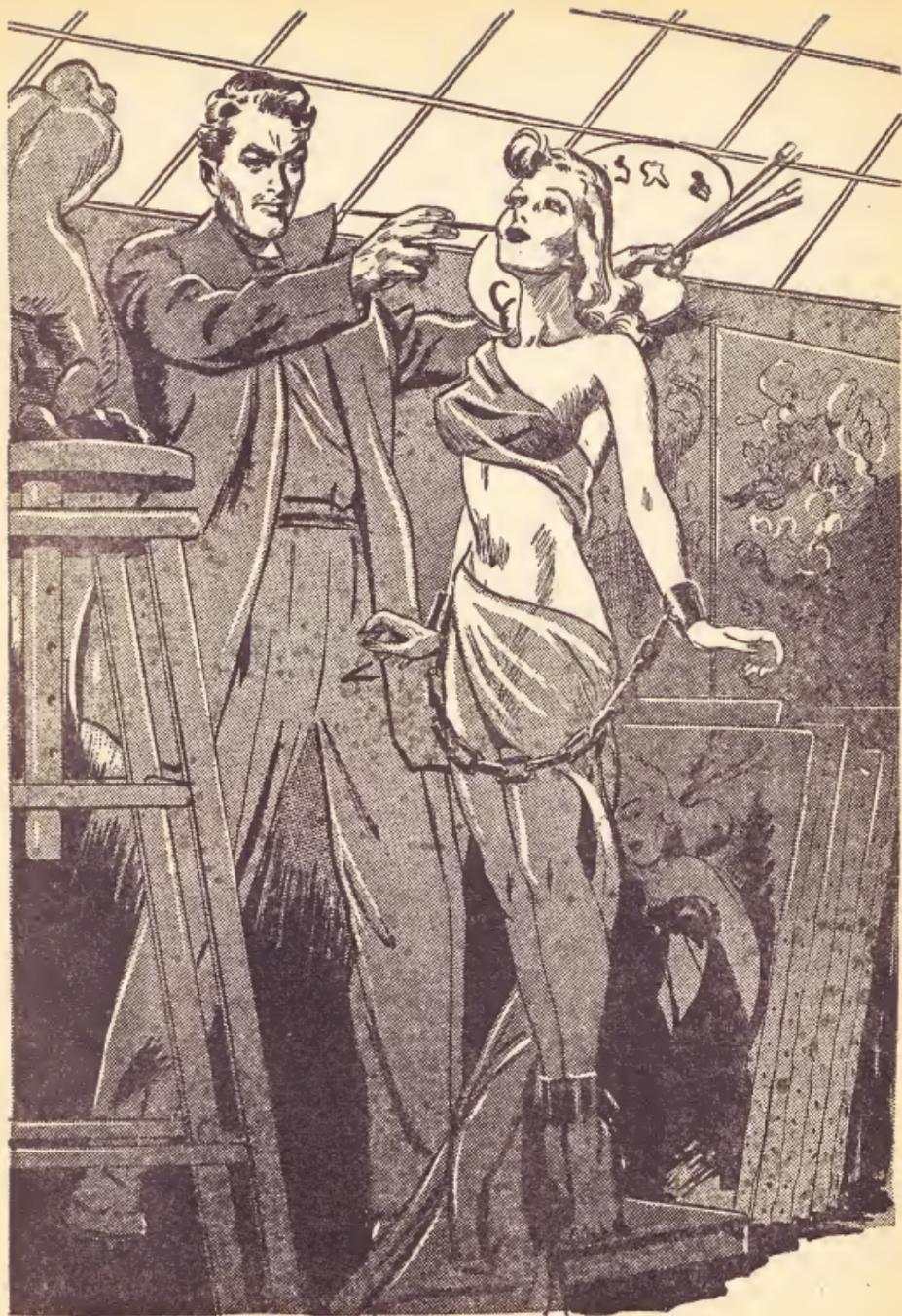
That would have been all right. But he didn't take into account the largeness of two things: his package and Windy. The package swung out and gave Windy an awful jolt in the small of the back. Beer spurted in a frothy, amber flood from Windy's lips. Beer and expletives."

"Idiot! Fool! Dolt! Murderer!"

Windy paused to give the man with the package a long baleful glare from the strangely innocent eyes, then went on:

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM LATZ

**Windy had never seen anything
so lovely as this statue; nor yet
a sculptor so mad as its creator!**



Then he painted the statue in vivid colors of life . . .

"Blind-eyes! Why does it always happen to me? I'm sitting here, minding my own business with a glass of beer and along comes a Mr. Jerk who thinks this is the parcel room of the Union Station."

"I'm sorry, my friend," the stranger broke into Windy's tirade. "That was a hell of a clumsy thing to do. Here, let me buy you a drink."

The words were hardly out of his mouth, and Windy was thumping his glass on the bar and shouting, in a loud, high voice:

"My friend Abercrombie is buying me a Zombie!"

The stranger's jaw went slack at this sudden new outburst. And the bartender dropped the cocktail glass he was polishing. They both stared at Windy, as though they thought he had suddenly gone crazy. He was still pounding the bar with the empty beer glass and chanting:

"My friend Abercrombie is buying me a Zombie."

THE bartender walked toward Windy as though he was afraid Windy was going to leap over the bar and bite him.

"Hey! Take it easy, bud," the bartender said.

Windy stopped his chant. A beatific smile broke onto the cupid's-bow of his mouth.

"Sure, Mike," he said. "Don't worry, I'm not blowing my top."

The stranger shook his head dazedly.

"Look," he demanded, "do you always do that when someone offers to buy you a drink?"

"Nope," Windy replied, "but that little jingle came to me just then. Had to get it out of my system."

"Whew! Well I'm glad that's out of your system. And say, tell me: The suit. Where, may I ask, did you get it?"

Windy looked down at the suit which the stranger was eyeing with a peculiar look. A pleased look came into his own eyes.

"Like it?" he asked.

"Well-I." The stranger hesitated.

"My own creation," Windy said proudly. "The only one of its kind in Chicago. Nice color scheme, no?"

"No! I mean: no, not the only one of its kind?" the stranger amended.

"Yep. There's only one tailor makes it up for me. A C-note a suit," Windy explained.

A tall, silvered glass appeared between them. The bartender had taken Windy literally. It was a Zombie.

A look of pain came into Windy's eyes. His lips pursed in distaste.

"What's the matter, no like?" the stranger asked.

"Sure," Windy replied, "I like. But I'd rather have a beer." And with that he downed the ten ounces of mixed rums in one gulp.

The stranger's throat worked in sympathy. He expected Windy immediately to fall from the stool, after that drink. So did the bartender. He stood there waiting for something to happen. But all that happened was Windy asked for another "tall, cold one." The bartender shook his head in amazement as he walked to the beer tap to draw another one.

"Say," the stranger remarked, "you're what they call a character, aren't you?"

"Me, a *character*?" Windy said. "Brother, I'm *the* character. Windy Weston, the character, they call me. Do you know what my pitch is? Zircs! I'm a McGeester! Of Zircs!"

"Glad to know you Mr. McGeester. My name is Granger. Renfrew Granger, the sculptor."

Granger pronounced sculptor with a capital "S."

"Brother," Windy said, "the name is Weston, not McGeester. That's the trade."

Granger looked blank.

Windy explained:

"Look. A McGeester is a McGee. A McGee is a character who pitches con. And my con is zircs."

As Granger continued to look blank, Windy went on:

"Here, I'll show you. See this?"

HE TOOK out a man's solitaire ring from his pocket. Even in the dim light of the tavern, the stone in the ring flashed sparks of flame.

The look of intelligence came back to Granger's eyes.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "you sell diamond rings."

Windy giggled.

"That's the con, brother," he chortled. "It ain't a diamond. It's a zirco. Short for zircon."

Granger proved he knew zircons and that he wasn't stupid.

"I get it," he said meditatively, "you buy those in the rough, have 'em polished and cut, get a setting, then sell them to some sucker as a genuine diamond ring."

Windy shook his head sadly.

"Brother," he said, "you got me all wrong. The word *diamond* is never mentioned. But let's get away from me. What's your racket?"

"I told you. I'm a sculptor."

"Zasso? And what in the hell is that?"

Granger explained.

"Sure, I know," Windy said, "I've seen those statues all over. That's kind of hard work though, ain't it?"

"Would you like to see me at work?" Granger asked. "That is, if you haven't anything else to do."

"Who—me? Nothing else but drink beer. And I can do that anytime. Le's

go, brother."

Windy got off his stool. Granger stooped to pick up his package and as he fumbled with the string, Windy saw something fall from his inner pocket.

He reached down and picked it up. It was a photograph of a beautiful woman. And suddenly it was snatched from his hand. Granger looked quite calm as he replaced the picture in his pocket. There was nothing of emotion in his voice when he said:

"Ready? Let's go then."

Yet Windy had a feeling that the man was suddenly bursting with an inner anger and, strangely enough, fear.

"Sure, I'm ready," Windy said, and, as they started off: "Say, who's the beautiful babe? Looks familiar."

Granger turned his head to stare at Windy as they came out into the street. But there was nothing in Windy's bland innocent face or impersonal voice to give any hint of more than idle curiosity.

"Oh," Granger replied shortly, "some friend of mine."

Windy let it go at that. Granger's studio proved to be a few blocks walk from the Loop. It was on Rush Street, in a building which was probably at one time used for stabling horses.

Windy seemed all eyes when they came in. A glass skylight served as a roof. All sorts of statuary stood, leaned and lay about. He even saw half a dozen paintings in a corner of the room. But the thing which occupied his attention was the life-sized statue of a nude woman.

In the fading light of the late afternoon, the stone took on strange life-like shadows. For a second or two Windy had the feeling the stone face had smiled at him. But whatever his thoughts, Windy became interested in what Granger was doing.

He had opened the bulky package

and was pulling out various paint brushes, color pigments, even a couple of palettes.

"Say, I thought you were a sculptor?" Windy asked curiously.

"I am."

"So what's the idea of all the paints and brushes?"

GRANGER didn't answer immediately. He was suddenly and nervously busy in putting things straight. An ashtray on the window sill took his attention. He removed it from the sill and placed it on a small coffee table. A moment later, he took it from the table and brought it back to the window sill.

As abruptly as he had begun, he stopped his fluttery dashes around the room. He stood in front of the stone statue which had first caught Windy's eye when he first came in.

"It's for this," he said.

Windy said, "Hunh?"

"What you'd asked before," Granger said impatiently, "about the paints and brushes. I'm going to use it on this statue. Color it as it was in real life. Oh, it's been done before, I'll admit, but not as I'm going to do it."

"Brother" Windy ejaculated. "Let me know when it's done. I'd sure like to see it."

"Yes. Of course you would. And you will. I promise you that. The whole world will see it. And do you know what I shall call it?"

"Unh unh," Windy said.

"I suppose you think I'm a little crazy," Granger said.

"Is that going to be the name of the thing?" Windy gasped, "if it is, brother, you'll never sell it."

"Never mind the name." Granger's voice began to rise. "Do you see all this—this junk?"

He indicated the rest of the room,

and continued:

"Yes. All junk. But *this* is my masterpiece. When it is finished, the whole world will know. Do you understand? The whole world will know what a great artist I am."

With each sentence Granger jabbed at Windy with a stiffened forefinger. And with each jab, Windy retreated a step. The last jab brought him to the door of the studio. He almost made it. The getaway, that is. But his paunch got in the way of the door jamb and his haunch got in the way of Granger's hands.

At that, it took all of Granger's strength to drag Windy back. Windy was all for getting out of there while he was still in one piece.

Granger managed to shove him into a chair and, as he held him there by force, apologized for his actions.

"I'm sorry, Weston," he said. "You must think I'm crazy, from the way I've been acting. Nor can I blame you."

He took his hands from Windy's shoulders. Windy saw that the sculptor had himself under control. Although the twitching muscle at the side of his jaw told of the effort it took.

Granger went over to a low cabinet and took out a bottle of whiskey and two glasses. He brought the coffee table over and set it before Windy. Then, after removing ice cubes from the refrigerator, he mixed two drinks and made himself comfortable on a settee across from Windy.

The muscle had stopped its twitch and his eyes and lips were calm, as he began to talk.

"I suppose you're wondering what this is all about? My asking you over? Then my goofy talk and actions?"

WINDY didn't answer. Instead, he took up the drink which Granger

had put on the coffee table, and sipped it. But his eyes were watching Granger over the rim of the glass and they were both speculative and appraising.

Granger went on as though he really didn't expect an answer to his questions:

"After all, you're not the sort of person who accepts invitations like mine. And further, I'm not the sort that tenders them as casually as I did. But while I was sitting there, the damndest desire came over me. The sudden desire to talk; to tell someone, anyone, what was eating me."

He stopped to take a long pull at his drink. And Windy dropped a remark into the void of silence.

"So go ahead and spill it. All of it. I'm not good at puzzles."

Granger's lips lifted at the corner in a crooked grin.

"I told you I was a sculptor. Well, someone told me once that with my looks I should try the stage. I did. I wasn't bad, but I wasn't an Alfred Lunt. But somehow I couldn't quite make the grade. But get this Weston, no matter what I was doing, there was always my sculpting."

Again he paused to take a drink. Windy finished his drink and put the empty glass back on the table.

"Well," Granger continued, "about two years ago, I began to sell. Almost everything I did. It got so that I could ask any price, name any condition, and it was granted. Then——"

Granger had suddenly and inexplicably leaned back and closed his eyes. He sat that way for so long Windy thought he had fallen asleep. Granger opened his eyes. His face, drained of all color, was haggard and lined. His open eyes stared blankly at the ceiling.

"Then," he went on in a tired, flat voice, "I was awakened from a sound sleep one night by a voice. It said only

one word—vengeance. And said it only once. I awoke to the sound of that voice and found myself covered with a cold and clammy sweat. I leaped out of bed and turned on every light in the studio. Of course there was no one here. But sleep was impossible for me that night. A week went by. Nothing happened. Then again the voice. And again it said but one word—vengeance. It echoed and re-echoed through my brain, like thunder in a cave."

Granger brought his eyes back to look at Windy. And Windy felt the almost physical impact of the pain he saw there.

"That voice came every night for six months. Until I could hear that word through every waking hour. Of course, my work began to suffer. But what could I do?" He answered his own question:

"Nothing. And then, one day, I got the answer. That is, I thought I had it. Now I'm not sure."

Again Granger paused. Insofar as Windy was concerned, these pauses were not refreshing. And having decided that, he also decided to tell that to Granger. So, after shoving the coffee table aside, he got up and said:

"Listen, brother, it's a good story, see, but I'm past the stage where puzzles interest me. And as for the ghost stories, I'll take mine on the radio. There, I can always get another station. So thanks for the drink, and I'll be taking a bow out of here."

WINDY'S words pulled Granger erect in the settee and brought exasperation to his voice and eyes.

"Damn it, man," he almost snarled, "I told you that I have to get this off my chest. And get this. I'm not asking for a solution. So mix yourself another drink and hear me out. It won't be long."

"So okay, okay," Windy said placatingly, as he followed Granger's suggestion about another drink, "go ahead and spill your guts. I'll listen. Just don't ask me for any answers. That's all."

"I won't," Granger said, and continued, "Well, what I did and why I did it, will make you feel certain that I'm crazy. And perhaps I am. But that doesn't matter. I stopped that damned voice. You see, Weston, I recognized it the first night. It belonged to——" He caught himself, went on, "Never mind that. But anyhow, I got a crazy idea that if I made a statue of the person and gave it all the characteristics *she* had in real life: beauty, spirit, sweet devotion; all those things I remembered, then perhaps *she* would stop calling to me."

Windy was quick to note how Granger laid a peculiar accent and emphasis on the word, *she*. And suddenly he became interested in the story.

"Weston," Granger's voice held triumph now, "*it worked*. With the first stroke of my chisel I seemed to have broken the spell. The voice never came back. Not to this day."

He arose, his long slimmness towering over Windy. His face handsome, in spite of the gaunt tired lines, held triumph. Yet Windy could see fear there also. It seemed, when Granger mixed himself another drink, that the story was done. But Windy was sure that the ending hadn't been told. And he was right. For after taking a long swallow of the whiskey and soda, Granger continued his tale:

"Now get this. I'm a great sculptor. Some think I'm a genius. Yet I can't do what even an amateur could have done. Make the likeness I remember. Instead I have created, a—a horror. Look at it."

Windy did. But all he could see was

a statue of a nude woman, with her head thrown back. Her lips were parted in a smile. He even got up and made a closer inspection. But all Granger got out of him was:

"Sorry, fella. All I can see is a statue. Personally, I'd like to meet the model. What a dish!"

Windy's whistle of appreciation was heartfelt, but soundless. Granger looked at him, then, in a voice of helplessness, said:

"It would be too much to expect that you could see it. Or that anyone else can see it. After all you didn't know ——" Again that pause, as though something had almost slipped out.

"But when I am done with it. Then —perhaps you will see what I mean. But remember," he admonished, "it wasn't Renfrew Granger who made it. No! It was some force, some hand not of this world, that fashioned this horror. And now I wish that the voice would come back. Because this cold, stone image has become a more fearsome thing than its voice."

Windy felt pity for Granger take hold of him. Despite all Windy's fast talk and con-man actions, there was a warm humanness to the jolly little man. And Granger's fear was so real, that Windy had to say something to dispel that fear. He stood up again and, as he rocked back and forth on his heels, grinned widely and said:

"Brother! Get wise. You're just knocking yourself out. And for nothing. I don't know the boogey-girl you're talking about, but personally I think it's a lot of smorgasbrod. What you oughta do is change the brand of your whiskey. This stuff is too mellow. Get yourself a bottle of yocky and kill it. You'll have some fine nightmares, but they'll be the pink-elephant kind. Then you'll smarten up to the fact that the whole thing was a

dream. So the statue will get a swell paint job and you'll peddle it for maybe a couple of grand and everything will be solid."

GRANGER had to smile at Windy's expressions of optimism. But he couldn't swallow Windy's advice. For he said:

"No, Weston. Whiskey hasn't got anything to do with it. But thanks for listening to me. You did me a world of good. And I'd like very much to have you come over and see the—uh—'paint job,' I do. Let me have your phone number and I'll give you a call."

Windy gave him the phone number of the hotel where he was living. Not that he expected to see or hear from Granger again. But, as Windy thought, "I'll never see this 'yuck' again. So it don't cost nothing. Let him be happy with my number. I'm never in anyway."

It wasn't until he was half way back to the little bar where he had met Granger, that he realized what he said as he left.

"Listen, brother. Anything pops here that's a little screwy, give me a ring. And if I'm not in, be sure and leave a message. The time don't mean nothing. I'll come down."

And realized, too, that he had meant what he said.

What Windy couldn't understand, was why Granger's story persisted in staying with him.

Windy's innocent blue eyes could size up the number of suckers in a place faster than a thief could case a jewelry store. And he could see, as he made his way to the bar, at least two suckers in the joint.

The bartender grinned a greeting. As he placed the "tall, cold one" before Windy, he slyly whispered:

"D'ja make the grade?"

Windy said, "Hunh?"

"Look Windy," the bartender said patiently, "it's me—Mike. Remember? Not some shnook cop. I'm talking about the sucker you had."

Windy's eyes were blank. Something was bothering him, and he was trying to think what it was. The bartender's remark barely reached his consciousness.

"Hunh?" he said again. "Oh—him. No, Mike. We just moseyed over to his joint. He just wanted to show me some statues."

The bartender looked at him, bug-eyed. Then, bursting into a cackle of laughter, he said:

"Well, well. Windy Weston, the art lover." And raising his voice to a falsetto, he went on:

"Come on up and see my statues, the guy says. 'Sure,' says Windy. 'But I want you to know I'm a good——'"

"All right, wise guy," Windy broke in sourly, "why don't you stick to giving Miceys? And stop minding my business."

The bartender gave out with another cackle at Windy's answer and went back to serving his trade, leaving Windy to stare blankly into space. But he couldn't think of what it was he wanted to remember.

Someone sat down on the stool next to his. Windy looked over and saw it was one of the two men who looked like suckers.

Windy went into his act.

"Say, bartender," he called to Mike.

Mike came over and, seeing who was seated next to Windy and recognizing a chump as quickly as Windy could, said:

"Yes, Mr. McGeester?"

"My bill, please," Windy said.

"Of course, Mr. McGeester," Mike said. He made a pretense of figuring mentally, then announced:

"Fourteen dollars, even, sir."

THE act that Windy put on in looking for a wallet that wasn't there, would have brought cheers from George Jean Nathan. Finally, as though satisfied his search would net him nothing, Windy gave a philosophic heave to his fat shoulders and said:

"Must have mislaid my wallet. Is Mr. Schlumf in?"

"No sir, he isn't. But that will be all right, sir. The next time you're in will be——"

"I should say not," Windy broke in indignantly. "A McGeester always pays his bills. Here, take this." He took out the zircon solitaire and handed it over to Mike. "Hold it as a sort of security, for my bill."

In the meantime, the guy next to Windy was watching and listening in absorbed attention. And when Mike said:

"Sorry, sir, but we aren't permitted to do that," the stranger came in with:

"Look, mister, if you don't mind . . ."

Windy said:

"Yes?"

The stranger went on in a flustered, embarrassed voice:

"I heard your conversation. You'll probably think I'm a fool and all that but—er—uh—well, you see I can appreciate the mess you're in."

Windy gave the high sign to Mike. The bartender made himself scarce. The take was on and the sucker had bit.

"Yes?" Windy said again.

"Now don't get me wrong, mister. I'm not a wise guy. But you're kind of short, aren't you? I mean—oh hell, you haven't any money," he finished in a rush.

"So?" Windy said. He knew these monosyllabic questions were the kind of bait a sucker couldn't resist. This one certainly couldn't. He came right

to the point.

"I'd like to buy that ring."

Windy let a note of amused surprise come into his voice.

"For fourteen dollars?" he asked.

The sucker smiled and said:

"Hell, I'm no chump. I know its worth more than that. But I'm willing to spend. I need it for something."

Windy nodded sadly.

"Yes, you are right. I don't have my wallet. My bill here is a week old. But I'll tell you what. This ring is worth two hundred and fifty dollars. It's exactly half a carat. Here, look at it for yourself."

He thrust it into the chump's hand, then went on talking, but not too fast:

"Perfect cutting. I'll tell you what. I'll take two hundred for it."

The chump smiled and gave Windy the ring. Windy smiled and put the ring back into his vest pocket. ♠

The stranger turned back to the drink in front of him and said:

"Too much, my friend."

Windy said nothing. Suddenly the chump turned and said:

"Tell you what. I'm getting engaged to a swell kid. A singer for a band out here in the Loop. I need the ring. I'll give you a hundred and fifty, right now."

And Windy shouted:

"It's Donna!"

EVERYBODY in the place looked up to see who had gone crazy. The chump looked like he *knew* who had.

"Wha—wha—what?" he stuttered.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Windy said, his voice normal again. "I just said, it's done."

"Oh," the chump said, and reached for his money.

Windy gave him the ring and, after giving Mike fourteen dollars and five extra for a tip, got up and walked out.

He should have been in his glory. After all, he'd just taken a sucker for a hundred and fifty dollars. Which meant a profit of a hundred dollars. Yet all he could think of was a name, a photograph and a seemingly mad sculptor.

"I knew I'd seen that face before," Windy thought, as he walked to his hotel in the Loop, "that pic Granger dropped was one of Donna Rand. But what did he get so hot about? What did Donna have to do with him? Was Donna the *she* he talked about as the voice? Ah, nuts! I must be getting wacky from listening to that goon, Granger. Voices! Hands you can't see! And me, I sit there like a yuck and listen."

But just the same Windy did some hefty investigating in the next few days. Finally he knew what he wanted, and he waited. As days passed without the promised call coming through, Windy became worried. Nor could he explain *why* he was worried.

After the third day and no call, he was ready to call Granger. But something told him that Granger would do as he promised. Too, remembering what he had learned about the girl whose photograph it was made the wait doubly hard to bear. For Windy was possessed of a mighty plan, and it was connected with Donna Rand.

Granger called late one night, just when Windy had almost given up hope that he would. He was, in fact, ready to go back to the studio, on the chance that the sculptor might have forgotten his promise.

The phone rang and Windy knew, even before he answered, that it would be Granger.

"Hello, hello, Weston?" Granger's nervous, high-strung voice rasped in Windy's ear.

"Yep. It's me. What's on fire?"

"It's finished! Done! Marvelous!

You must come over! Tonight! Now!" Granger's voice was a series of exclamation points.

"Take it easy, chum," Windy said calmly, "I'll be there."

Windy replaced the phone on the cradle. He was surprised to find that the palms of his hands were moist with sweat. He could feel his heart pounding furiously. He could understand the reason for it. He knew that it was a matter of the most urgent importance to get to Granger's. And that whatever questions he would have to ask, would be answered there.

HIS knock brought an immediate response. Granger opened the door and beckoned him in. The studio looked the same as when he was first there, except that the statue was enveloped from head to toe in a grey canvas covering. A couple of bottles of whiskey stood on the coffee table, one already half empty.

Granger walked over and poured out two drinks. He gave one to Windy and drank his without adding soda or ice. He seemed to be laboring under an air of terrible excitement. His eyes burned fiercely with an inner light. And the look he bent on Windy made the fat little man go cold, as if in fear.

"Yes, Weston," Granger said, as though he were continuing the telephone conversation, "it is done. Even more wonderful than I thought it would be. So life-like. So real. She seems to live. *And damn it, I thought she was dead!*" The last words were almost a shriek.

He walked over to the canvas covered statue and jerked the covering off. Windy gasped aloud. It was as Granger had said. So real that Windy thought he could see the breasts move, as if she were breathing.

The sculptor had done an unbeliev-

ably wonderful job of painting. A fine gauze veil draped the girl. But beneath its transparency, Windy could see the warm colors of human flesh. Her hair had been painted a bronze-gold. Her lips, in contrast to the paleness of cheek and brow, were a vivid scarlet. Then Windy lowered his eyes to her hands and felt a thrill of horror.

Wide steel bracelets enclosed both wrists. And connecting the bracelets was a two foot length of heavy steel chain.

Granger had regained his calm. He seated himself in the settee and was watching Windy.

"I placed them on her feet, also," he said.

It was true. Windy saw that her feet were held prisoner in chains.

"But—but why?"

"It's obvious. So that she can't move," Granger replied.

Windy felt the need of a drink. His hand was shaking so, when he lifted the glass, that half the contents sloshed onto the floor. Quickly he poured another shot into the glass and downed it. Then he sat down and, still looking at the statue, said:

"To hell with that. Of course it can't move. It's made of stone."

"Listen to me, Weston," Granger demanded, "I tell you that it can move. What's more, it has! From the first moment I began to apply the colors, I felt life stir in it. And that first night when I felt her stand beside me . . ." He shuddered violently at the memory.

"I felt her cold touch on my shoulder. I awoke to find her beside my bed. Weston, I felt and saw her. She stood there, looking down at me, and there was something so horrible in those staring, stone orbs that I had to close my eyes. And when I opened them again, she was back where she is now."

"Go on," Windy said.

"Every night she came to me. And with each succeeding day she became more life-like in appearance. So that, as the nights went by, it was no longer a stone image that stood at the side of my bed. It was someone real, yet someone I know is dead. I was finished yesterday afternoon. When I went to bed last night, I had the most horrible feeling, as of impending doom."

GRANGER'S head had fallen to his chest. The words came from lips, stiff with remembrance of the horror of last night.

"I heard the heavy sound of her feet. And felt the warmth of her body bending over me. Do you hear, Weston? That cold stone figure radiated a *human* warmth! She placed her stone fingers around my throat and from her lips there came that voice, intoning its damnable cry, 'Vengeance!'"

"Granger, you're nuts. Donna Rand is dead," Windy said.

"Yes, I know. But I've found out she won't stay dead. So I placed the chains about her wrists and ankles. To make sure she stays that way," Granger said. It was as though he had heard Windy with only part of his senses. Slowly his head came up, away from his chest, wonderingly.

"You *know* who she is?"

"Yes. I thought there was something familiar about that picture you dropped in the Cozy Corner. I remembered later."

Granger looked at him with sudden suspicion. "And why do you tell me that just now?"

"Because," said Windy deliberately, "I think you killed her."

Granger's face got red. His fists clenched, then he calmed himself with an effort.

"She died in an accidental fall from her window," he said. "The inquest

proved that. You had better be careful what accusations you make!"

Windy snorted. "If you think I'm sticking my neck out, you're nuts. Besides, I won't have to do anything to see that you get paid off. . . ."

Granger swallowed hard. "What do you mean?"

"Why'd you make the statue of her?" asked Windy.

"I . . . I had to!" gasped Granger. "Invisible hands forced me to do it. And her voice, crying for vengeance . . ." He stopped.

"That's it," said Windy. "You're telling me right there you killed her! Otherwise why should she want to be revenged? Revenged for what—a fall from a window; an accident?"

"Voices aren't evidence," said Granger craftily, but with pale face.

"No," admitted Windy, "and I ain't gonna try to make evidence out of 'em. I'm just going back to my hotel and stay there—and it won't do no good to call me up again, because I won't come back."

Granger leaped forward. "No! Don't leave me here! You've got to stay with me tonight! I tell you, that statue walks! I can't stand it any more! I . . ." His voice was rising to a shriek as Windy slammed the door shut behind him and walked down the steps into the street. In his mind there was a crafty exultance — if he, Windy Weston, worked this right, it would be the biggest 'con' job of his career—and it would be a *gift!* Even better, it would be *legal!*

TEN minutes later he was back at Granger's door. Beyond it he heard a terrified sobbing. Granger was near the cracking point. Windy grunted. Maybe it wasn't cricket to play a man's conscience against him—but after all, the guy was just a lousy killer. He was

fair prey—and with this one job Windy could retire.

He opened the door, and Granger almost cried out in his relief.

"You'll stay with me after all!" he begged.

"No," said Windy, "I won't. But I'll do you a favor. It's that statue you're afraid of, isn't it? Okay, just give me a bill of sale for a buck, and I'll take it off your hands—and I'll forget that I *saw* you push Donna out of that window!"

Granger's face grew ghastly white.

"Y . . . you *saw* me—"

"Yes," said Windy shrewdly. "I've been around the 'spots' a long time. She told me how it was between her and you. She told me the whole thing! Even about the . . ."

"She lied!" cried Granger desperately. "She just said that to get me to marry her. It was a plot!"

"Plot? No, she never told anybody about it but me! Does that look like a plot? Nobody knew, either, or it would have come out in the inquest. All they found out was that she was going to have a kid, and concluded that was why she killed herself. . . . But about the statue. As far as I can see, that's what's bothering you. Okay, sell it to me for a buck, and I take it away where it can't bother you anymore. Don't sell it to me, and maybe I can't keep my mouth shut!"

Granger was staring at the statue. He was backing away, in horror.

"It's *moving!*" he shrieked.

Windy felt the hair on the back of his neck raise, but when he looked, the statue still stood as it had been before. A lovely thing—a real work of art. None of the great masters had ever done better! It was worth a fortune. . . .

"I'll sell it to you!" Granger was babbling. "Oh, God, take it out of here!"

Windy positively beamed. He produced pen and paper and in a moment the deal was finished. He solemnly paid Granger one dollar—out of the money he had conned for the zirc. He put the paper in his pocket. It made the whole deal legitimate. It was an honest bill-of-sale. . . .

"I'll send a truck up in an hour for the statue," he promised.

"No!" Granger screamed the word. "Stay with me! The statue will kill me. . . ."

Windy swallowed hard. It had been just about time he'd finished this job. Granger wasn't *going* nuts, he already *was* nuts! "Okay," he said hastily. "I'll phone for a truck right now and stay till it gets here. Then I'll go along with it."

He reached for the phone while Granger cowered in a corner, staring fearfully at the statue. Once or twice while he waited for the truck to come Windy caught himself staring at the statue, and once he imagined he could see it move. He shook his head angrily and blinked his eyes rapidly. Damn Granger anyhow, maybe insanity was catching! The sooner he got out of here with his loot, the better. . . .

LATE that night Windy unwrapped the statue from its gray covering and directed the full beam of his bed lamp on it by tipping the shade. Then he relaxed on the bedspread and regarded it with an appreciative smile.

"Mighty pretty!" he said. "I wouldn't mind having it around all the time! But for the kind of dough it'll bring. . . ." He sighed, fell to looking at the statue with sheer enjoyment for nearly an hour. Then he yawned, sat up and took off his clothes. He climbed into bed, took one last look, and snapped off the light. The moonlight, coming through the window, fell across

the statue and wove a halo about its startlingly lifelike figure. Almost it appeared that the statue breathed. . . . The breasts seemed to rise and fall. . . .

Windy fell asleep; and he dreamed the statue walked.

He slept until the police came to get him.

"A guy by the name of Granger is dead," a sergeant told him nastily. "We found this bill-of-sale on the floor, made out to you. Could be you killed him, could be you didn't. . . . but we're taking you along. Get your clothes on, Windy, maybe this is one con game you carried too far!"

Windy was still not wide awake. "I musta dropped it on the floor," he muttered, stumbling to his feet.

"Then you *was* there!"

"There?"

"Yeah, tonight. Granger died—or was killed—not two hours ago. This bill-of-sale was under his body!"

Windy gasped. "Under his body! It couldn't be. I been here all night. And you got it all wrong. Why would I kill him? The bill-of-sale is all legal. . . ."

"Legal!" the sergeant snorted. "It ain't even signed. It's torn off at the bottom. What are you trying to put over? Maybe you better keep your mouth shut until you talk to a mouthpiece. You kinda give me the idea you killed him for this statue when your con game wouldn't work. . . ."

"I didn't kill him!" protested Windy, his face pasty with fear.

WHICH is exactly what the coroner said when he had performed an autopsy. Granger had died of heart failure.

But the judge gave Windy twenty years for stealing the statue; for attempting a confidence game; and a few other counts thrown in, including contempt of court.

You see, Windy had *tried* to tell them it was the statue that tore Granger's signature off the bill-of-sale.

Of course she had! And Windy knew, deep in his heart, why. Donna Rand wanted only a just vengeance—and even in the case of Windy Weston, it wasn't fair that he should pay for anything except his actual crime.

If she *hadn't* torn off that name, and had actually *strangled* Granger instead of just scaring him to death, Windy would have fied for murder. He should have been thankful for the favor . . . but he wasn't. Rats never see it that way; and after all, that's what Windy was.

The End

A NUTTY FANTASY

By GALE STEVENS

IN MANY delicacies which tickle the human palate is found the nut, a humble but well-liked fruit. There are facts about this product of the soil that shed light on its romantic and dramatic history through the ages.

THE ancients believed that walnuts possessed powerful medicinal properties. They believed that it was capable of curing the much dreaded hydrophobia.

OVID, a famous Roman poet, wrote a poem entitled *De Nuce* from which we learn that it was the Roman custom at marriages for the bride and bridegroom to toss walnuts among the children present.

IN 1664 John Evelyn in writing of the German forests mentioned the fact that no one was permitted to cut down a tree unless it was old and decayed. Then it was a patriotic duty to plant a young tree nearby. In several places between Hanau and Frankfort, no young farmer was permitted to marry until he presented proof that he had planted a stated number of walnut trees.

A FORKED twig from the hazel nut tree was once thought to possess the occult power of a divining rod for finding hidden treasures, veins of metals, subterranean streams of water, and even pointing out criminals.

THE peach tree and the almond tree belong to one family. Indeed, it is supposed that the wild almond tree is the parent from which all cultivated peaches and nectarines are descended.

ALL the early Roman writers who occupied themselves with rural affairs and agricultural problems, mention the chestnut as one of their valuable trees. In the wake of their conquests, along with the building of roads and their program of general improvement in the new territories, the Romans are supposed to have distrib-

uted chestnut trees through France and Great Britain. The English, looking upon these trees centuries later, thought them to be indigenous.

ACORNS have been used as a substitute for coffee beans and for malt in making beer.

IN DAYS of old when the Roman Empire still flourished, acorns served as the main ingredient in a dessert in the Spanish court.

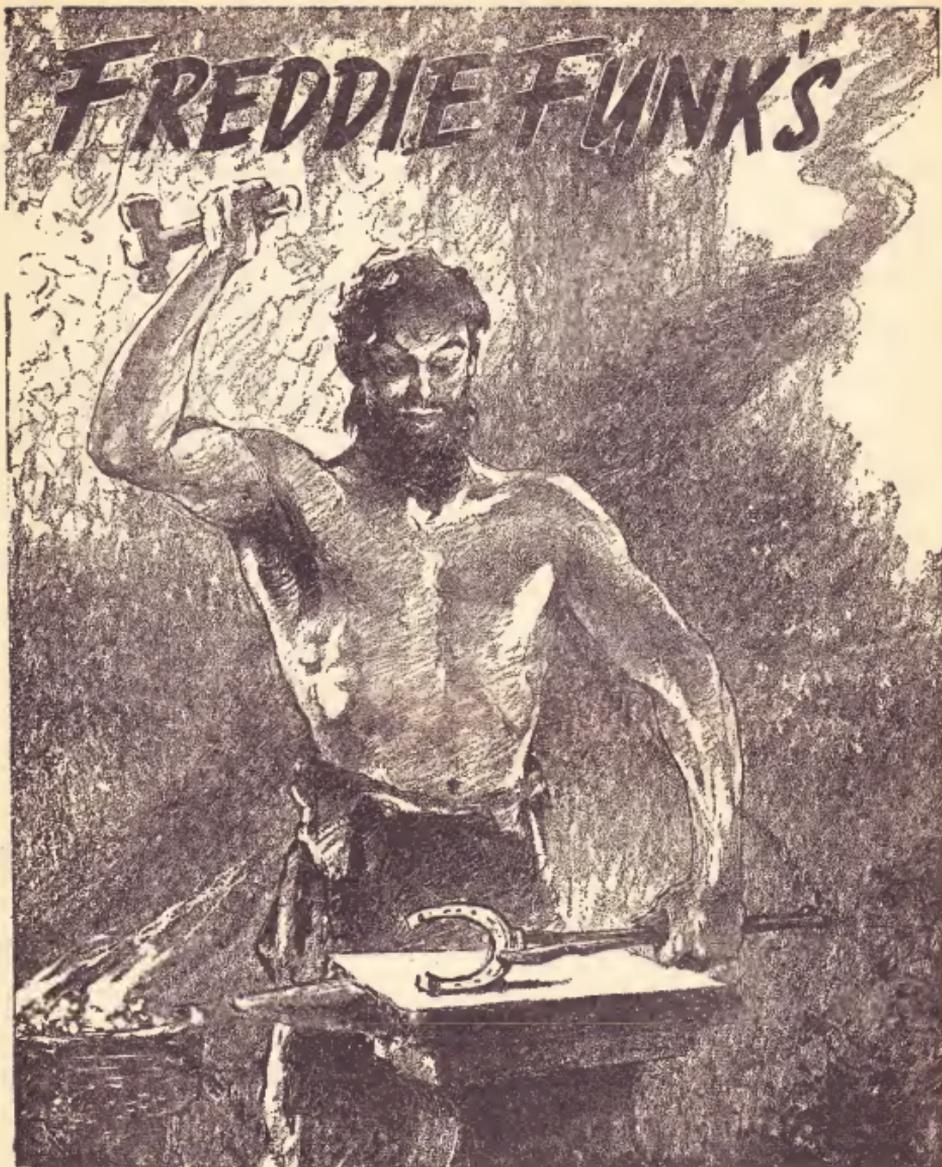
EARTH chestnuts are small nut-like tubers of a sweetish taste which are loved by children in several European countries. In England they are called kipper nuts and pigs nuts, but a familiar local name in Scotland is "Jousy nuts," because it is said that eating them is sure to breed lice. This story was probably invented by parents to keep their children from digging and eating the roots of wild plants.

THE name "horse chestnut" was derived from a custom among the Turks of giving the nuts to horses as a medicine when they were affected with a cough or inclined to become wind-broken.

IN SOUTHERN Europe horse chestnuts were sometimes given to cows to increase the flow of milk. At one time these same nuts were used to make paste for hook binders.

THE Physic nut, or Indian olive, was carried by the American Indian when he went hunting. In the pursuit of deer the nut was thought to be particularly useful in charming or drawing the animal to the hunter.

AMONG the Malayan races the Betel nut is chewed habitually by the natives to the same extent that tobacco is chewed by the white man. The nut is cut into small pieces, rolled up in a leaf of the same plant, and a little lime juice is sprinkled over it. Then it is chewed or held in the mouth. It acts as a narcotic stimulant and causes drunkenness or giddiness.



THE afternoon was cloudy, but Freddie Funk's outlook on life was very bright. With Dora the forgetful elephant out of his life, Freddie was enjoying a quiet ride in the

Des Plaines Forest Preserve. He was assisted by a small mare with a brown belly and white face. The mare seemed gentle enough, but her untroubled outlook on life was not to last.

FOREST FORGE

By LEROY YERXA

Freddie didn't expect to find a smithy here in the forest; even so, he might have paid little attention—until this odd smith entered the way!

ILLUSTRATED BY
S. ALLEN ST. JOHN



The horse shied violently and whinnied; although certainly there should be no reason to fear this kindly old smith.

FREDDIE and his horse had just passed a large clump of bushes near the river when the mare whinnied, her ears flattened back and she broke into a frightened gallop.

Freddie grasped the reins firmly, took a deep breath and held on.

"Whoa," he shouted, but it became obvious the mare had no intention of "whoaing."

"Cut it out," Freddie begged, bouncing up and down on an already tender portion of his anatomy. This appeal had no effect on the mare. She passed swiftly under a low hanging limb and Freddie Funk found himself sitting in a mud puddle.

The horse with the white face seemed satisfied. She came to an abrupt halt several yards beyond Funk and turned with a puzzled expression in her limpid brown eyes. Freddie found the edge of the mud puddle, crawled to higher ground and stood up. He was badly splashed.

He limped toward the horse, then saw the reason for her fright. She had thrown a shoe. Something had frightened her as she passed that clump of bushes. The shoe, badly bent, had worked loose and lay near the edge of the bridle path.

Freddie picked it up and stared along the path. No one in sight. It was at least two miles in either direction to anything resembling civilization. Aside from all this, Freddie Funk was angry. Someone or something hidden in those bushes had frightened his horse and ruined a swell afternoon. That wasn't all that was ruined. He stared down at a mud-splashed riding outfit.

"Damn," he said, then in a louder voice, "Damn!"

He started limping back along the path toward the bushes. The mare looked after him longingly and started to limp behind Freddie. They reached the bushes and Freddie pushed his way into them, parting the branches with both hands. His eyes widened.

He was in a small opening concealed by heavy trees. In the open glade Freddie saw a small hut. Outside the hut was an old fashioned blacksmith's forge complete with bellows. At one side he noticed a large anvil, hammer and a pile of charcoal.

Funk had never seen an anvil before, but he had seen pictures of them. And of mighty smiths pounding and shaping shoes out of white hot metal.

Now his horse needed a shoe. The one he held in his hand was bent out of shape. Give him fire, the hammer and a few mighty blows? Anyhow, a few blows, and he could make a horseshoe as good as new. Maybe better.

Freddie tied the mare to a tree on the far side of the path. Then he entered the glade. The charcoal was dry. He heaped a pile of it in the forge, touched a match to the dry wood that lay underneath and started to pump gently on the bellows. The fire went out twice, then caught and at last the forge was hot.

Freddie placed the horseshoe in the center of the flame and put the tongs where they would be handy. He went to where the mare was tied and stared her in the eye.

"I hope you're ready to cooperate," he said warningly.

The mare showed no sign of understanding. Freddie untied her and led her through the bushes into the glade.

CLANG.

Freddie Funk's heart thumped loudly. The sound of a huge hammer hitting against steel stopped him in his tracks. He let go of the mare's reins and stared.

A HUGE man stood over the anvil. He was dressed in a scarred, blackened leather apron that hung from his waist to his knees. His muscled, hairy legs were bare. His arms and torso were black and sweaty. He had a pleasant face, with blond hair that hung in ringlets atop his head and circled his chin in a heavy beard. As Freddie watched, the hammer dropped again, hit the half circle of hot metal and straightened it out perfectly. The giant, perhaps seven feet tall, held the shoe

up in his tongs, stared at it with a satisfied frown and then caught sight of Freddie.

"Hoo!" he said in a voice that resembled fading thunder. "Two wallops and she's good as new."

"Where-where did you come from?" Freddie stuttered.

The giant grinned, dropped the shoe on the ground and put the tongs on the anvil.

"Just thought I'd limber up a little," he said. "Bring that horse over here and we'll fix her up in a jiffy."

Freddie started to respond, then remembered that the smith had suddenly come from nowhere; that he had just materialized from thin air. Freddie hesitated.

"You weren't here a minute ago," he said.

The giant laughed.

"No?"

"No!" Freddie said.

The smith chuckled.

"You brought me here," he said.

"I—" Freddie gulped. "Oh — no I didn't. I had nothing to do. . . ."

"But you did," the stranger insisted. "Come over here where we can't be seen and I'll tell you about it."

Freddie led the mare forward and tied her to the anvil. He backed away a safe distance. The giant bent down and lifted the mare's hoof. He placed the shoe against it and started to spit nails from his mouth. As he did so, he pounded them into the hoof. Then he dropped the horse's leg and stood up.

"Good as new," he said. "A little out of my line, but not the kind of work that will degrade me."

"Thanks," Freddie managed. "But . . ."

"Vulcan," The giant pushed out a hairy hand. "They call me the god of fire and destruction—of industry and whatnot. I've been trying to get a look

at civilization for some time."

Freddie sidled close and accepted the hand. He winced as the smith shook it and dropped it again like a dead fish.

"Funk," Freddie stuttered. "Freddie Funk. Glad to meet you."

Vulcan frowned.

"I wish you hadn't done that," he said, shaking his head.

"What?" Freddie asked.

"Given me your first name. Now I have to tell you mine and I'm not very proud of it."

"But you don't have to," Freddie protested. "Really you don't."

Vulcan blinked. His face turned very red.

"Common courtesy," he mumbled. "But I still wish you hadn't. I'm christened Mulciber. Ain't that a hell of a handle for a god? Mulciber Vulcan. I'd like to ring Augustus' neck."

"Why don't you?" Freddie asked, not knowing who Augustus might be. "I'm sure you could."

Mulciber Vulcan snickered.

"You don't get around much, do you? Augustus was a Roman. He's been dead for centuries.

"Oh!" Freddie felt foolish.

HE WAS getting quite accustomed to meeting odd people. There was a time when the name of Mulciber Vulcan might have thrown him into a violent nightmare of dread. Now that life had tossed him into destiny's path so many times, the god Vulcan wasn't much of a shock to his nervous system. Freddie could take his gods or leave them alone. Besides, Vulcan had fixed the shoe. He owed him something for that.

"You probably wonder how I got here?" Vulcan asked.

"Maybe you walked," Freddie said. "I don't see a car or anything."

Vulcan roared with laughter.

"Say, you're a great joker, ain't you. Think I could drive a car here from Olympus?"

Freddie thought that over.

"Maybe not," he said, wondering what the correct answer should be.

"I'll say," Vulcan agreed. "No, it's a long story, but I'll make it short. I been wanting to come down here for a while. What with a war on, I'd like to play around with fire a little. It seems that Mars, the god of war, dropped into Germany last month and Hitler gave him a hot-foot. We got to talking it over and I decided to get it back on Hitler. The Boss said that if I could get someone to light the forge, I could come down. Magic power of fire, and all that. Kinda deep for me to explain."

"I know," Freddie nodded understandingly. "So I lit the fire and here you are."

Vulcan seemed puzzled.

"Say," he said. "You're all right. I thought I'd scare the daylight out of everyone. You ain't scared?"

Freddie Funk thought of Dora, the elephant, and the seven league boots.

"I've got accustomed to things, pretty much."

"You sure have," Mulciber Vulcan admitted. "But, say, now that I'm here, how about showing me around."

"Everytime I start showing people around," Freddie said, "I get into trouble. Are you sure you want to see what's going on? All the war there is in Chicago is in the armament factories."

Vulcan nodded his head enthusiastically.

"That's it," he said. "Armament. That's where they make war weapons. I ain't bad on a forge and anvil," he added modestly. "Thought I might like to look at some of them armaments and make some myself. The guys who are

fighting Hitler could use them, couldn't they?"

Freddie hated to hurt Vulcan's feelings. The big guy was corny and he sure didn't understand that he was up against a world of precision instruments. Well, perhaps if he just took him around? After Vulcan saw a few machine guns, cannons and so forth, he'd probably clear out.

"I guess I could get us into a factory," Freddie admitted. "What do you make on that anvil?"

Vulcan's chest swelled suddenly. He was himself again.

"Plowshares," he said proudly. "Plowshares and swords. The best swords in the world."

Freddie caught his breath.

"We—we got almost enough plowshares now," he said. "And about swords, they're usually used for dress, but not for fighting. Things have changed a lot, you know," he added, afraid he might hurt Vulcan's feelings.

Vulcan didn't hurt that easily.

"I'd still like to see those factories," he said. "We gods haven't been around much lately, but we still got a few aces in the hole."

THE manager of Powerful, Inc., hated to let Freddie Funk and his big companion beyond the gates. The big gent looked like a farmer from southern Illinois, but you can't be too sure, when there's a war on. Powerful, Inc., made guns, and Axis agents were everywhere. However, Freddie's pass was signed by the Mayor of Chicago. It must be the real thing. After one of the staff had placed a phone call to the Mayor, a guide was assigned to Funk. Mulciber Vulcan drew Freddie aside as they waited in the main office.

"Say," he said in a low voice. "I been thinking. They made out my name on that pass as M. Vulcan. You

ain't gonna' tell them it's Mulciber, are you?"

Freddie shook his head.

"It's our secret," he said.

Mulciber looked relieved.

"You're a real friend," he said. "I won't forget it."

Powerful, Inc., was a vast factory, housed under miles of glass roof. Men and women, thousands of them, manufactured and assembled cannons, anti-aircraft guns, machine guns, rifles and small ammunition. Certain rooms were so well hidden that the two visitors were not allowed near them. The guide made sure that both M. Vulcan and Freddie Funk were kept some distance from the completed machinery.

Vulcan's eyes were wide before he had seen half of the factory.

"Say," he said. "You boys don't fool. I didn't know wars were like this. I been watching the big furnaces and those torches that throw flames. I never had anything like that when I was in active business."

Freddie nodded.

"I suppose you've given up the idea of producing these instruments on the anvil?"

Vulcan chuckled.

"We'll see," he said. "We'll see. I got contacts that may help out."

Everything might have gone well if Vulcan, in his curiosity, had not decided that a blue print or two might help him in his future work. Freddie had already explained that the blueprints near some of the machines showed how certain machines were placed together. Vulcan, unseen by Freddie, managed to fill the pockets of the cheap suit Freddie had bought for him with several of these interesting papers. If the guide noticed it, he said nothing. Everything went smoothly until the pair were once more ushered into the main office.

The manager, a short dark faced man

with practically no eyebrows was waiting when they came in. With him were three husky guards and two city policemen.

"A nice trip, Mr. Funk?" the manager asked.

Freddie nodded, his eyes on the police.

"Ye-yes," he stammered. "We—that is—I enjoyed it very much."

The manager's face turned several shades darker. His eyes narrowed.

"That is fine, Mr. Funk," he said sarcastically. "The guide phoned me from the plant that during the trip your friend enjoyed himself also. Indeed, so much so, that . . ."

Three armed guards jumped forward, pinning Vulcan's arms behind him.

"He put them," the guide shouted, "in his pockets!"

THE office was in an uproar. The police closed in on Funk. As he watched, the manager whipped out a handful of blueprints from Vulcan's pocket.

"I'll blast the whole bunch of you," Vulcan shouted.

"Don't do anything," Freddie pleaded. "They'll shoot. . . ."

Vulcan struggled for a moment, then a quiet grin came over his face.

"You might as well let me and my friend go," he said. "You can't do anything about it."

When they were both locked in the city jail, Vulcan sat on the edge of the hard cot, staring around the tiny cell.

"Humans are funny," he said. "Locking us in this funny little box."

"Yes." Freddie rocked his head gently from side to side. There was no hilarity in his voice or his expression. "Four walls do not a prison make, but with bars, that's different. That's the trouble with gods and things. They can't understand how we live. Suppose

you can't be held in, and I'm not so sure you can't. Some time you'll be leaving me. Then I'll take the rap for both of us."

Vulcan looked hurt. He stood up and walked to the door. He tested the bars with his finger tips. Then he turned.

"Funk," he asked in a kind voice. "Do you think I'd leave you in trouble?"

Freddie looked up. He caught the genuine, honest expression of the big smith's face and smiled sadly.

"Mulciber," he said, and Vulcan winced.

"Not that," he begged. "Not—not that name again."

Freddie shook his head.

"Okay," he agreed. "Then—Vulcan, what's going to happen? If we get out, where can we go? I'm only human. Now, don't suggest that I go with you. That's just the trouble, we humans have to stay where we belong. What chance have we got against the law? They think we're spies. They'll follow us and we'll get locked up until they're tired of me. Then I'll get shot."

"You'll get along all right," Vulcan said. "Stick with me. I'm leaving here right now."

"In broad daylight?" Freddie sprang to his feet. "You can't get out. If you could, they'd shoot us both before we got a hundred yards."

Vulcan chuckled.

"Oh, would they? We'll see."

He grabbed a handful of iron bars and started to pull. The bars turned cherry red in his grasp and fell apart. Vulcan bent the ends down until a large hole was left in the center.

"Out you go," he said and pushed Freddie Funk out into the long hall.

Immediately a howl went up from prisoners in the other cells.

"There's a break!"

"Call John Law!"

"Hey, what the heck, get us out of here too!"

"Hey, copper, they's a jail break!"

The last voice was a shout. It resounded up and down the hall. From the front of a station a door clanged and two guards rushed into the hall with pistols drawn.

Freddie, behind Vulcan now, took a deep breath and kept on running.

"They'll shoot us," he howled.

Vulcan held a mighty arm ahead of him.

Fire shot from his finger tips, crackled like lightning, a jagged, white bolt knocked the two policemen over. Silence fell over the cells as though everyone had suddenly fallen asleep.

Vulcan turned to Freddie.

"Let us out of here," he said calmly. "I've had enough of this foolishness. I'll have a lightning bolt ready if you get into trouble."

Freddie gulped. He held a newborn respect for Mulciber Vulcan. Gods weren't to be toyed with once their temper was hot. He hadn't met a god before. He'd have to be more careful.

"Yes, Mulc. . . . Yes, Vulcan," he stammered and led the way out of the police station.

SERGEANT JOHN COX of the Chicago Police Department hesitated as Inspector Wilson shouted to him, then leaned once more over the phone. Cox had been on the trail of two escaped prisoners all day. He was tired. For a minute only Inspector Wilson's voice could be heard in the stillness of the office.

"Yes! Good Lord, you can't mean it? No. Impossible. But . . . but . . . ?"

Then Wilson's voice took on a new steadiness.

"You *are* serious. All right, sir. Yes,

sir, at once. We'll get every man out. Plan B? Yes sir, depend on us."

Wilson dropped the phone, then ran his hand along a row of buttons on the wall near his desk. The top of the chart was lettered, "Air Raid—Plan B."

Sergeant Cox's eyes widened. He stepped close to Wilson's desk. Wilson turned, evidently waiting for the various stations to get his signal. He drew a mike close to his lips, then looked at Cox.

"An honest-to-God air raid. German bombers. They've been watching for hours, wondering which way the flight would go after it hit the coast. Came in over Newfoundland and it's headed straight for Chicago."

Cox's jaw dropped.

"You're kidding . . ."

Wilson swore.

"The hell of it is, I'm not. Not an aircraft gun in the Loop. A bunch of wardens and that's all. They report two hundred long-range bombers. Flying high. Hell will be . . ."

Wilson nodded. "The board's clear. They're all waiting."

Wilson pressed a button on the mike and took a deep breath.

"Inspector Wilson speaking from Headquarters. This signal system has been used for drills. Now we have the real thing. Don't take this as a joke. You know Plan B. Throw it into action at once. There's a real air raid on the way. Get those patrol cars out and the sirens going. Get stretchers, first-aid squads. If anyone refuses to douse their light, put a shot through their windows. If they won't get off the street, drag them off. This isn't a tea party. It's the McCoy. Start moving. This board will stay open. New reports will be flashed. . . ."

Wilson turned to Sergeant Cox.

"Didn't find the spies, huh?"

Cox shook his head.

"Trailed them to Des Plaines. They lost themselves in the woods along the river. Planned to send a squad of men out. . . ."

Wilson shook his head impatiently.

"Can't spare 'em," he said. "You handle this sector. See that civilians are treated decently, but if wardens have any trouble, tell the boys to use their sticks. A lot of people will think this is a joke. It isn't!"

In a distance sirens started to scream. Wilson listened.

A low hum, like a base chord on a piano, sounded to the north.

He turned a shade paler.

"On second thought, I don't think they *will* think it's a joke. That sounds like business."

"Yes sir," Cox grabbed his coat and hurried out.

Searchlights were criss-crossing the sky above the Loop. Air raid wardens were dashing around, white hats easily seen in the moonlight. Civilians, wondering what was going on, were arguing among themselves. They didn't argue long. Cops and wardens went to work. In five minutes, men and women were flocking into open doors. Chicago was in for its first pounding from the sky.

FREDDIE FUNK turned over, felt the hard ground under him and sat up. He was in the hut near the river. In a distance he could hear a dull, pounding noise, as though someone were hitting the earth with a huge hammer. His head ached. Freddie stood up, stretched stiffly and looked at his wrist watch. He had been asleep for several hours. It was close to eleven in the evening. He had dropped off right after he and Vulcan managed to escape the police at four o'clock. Freddie had slept ever since.

He wondered about the distant noise and went outside the hut. Vulcan was

leaning over the anvil. The anvil, the tongs and Vulcan's hammer were glowing and hot. The force sent out a terrific heat that made the whole glade unbearable. Vulcan himself, black with soot, pounded savagely at a huge chunk of cooling metal that he had almost finished shaping.

"What's that noise?" Freddie asked, then realized that Vulcan was so busy he couldn't have heard. He approached the smith and touched his arm.

Vulcan dropped the piece of steel and turned, wiping sweat from his face.

"That's that," he said. "I've made a hundred of them. Not bad, either."

Freddie stared at the cooling metal. It was a perfectly tooled barrel for a big gun. The barrel was about eight feet long and had an opening about four inches in circumference. Freddie's jaw dropped.

"You—made *that*?"

Vulcan frowned.

"And why not? Just as easy as a plow share."

"But—the metal—the machining?"

"Easy," Vulcan said. "God's have power, haven't they? Then why not use it?"

Freddie hadn't thought of that. Then, listening instantly, he heard that pounding noise again.

"That sound?" he asked. "You can hear it?"

Vulcan nodded.

"I can drown it out," he said and lifted his hammer.

"No—listen—how long has it been going on?"

Vulcan looked puzzled.

"About five minutes," he said. "It don't bother me much. I been busy."

Something about the continued, dull crumping sound troubled Funk. Then, as though an electric light suddenly went on in his brain, he knew what it was. He had heard the same thing in

the movies, the sound of a town being bombed.

"Bombers," he said, then frowned uncertainly. It couldn't be that. This was Chicago. No bombers over Chicago. But why not? It wasn't impossible.

"Vulcan," he said. "The highest tree. You've got to help me get into it. I need a look at Chicago."

Vulcan grinned.

"From a distance," he agreed. "You'd better not go close. We just left there."

They looked around, found a high elm and Vulcan gave him a boost into the lower limbs. Funk scurried aloft, found a branch that grew high above the forest and climbed carefully out on it. A terrible scene met his eyes.

The sky was criss-crossed with searchlights that managed to pin down tiny spots of black, only to lose them again as the planes roared away. The city was a glowing cherry red. Sections of it were in flames.

Overhead the searchlights continued to work back and forth. There must be dozens of bombers. Occasionally a small charge exploded in the sky as though a few small guns were firing from the ground.

FUNK tore his trousers almost off getting to the ground. He was breathless.

"It's Chicago," he shouted. "It's being bombed."

Vulcan had returned to his anvil. He was pounding contentedly.

"Hunh?"

"*Mulciber*," Freddie howled. "*Chicago is being bombed.*"

Vulcan dropped his hammer angrily.

"I told you not to use that name," he said darkly.

"I had to get your attention. What are we gonna do? It's the Axis—Hit-

ler, the guy who gave your friend Mars the hot-foot. He's dropping bombs on Chicago."

"Bombs?" Vulcan asked. "Say, are you or ain't you gonna call me Mulciber?"

Freddie groaned.

"Look, Vulcan," he pleaded. "Sit down, will you? Sit down here on the ground and we're going to have a talk."

Mulciber Vulcan sat down cross-legged. He leaned a shaggy chin on his palm, elbow on one knee and listened patiently. Freddie talked fast, trying to make his point clear.

At last Mulciber sprang to his feet. An angry roar escaped his lips.

"Hitler," he howled. "We'll give his bombers a hot-foot."

Freddie grinned, wondering how, but questioning nothing.

"If Hitler ever saw you, he'd call you Mulciber-Mulciber-Mulciber," Freddie yelled. "You gotta do something."

Vulcan looked desperate.

"That name," he shouted. "How I hate it. I'll kill Hitler dead. I'll take him home and pickle him in olive oil."

He started running around the forge, trying to collect his wits. Then he stopped short, staring down at the barrel of the gun he had just finished. He looked at Freddie and grinned.

"I'm a damn fool," he said. "I get excited. Why didn't I think of that?"

He bent over, picked up the big barrel in one arm and started toward the woods.

"You lay down on the ground and put your fingers in your ears," he shouted. "I'll take care of Chicago."

Freddie flopped on the ground. He knew Vulcan's power. He didn't want to dispute it. Mulciber Vulcan was plenty mad.

Freddie Funk lay very still for about three minutes. Chicago was taking a hell of a beating. The raid had been

in progress for about fifteen minutes. The planes were good for another hour if they were big bombers. They must be big, Freddie thought, to come so far.

S P L U T T E R — C R A C K
C R A C K L E — W H A A A M

THE earth around Freddie Funk suddenly seemed to hump up like a seething volcano, shudder under the force of a terrific flow, then settle again slowly. The world went upside down and Freddie crouched close to the dirt, watching a terrible white sheet of flame that arose all around him, flinging itself into the sky. The night turned bright as day. Then, strangely silent, the world was normal again. Normal that is until Freddie gained courage to turn over on his back and stare about him. The woods were gone. Only the stumps of a few trees blackened by fire remained. Stranger yet were the line on line of cannon that he could see in the direction Vulcan had disappeared. He stared, but believed his eyes.

Vulcan, a triumphant grin on his face, trotted toward Freddie. Behind him there were at last a hundred cannons. Then Freddie understood. Every one of those cannons had the same type of barrel that Vulcan had been forging when he awakened. The god of fire had been busy all evening. He remembered what cannons looked like. He must have added a few features of his own.

Vulcan strode toward Funk and Funk stood up weakly. Vulcan grasped Freddie's hand.

"I think Chicago is safe now," he said. "Funny, I made lightning-cannons all afternoon, then I almost forgot to use them."

"Lightning-cannons?" Freddie felt suddenly limp. "You mean all that fire, that noise . . . ?"

Vulcan nodded.

"I been fixing to put this Hitler out of business" he admitted. "Your cannons are all right, but just add a little button trigger and stuff the firing box with lightning. It's a great stunt. One barrage and there isn't a bomber left in the sky."

Freddie stared toward the city. There wasn't a tree standing to disturb his view. Chicago was silent. The spot lights had winked out. The sound of bombs was gone. He wondered what everyone thought when the forest preserve at Des Plaines suddenly belched enough lightning to knock hundreds of bombers out of the sky. He turned to Vulcan with wild, frightened eyes.

"Those cannons," he said breathlessly. "We got to hide them. When the cops catch us . . ."

Vulcan grunted.

"They wouldn't be mad if they know we're on their side, would they?"

Freddie caught his breath, then he realized what Vulcan had done. With a battery of cannons like this—why—they'd knock the Axis for a row of . . .

"Mulciber," he whispered fervently. "Mulciber, you're wonderful."

A delighted grin spread over Vulcan's face.

"No fooling, you really think so?" Then he frowned.

"That name," he howled. "You promised not to use it."

IN THE early daylight the rows of lightning cannons looked very impressive. They were all facing the city, their slim barrels glistening in the sun. Freddie Funk, hair combed neatly, walked up and down along the row of weapons, whistling Yankee Doodle. He felt fine. Vulcan had departed. In Vulcan's apron the god of fire carried a note book filled with names and addresses.

Freddie Funk carefully prepared that list of names, and his agent, Mulciber Vulcan was on his way to carry out Funk's instructions.

Freddie felt like a successful general. All he had to do now was wait. He patted the barrel of one of his cannons, proudly rubbing the cold steel.

Over the bridge, about a mile away on the main highway he thought he saw a jeep. Sure enough, another jeep crossed the bridge, then a couple of army trucks. They turned and came down the dirt road toward Freddie.

Freddie was getting nervous. Another car turned off, then another. He could see a couple of machine guns shining on top of the trucks.

The first jeep came into view, turned away from the road and stopped fifty feet away. Soldiers, bayonets fixed, jumped out and came toward him, toward Funk. They stopped about six feet away, stared in blank amazement at the long row of cannons, then stiffened. They saluted. Freddie returned the salute. A stout, middle-aged general approached Freddie.

"What company is this?" the general asked sternly.

Freddie blushed.

"Mine."

The general bristled.

"I'll have none of your lip, lad. I'm General Sullivan of Fort Sheridan.

"We are well aware that the concentrated firing of this concealed battery saved the city of Chicago last night. Now, go for your officers. I want to talk with them. Where in hell all this came from, I don't understand."

He hesitated, taking another look at the heavy guns.

Freddie waited until the general turned again.

"Well," Sullivan said, "your officers?"

"The guns are mine," Freddie said.

He was getting angry. Perhaps he *was* only an honorably discharged corporal, but the guns *were* his and Vulcan's and they had saved Chicago.

The general smiled.

"Now look, man, I'm not here to quarrel. That job last night was a wonderful thing. Would that I could claim such credit. Chicago would have been a mess if it hadn't been for these guns. You can't stand there and tell me that you fired them alone."

"That's what I'm saying," Freddie answered stubbornly.

The general turned and greeted a half-dozen more officers who had come up in a staff car. He explained the situation in a low voice. Finally the group faced Freddie. A dozen jeeps were nearby, soldiers at attention. Tanks, trucks, were all in sight.

"Suppose," one of the officers suggested in a smug voice, "that this general what's-his-name shows us how he fired that battery of guns. Also, where he got his ammunition and how he handled it? This is one of the craziest jokes I've ever had to stand by and listen to . . ."

Funk was mad. Fighting mad. He didn't blame them for misunderstanding, but they hadn't even made an attempt to be friendly.

"Maybe you'd like an exhibition?" he asked in a sarcastic voice.

GENERAL SULLIVAN turned red. "Maybe we would," he said shortly. "In fact, we demand an explanation at once."

Freddie Funk had been waiting for that.

"Have you got an old jeep you don't need?" he asked.

The general looked doubtful, but the smart officer who had put in his two cents was waiting for three cents change.

"Go ahead, Sullivan," he said. "Sacrifice a jeep. This civilian couldn't fire a cannon if he *had* the ammunition."

Sullivan grinned wickedly.

"And where will you have the jeep, sir?"

Freddie remained solemn.

"Drive it up against that river bank," he said. "There's a solid clay bank about fifty yards high over there."

Sullivan motioned to one of the soldiers. The kid jumped into the jeep, drove it quickly into the water and up on the far side of the river. It was almost hidden close to the high clay bank.

"Now," Freddie said, "you'd better get your staff behind the cannons and lay down on the ground."

Sullivan chuckled.

"We'll stay where we are," he said.

Freddie shook his head uncertainly. He turned and walked over to the first cannon. Vulcan had given him careful instructions. At the firing end of the first cannon there was a small, metal box. A lever on top of the box controlled the firing positions of all the guns. He sat down on a cushioned, revolving chair and turned the lever. One hundred gun barrels turned and pointed at Sullivan. The general swore and started to run. His staff followed him. None of them stopped until they were well behind Freddie.

"Don't you do that again!" Sullivan howled.

Freddie noticed that the officers were gathered in a little group.

He heard them talking among themselves.

"But ammunition?" one of them said in a nervous voice. "He can control them automatically, but he can't load and fire . . ."

Freddie pressed the firing button.

S P L U T T E R C R A C K
W H A A A M

The entire line of cannons suddenly erupted white hot fire. The soldiers and officers went down like ten pins. Freddie himself, well protected in the spring-slung chair that Vulcan had constructed, felt himself thrown back. He bounced up and down on the powerful springs.

He was looking at the spot where the jeep had been. The river itself went up like a geyser. The clay bank disappeared as though a huge plow had suddenly pushed it back three hundred yards. The jeep? It wasn't. The river settled back into its bed and flowed evenly once more. Clay started to fall out of the sky. The hole where the clay bank had been, filled with water. The river formed a deep lake.

General Sullivan lifted his head cautiously and took a look around. His eyes fastened on the lake the guns had blasted, then shifted to Freddie Funk.

Freddie smiled.

"You—you did that?" Sullivan asked, his mouth hanging open very loosely.

Freddie nodded.

"After this," he said sternly, "the army will ask no more questions. Where these guns are made is a secret so precious that even the army cannot know. How they are loaded is my secret. I'll deliver them free of charge to the fighting front. My agent is already on his way to Italy to prepare for the invasion. You ask no questions and you get all the guns you need with instructions to fire them. Is that clear?"

Freddie had never delivered a speech like that in his life. He wondered what the answer would be.

GENERAL SULLIVAN took a deep breath.

"Now I know you. You're name is Funk, isn't it? Corporal Funk of Camp Blitz. The man who saved the inva-

sion plans?"

"Yes sir," he said.

Sullivan grasped his hand.

"I thought I remembered you, Funk. It was that picture of you, taken when the President presented you with the Congressional Medal of Honor. Funk, you'll get a basketful of medals for this."

"Yes sir," Freddie said uncertainly. "And you'll see that the army keeps its promise?"

Sullivan turned and surveyed his companions with stern eyes.

"You men will keep your mouths shut and your eyes open after this, understand."

Freddie chuckled.

"All because of a hot foot from Hitler," he said.

"What's that?"

Freddie was thinking of Mulciber Vulcan.

"Forget that too," he said. "Now, if you'll get some trucks, we'll load these guns."

"Yes sir," General Sullivan answered respectfully.

GENERAL FREDDIE FUNK swivelled around from his desk in the big office at Fort Sheridan. An orderly stood at the door, an envelope in his hand. He saluted General Funk respectfully.

"Another message from your agent. This time it's from Australia," the orderly said. "Came a few moments ago."

General Funk took the message, turned to his desk and opened it.

"Dear Freddie," Mulciber Vulcan wrote, "I've been to all them places you told me to go. There are a thousand lightning-cannons in Africa. Also a thousand in the places mentioned below."

Then a long list of cities and countries that Freddie had already heard

from. Italy, France, England, Alaska. He scanned the list hurriedly then read on:

"I'm getting pretty tired of making these things, and I guess the hot-foot Hitler gave Mars is pretty well taken care of. I'm going to Manila next and that's the last place on the list. I'll take a crack at Tokio just before I leave for Olympus. Maybe you didn't know I used to be called *Volcanus*. That was another one of them names Augustus stuck on me, cuss him. I think I just use my *Volcanus* power, open up Mount Fujiyama and spray Japan with lava. That should be an easy way to kill off the Japs. Meanwhile, a thousand lightning-cannons for Manila and I'll be seeing you one of these days. Thanks for everything. P.S. Remember, keep that name *Mulciber* to yourself."

General Funk burned the letter carefully and went back to work. He was busy writing a note of instructions to the American garrison at Manila.

Two weeks passed before a reply came from Manila. Freddie read it with a suspicion of moisture in his eyes.

"We've got the cannons," the dispatch read, "and they are fine. Knocked hell out of a flight of Jap bombers last night and will go into plenty of action when the boys get the hang of that fancy firing dingus. One thing we wish to mention. With the cannon, delivered F.O.B. this camp, were about a hundred new plowshares and about six dozen old fashioned swords. We have no use for the plowshares and swords. They must have been meant for some other destination. Haven't seen anything like them since our visit to the museum. Please wire instructions for their disposal. . . ."

Freddie turned the dispatch face down on his desk. He took out a hand-

kerchief and started dabbing his eyes. He looked out the window and across the drill grounds, but his vision was badly blurred.

"Poor old *Mulciber*," he said to himself. "Couldn't resist putting in a little of his old handiwork. Gee, it's gonna be kinda lonesome. . . ."

A sharp knock at the door interrupted Freddie's dreaming. He wiped the tears away from his eyes hurriedly and turned.

"Come in."

The orderly entered, waving a cablegram excitedly in his hand.

"It's from the Pacific," he said. "My God sir, Tokio's done for, and without a shot fired."

He passed the cable to Freddie who looked at it with mixed emotions.

S.S. Washington

Somewhere in the Pacific

December 7, 1944

OBSERVERS FROM THIS SHIP
REPORTED THAT MOUNT
FUJIYAMA ERUPTED TO-
DAY STOP LAVA FLOW
CONVERGED DIRECTLY ON
TOKIO STOP CIVILIANS IN
HURRIED FLIGHT STOP
CITY DOOMED

Freddie read the cable over twice, then looked up to see the orderly waiting patiently.

"It's wonderful news, isn't it sir?"

Freddie nodded.

"Blame it all on *Mulciber*," he said dreamily. "*Mulciber* Vulcan, the guy who was mad at Hitler about a hot-foot."

The orderly looked blank.

"Yes sir," he said, and turned away with his mouth open. "Yes sir, at once sir."

He made a dash toward the hall.

★ ★ ★ BUY MORE BONDS! ★ ★ ★



Big Mike watched him go, and scratched his head in awe and bewilderment.

THE OBSERVER

By **ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS**

**No mere human scored 100%
in the army's aptitude
test! Yet one man had!**



"NEXT man," Big Mike shouted.

In answer to his summons a man rose from among the jeeps waiting on the benches to be interviewed, came slowly, hesitantly, toward Big Mike's booth. How many of them had he seen come up like that? Scared, confused, wondering what this strange new world would next demand of them. Already on this, their first day in the army, they had bared their arms to sharp needles, they had spent interminable hours taking intelligence and mechanical aptitude tests, they had been tagged, ordered here and ordered there. Now, although they didn't know it, their whole life's history was going to be taken and written down on a big yellow card that would go with them as long as they remained in the army.

Big Mike grinned at the man who came up to his booth. "Sit down, soldier. Cigarette?"

He eased himself carefully down on the stool at the end of the booth, took the cigarette, stared hesitantly at it for a moment, then, as if he had suddenly remembered what he was supposed to do with it, reached into his pocket and pulled out a lighter, a little silver shell that puffed instantly into a tiny flame. He coughed over the smoke, and for an instant Big Mike had the impression that this was the first cigarette the man had ever smoked. The army got men

like that. The army got all kinds, from mamma's boys to tough lads from the steel mills. Big Mike opened the envelope that contained this man's records, pulled out the big yellow card, picked up his fountain pen.

"Name?"

"John Hunt."

Big Mike heard the words but they scarcely registered on his consciousness. He felt something turn over in his mind. He had been a little sleepy before but he was wide awake now, maybe wider awake than he had ever been in his life. He looked sharply at Hunt. He saw a well-dressed, black-haired, black-eyed young man. Brown skin, clean, delicate features. Good-looking as the devil. Big Mike's scrutiny lasted several seconds. Startled uneasiness suddenly appeared in Hunt's black eyes.

"Did I—have I done something wrong?"

"Wrong?" Big Mike was startled. "You've done nothing wrong. On the contrary you've done everything exactly right."

Hunt settled back on his stool.

"What you've done isn't wrong," Big Mike continued. "But it's something no one else in this army has ever done before."

Hunt was on the edge of his stool again. "I—I don't understand."

"The intelligence tests you took this morning," Big Mike explained. "The testing section records the scores on this card before it reaches us. You took three tests—general aptitude, radio, and mechanical aptitude—and made perfect scores on all three of them."

Big Mike had not noticed the scores until after he had written Hunt's name. When he saw them, he forgot everything else. The armed forces had enlisted over ten million men. All of

these millions had taken these tests in one form or another. A very few men—you could count them on your fingers—had made perfect scores on one test. No man had ever made perfect scores on all three of them. No one except John Hunt!

Hunt's face had turned milk white. "I wanted to make good scores," he whispered. "I didn't realize that no one else—that perfect scores would attract attention to—that—I didn't think—"

"On the contrary, you must have been thinking very well," Big Mike said. "In case you don't know it, you're the most high-powered genius this army has ever enlisted."

"Could—could we change them?"

"Uh?" Big Mike was so startled he almost swallowed his tongue.

"These scores are going to attract attention to me, are they not?"

"Yes."

"What if I don't want any attention?"

"Uh?"

"I was wondering if you could change the scores," Hunt hastily said. "Lower them—"

"Well, I'll go to hell!" Big Mike whistled.

"You mean you cannot change them?" Hunt frantically whispered.

"Of course I can't," Big Mike indignantly answered. "I wouldn't if I could. They're your scores, not mine. You made them, you live with them. What the hell's the matter with you, man? If I had scores like that, I'd be telling the generals how to run the war. Change them, hell! When I finish interviewing you, I'm going to take you up to the lieutenant. He'll take you up to the captain. The captain will take you to the major. The major, for all I know, will take you to the colonel. The army can use men like you. But as to

changing these scores, that's out. What the hell are you scared of, man?"

HUNT, cringing on the edge of the stool, seemed in abject fear. All during the interview, Big Mike was aware that Hunt was watching him closely, that the man seemed to be revolving something in his mind. Big Mike in turn was keenly curious about Hunt. What kind of a man was this who could make perfect scores on the army intelligence tests? What was his background, what had he done, where had he gone to school?

It was Big Mike's duty to ask questions about all of these things. He got some strange answers.

"How far have you gone in school?"

Big Mike asked.

"I have never attended school."

"What?"

"I was privately instructed—what is the word?—tutored. I was tutored privately."

Big Mike wrote it down that way.

"What foreign languages do you speak?"

"None, except English."

"English, from our viewpoint, is not a foreign language."

"Yes? Ah, yes, of course."

"Sports?"

"None."

"Hobbies?"

"No hobbies."

The answers were not making sense, Big Mike knew. A man as intelligent as Hunt would logically have many interests. Yet Hunt claimed he had no hobbies. Was he lying? If so, why?

Big Mike came to the last question, and the most important one.

"What kind of work were you doing before you entered the army?"

"Work?" Hunt acted as if he did not understand the meaning of the word.

"Yes, work. How were you employed?"

"Employed? Oh, yes. I was not employed." Hunt smiled for the first time during the interview. "I didn't have to work, you see?"

Big Mike laid his pen down. The draft caught them all sooner or later, big and little, rich and poor, the newsboy from the corner, the millionaire from the Park Avenue apartment. After all, there were people in the world who didn't have to work. Big Mike made the entry: no work history, started to rise from his desk. "Wait here a minute, Hunt. I want to show this card to the lieutenant."

The motion that would have brought him to his feet was never completed. As he started to rise, Big Mike glanced at the yellow card.

The scores, the perfect scores of John Hunt, had changed. They weren't perfect any longer. They were way down the scale.

"Am I going nuts?" Big Mike exploded. "Have I blown my top? Have I sprung a leak in the upper story?"

When he had first taken the big yellow card out of the envelope, the scores had been perfect. During the interview, the card had never left his hands. It had been lying on the desk in front of him all the time.

During the interview the scores had either changed or he had misread them in the first place. He looked again to make sure. Solidly inked in, the scores were well down the scale, grades that any man might make. He was aware of a voice.

"Is—is something wrong?"

It was Hunt speaking. Big Mike's eyes jerked to focus on the man. Hunt's face was bland and suave but lurking deep within his eyes was a hint of malicious laughter.

"Did you change these scores?" Big

Mike blurted.

"I? What? How could I? Have you taken leave of your senses?"

BIG MIKE'S mouth clicked shut.

He got to his feet, clumped back to the water fountain, left the interviewing room. He sipped at the icy water, lit a cigarette. Around him the shipping, records, and assignment sections buzzed. Here the men he interviewed were assigned to various army camps. Over there in that corner they were shipped to the four corners of the country and eventually, from some other corner somewhere, they were shipped to the four corners of the earth. This was a global war. Here in this room the legions started to form. From here they marched out—and out—

"I guess I'm nuts," he said to himself. "I guess I just imagined those scores were perfect. I guess."

On clumsy feet that kept him from active duty he clumped back to the interviewing section. Hunt looked up at him, watched him narrowly, weighed him with twin black eyes. He bundled the papers together, handed them to Hunt.

"Take these up to the desk in the center of the room."

Hunt accepted them. "Then—then there is not going to be an interview with the officers?" he hesitantly asked.

"No," Big Mike answered.

A sly, triumphant smile flitted across Hunt's face, was gone as soon as it appeared. Like a man who is completely confident of himself, he walked toward the desk in the center of the room. His whole manner had changed. When he had learned that he had made a perfect record, he had been badly scared. Now, when he knew the record was not perfect, all fear had left him.

"I'm going nuts," Big Mike said to himself. "I'm either nuts or those fig-

ures changed. But how in the hell could they have changed?"

During the rest of the day, Big Mike consistently botched his interviews. He got himself bawled out by the sergeant. He didn't care. He was thinking about Hunt and those perfect scores that had somehow changed into imperfect scores. Not until that night did he think of a way he could check up and find out what had really happened.

He went back to the building where he worked, went to the testing section. The papers of the men who had taken the intelligence tests today were here. He hunted through them until he found the papers of John Hunt.

"By the Lord Harry!" Big Mike Hardesty muttered, staring at the papers. "By the Lord Harry—"

The scores, as recorded on the papers, were perfect.

A spider with icy legs was running up and down his spine. He wanted to talk to Hunt. He wanted to know more about this man, much more.

HUNT was sitting on his bunk, the contents of his barracks bag spread out around him. He was in uniform now and he looked like a thousand other young, healthy Americans who had a fine sun tan. He was examining the equipment that had been issued to him, mess kit, canteen, leggings, helmet liner, clothing. He looked up as Big Mike came walking down the room. His glinting eyes were twin rapiers tense with warning.

"How did you do it?" Big Mike said.

"Do what?"

"Change those scores?"

"I—change— Are you—I didn't do anything."

"You're a liar."

Hunt blinked. Then he shrugged.

"Can you prove it?"

"I can't prove that you did it but I

can prove it was done. I went back and checked the papers on which you took the test—”

“Oh!”

“You forgot about that, didn’t you?”

“Well—” Hunt squirmed.

“You’re hiding from something,” Big Mike challenged. “The perfect scores you made would call attention to you and you don’t want any attention. That’s why you changed them, isn’t it?”

Hunt was silent. His eyes drilled into Big Mike but he didn’t say a word. “I guess you know what is going to happen.”

“I can guess.”

“If you want to talk to me, give me the whole story, maybe we can get it straightened out. If you don’t want to talk to me, you can talk to the F. B. I.”

Hunt shook his head. “I feel sorry for you,” he said. “Very sorry. Remember, you forced it to happen, you brought it on yourself. Or do you want to forget about the whole thing?”

“What?” Big Mike gasped. The audacity of the threat left him breathless. “What the hell kind of a game is this, bub?”

“A very dangerous game,” Hunt answered evenly. “You came in here to tell me to talk or something unfortunate would happen to me. Well, I’m telling you that if *you* talk, something will happen to you.”

Not moving, Big Mike stared at this man. Furious anger moved through him. He resisted the impulse to take Hunt by the throat and shake him like a dog shakes a hat.

“You go to hell!” Turning, he stalked out of the barracks. If Hunt wanted it that way, that was the way it would be. Big Mike knew his duty. Hunt was hiding something. Maybe what he was hiding wasn’t important but the F.B.I. would have to decide that. As far as his threat went, what

could he do?

Big Mike was halfway back to his barracks before he noticed that he was sweating. The night was cool but great blobs of perspiration were forming on his forehead. And, nausea was beginning to form in his stomach. Suddenly the pain struck him. It hit him in the stomach, a great throbbing gnawing burst of pain that doubled him over. He was sick, sick. He turned toward the dispensary, forced his buckling knees to hold him up. If the dispensary had been fifty feet farther away, he would never have reached it. Pushing open the door, he fell flat on his face.

“Stomach,” he whispered to the startled attendant. “Something wrong—stomach—”

Blackness hit him.

BIG MIKE swam out of the blackness to find himself lying down. A doctor with a worried frown on his face was bending over him. He rolled over. An instrument that he vaguely recognized as a stomach pump—a pump that had seen recent usage—was lying on a table. He tried to sit up. The effort was not successful.

“What—what happened?”

The doctor was not interested in answering questions. He had some that he wanted to ask.

“How do you feel?”

Big Mike looked at the stomach pump. “I’m alive,” he said. “Did you use that thing on me?”

“Yes,” the medico admitted. “Are you feeling all right now?”

“I think so. A little weak is all.” This was not the truth. Big Mike felt like the devil but he had no intention of admitting it. “What happened?”

“That’s what I want to ask you?”

“Why, nothing happened. I was just walking along and suddenly I felt sick

at my stomach. That's all."

The doctor thought there must be more. He quizzed Big Mike thoroughly. What had he eaten? What had he drunk? Had he ever had an attack like this before? Big Mike hadn't eaten anything unusual. No, he had never had an attack like this before. "What was wrong with me?" he questioned.

The doctor frowned. "Some kind of poison," he hazarded.

"Poison? Where would I run into any poison?"

"I don't know. But you were poisoned all right. And if you had been five minutes later in getting here, you wouldn't be alive now."

"Uh!"

An hour later, the doctor was willing to release him. Big Mike had to make a very rapid recovery and talk extra fast to get released at all. The doctor was about to send him to the hospital. "If you don't feel all right tomorrow—"

"I'll go on sick call," Big Mike promised.

Poisoned!

In civilian life Big Mike Hardesty had been an assistant employment manager and a good one. When he entered the army he had thought he was going straight to active duty, which was what he wanted. Instead he had discovered that active duty was not for him, that his job would be to sit day after day and interview men who were just entering the armed forces. He hadn't liked it. There was no action in his job. Or there hadn't been, until he had interviewed John Hunt. The thought sent a cold chill through him.

Hunt had warned him. He had defied the warning. A few minutes later he was almost dead.

"It's not possible!" he kept telling himself. "Hunt couldn't have poisoned me. I didn't eat or drink anything—" The cold chill came again.

"Tomorrow," he said, "I'm going to make a full report to the intelligence officer. This fellow Hunt needs looking into."

Big Mike didn't do much sleeping that night. His stomach hurt, for one thing. For another, he had kept remembering that Hunt had warned him. Soon after that, he had almost died of poison. Had Hunt poisoned him?

"Impossible!" he snorted.

When he awakened after fitful dozing, a sheet of paper the size of a calling card was lying on his bed. He picked it up. Lettered in neat print were the words:

"Are you convinced now or do you want another demonstration?"

Big Mike glanced from the card around the barracks. His sleepy comrades were awakening, pulling themselves out of bed with much muttering and complaining.

"What damned joker left this on—"

He got no farther. His first thought had been that one of his barracks mates had played a joke on him. The thought was speedily dissipated.

As he started to speak, the card puffed instantly into flame. It burned his fingers. He dropped it. The card fell on the floor, curled in upon itself as the flame ate it, turned into ashes before his eyes.

"What the hell you doin', Big Mike?" one of his buddies demanded. "Tryin' to set the barracks on fire, maybe, huh?"

Big Mike didn't answer. He was too scared to answer. What had caused the card to burn? The British had dropped pieces of wet paper coated with phosphorus on Germany. When the paper dried out, it caught on fire. Maybe something like this had been worked on the card. Maybe it hadn't!

In spite of the warning, Big Mike knew what he had to do. He had to

make a full report to the intelligence officer, immediately.

THE intelligence officer was a Captain Richards, a red-headed wiry Irishman who was as keen as a whip. He listened in complete silence to what Big Mike had to say. Then he asked questions.

"You say the scores on his form 20 were perfect when it first reached you?"

"Yes sir."

"And when you had finished the interview the scores had somehow been changed?"

"Yes sir."

"You checked back on the original test papers?"

"Yes sir."

"Hmmm." Captain Richards took off his glasses and polished them thoughtfully. "Is there any possible connection that you can see between the attempt to poison you and this man Hunt?"

"None that I can see, sir."

"And the card on which the warning was written burned up almost as soon as you had read the message?"

"Yes sir."

"Hm."

Big Mike was aware that Captain Richards was looking very thoughtful again, only now the captain was looking straight at him. He knew almost exactly what the captain was thinking.

"Yes sir," he said. "Either I'm crazy or this man Hunt is something very unusual."

The captain looked startled. "That—well, I grant you that was what I was thinking. Frankly, I don't know which is which. But you can be certain of one thing—that Hunt will be carefully investigated. We can't afford to take any chances. He might—"

The captain had intended to say that Hunt might be a spy but he changed

his mind. He looked for a minute at Big Mike, abruptly he picked up a pen on his desk.

"I'll write an order—"

A look of pain flicked across his face. The pen dropped from his fingers. It made a little rattling sound as it struck the top of the desk.

The captain snatched at his chest. His fingers dug into his uniform. His driving nails tore great rents in the stout cloth.

Big Mike leaped to his feet. Before he could get around the table, Captain Richards had fallen out of his chair. There was no question about one thing: the captain was dead.

What had killed him was another matter.

It was over an hour before Big Mike, shaky to the bottom of his soul, was able to leave the office. He went back to his barracks, empty of men now that his buddies were on the job at their various duties. Cigarette. He needed one very badly. He fumbled in his pocket for the package, pulled it out. A card was sticking to the package. There were words on the card. Dazedly he read them.

"I rather like your courage. That makes you lucky. If I didn't like you, both you and the officer would be dead. Think it over before you open your mouth again."

Almost before he had finished reading it, the card had puffed into flame. Hastily, he dropped it, watched it spiral to the floor, watched the flame consume it.

A heart attack had killed Captain Richards, the medicos had said. They hadn't known, of course, but that was as good a guess as any. Mike knew better.

HE WALKED to the end of the barracks, pulled a foot locker into a

corner, sat down with his back to the wall where he could watch the doors. He would see anyone who entered the big room. His eyes went from the doors to the windows and back to the doors again. A card on his bed this morning. A card in his pocket. Cards that carried warnings. How had the card gotten onto the bed, into his pocket?

A man with an I.Q. so high the army could not test it. A card in his pocket, an officer clutching at his chest so hard he tore his uniform.

"I wonder if I'll be warned again?" Big Mike thought. He knew there would be no more warning. If he went ahead now, it was at his own risk.

He *had* to go ahead. If he could have done anything else, he wouldn't have been Big Mike Hardesty. The question was not whether he was going ahead. Too much was at stake, the whole thing was somehow too important, to back out now. The question was how to go ahead and still stay alive.

He went to his foot locker, took an old battered portable typewriter out of it, went back to his corner, fed sheets of paper and sheets of carbon into the machine, began to type rapidly. As he typed, he watched the doors and the windows. If invisible eyes were on him, he was not aware of them. Around the barracks the only sounds were the orderly noises of the morning, the shouts of the police-up details, the clatter of trucks delivering food to the mess halls. He looked out the window. Down the company street a soldier was slowly searching the gutter for cigarette butts and match sticks thrown there by careless soldiers.

Hunt! On police detail!

He looked like a perfectly ordinary jeep, a newly-hatched soldier, goofing off on a disliked job. He had the highest I.Q. the army had ever found.

Big Mike went back to his typing. So far as he could tell, Hunt had not seen him at the window. But now he was more alert than ever. He finished the typing job, carefully sealed the different copies in separate envelopes, addressed them, strolled casually down the street, dropped each envelope in a different box. The rest of the day, with the expertness of an old soldier, he kept carefully out of sight.

It was eight o'clock that night before he called on Hunt.

"I'VE only got one thing to say," Big Mike said. "I've written a complete story of everything that has happened and made three copies. The original and the three copies are in the mail, to four different people. They will be delivered tomorrow morning. If I were you I would spend the night thinking up an alibi because you are certainly going to need it tomorrow."

Hunt had been lying on his bunk when Big Mike entered. He had sat up when he saw the classification man approaching. Now his black eyes were fixed on Big Mike with unwavering intensity.

"Is that all?" he questioned at last.

"That's all."

The eyes dug into Big Mike. "You're not lying," Hunt said, regret in his voice. "I can see you're not. Your kind doesn't. That is too bad. If you were lying, it would be so simple to eliminate you and solve the whole problem."

His voice was low. It was almost as if he was talking to himself. Big Mike said nothing but he felt cold waves of chill run up and down his back.

Hunt sighed. "I guess this is it," he said. "I can't eliminate *all* of you. It just can't be done. And I would have to eliminate all of you for now that I have been discovered, all of you will be after me. Ah, well—"

"Yes."

"Tomorrow," Hunt said, "I will have an alibi. And thank you for the warning."

The tone of his voice said that this was all. Big Mike turned, walked out. It was only when he got outside, out in the cool night, that he realized he was covered with sweat.

He wasn't finished yet. He was just started. Slipping out of sight, he found a hidden spot from which he could watch Hunt's barracks. He didn't have to wait long. Within fifteen minutes, Hunt came out, started down the company street. With all the stealth of an Indian, Big Mike followed him. Hunt crossed the reception center, and finding an unguarded spot, went over the fence.

Big Mike followed him. He was A.W.O.L., but to hell with that. He wanted to know where Hunt was going and if he had to follow him to hell and back, he was going along.

Hunt—and this worried Big Mike—made no particular effort to keep hidden. He didn't try to move quietly or to take advantage of cover. There was a full moon overhead but Hunt didn't even try to keep to the cover of the trees. He chose the open spots to walk in and he was apparently heading for a hilly section less than a mile away. When he reached this section, he seemed to be looking for—of all things—a hill. He climbed several rises, looked around, then went on. At last he seemed to find what he wanted. It was a hill with a barren top. Big Mike, down flat on his stomach, wiggled close. He wanted to see what Hunt was doing.

Hunt was doing nothing. He was just standing still, looking around. Big Mike crept closer. There was a sound in the air, a high thin note that was so far up the scale it was almost out of hearing. It was something like the

whine of a high frequency radio generator. Big Mike heard it, then didn't hear it. He watched Hunt. With a start he realized the sound was coming from something Hunt was holding in his hands. As he watched, Hunt bent over and set the object on the ground. Hunt straightened up. The sound continued. Idly, Hunt lit a cigarette.

"Come on out," he said.

Big Mike froze to the ground.

"Come on, come on," Hunt said, impatience in his voice. "I know you're there. I've known all along that you were following me. What is it they call you? Big Mike? Get up off the ground, Big Mike, and come here."

BIG MIKE rose to his feet. The palms of his hands were clammy and there were beads of sweat on his forehead. He stood facing Hunt. Hunt was silent. Big Mike was silent.

"I made a mistake," Hunt said. "I should have killed you."

Big Mike said nothing.

"I shall probably have to answer for that," Hunt meditatively said. "It will probably go on my record—error in judgment—unless I can talk them out of it."

Big Mike swallowed. "*They*—" he whispered.

"My superiors." He did not seem inclined to enlarge on the statement and Big Mike attempted no further questions along this line. But Big Mike was wondering who those superiors were. Was Hunt a spy? Had the Germans contrived to plant a spy within the armed forces?

"Yes," Hunt repeated. "I should have killed you?"

"You almost did," Big Mike said. "And as for Captain Richards— Would you mind telling me—that poison—I neither ate nor drank anything after I left you. So how could you have poi-

soned me? And Captain Richards—"

"Simple," Hunt answered. "If you know how and can do it. I merely materialized poison inside your stomach. How did I do that? Mind, the power of the mind. As for the captain, a clot of blood suddenly formed in his heart. His heart stopped. Mind again, mind working on matter."

"Mind?" Big Mike gulped.

"I'm afraid your science has not progressed that far as yet," Hunt answered. "Some of your smarter scientists, some of your metaphysical thinkers, have suspected the almost endless possibilities in this direction, but no real progress has ever been made. I materialized poison inside your stomach. I materialized a blood clot inside the captain's heart. The warning cards I sent you, no doubt you wondered how they burned. Again it was mental power."

"Mental—" Big Mike choked. This was madness, the crazed raving of an insane mind. What Hunt was saying was simply not possible. "What blasted nonsense is this? No human—"

"Did anyone ever say I was human," Hunt quietly interrupted.

"Huh?"

"I'm not and have never been human," the quiet voice continued. "I come from up there." He gestured toward the sky. "What do you call the star that is my home sun? Vega. That's it. Vega."

"Vega?"

"Yes. I'm a member of an exploring expedition. The ship that brought me and my companions here is in an orbit around earth, has been in this orbit for almost five years. While it circled the planet, observers were sent down to the surface. That's what I am, an observer. We were seeking information about your race, your customs, your strength, how you fought, what kind of weapons you used, every bit of information that

would be of importance to use, if we ever decide to land here in strength."

Big Mike heard the words but they had ceased to carry meaning to his mind. Hunt was talking madness, impossible madness. He was talking words that didn't mean anything. Words, words, words. Big Mike's brain was reeling. Vaguely he was aware that Hunt was no longer looking at him. Hunt was looking up. He seemed to be listening. Big Mike found himself listening too. He heard a sound. It was a soft flutter in the air, coming from somewhere overhead. He jerked his head around.

A torpedo the size and shape of a B-26 bomber except that it had no wings and no propellers was dropping down through the night. When he first saw it, it was not a hundred feet in the air. Swiftly, it dropped lower. While Big Mike stared at it, it halted a foot above the ground, hung there in the air, unsupported.

A door swung open in the side.

HUNT reached over and picked up the tiny object he had placed on the ground. He touched a button on its side and the high shrill whine died into silence. Big Mike realized that this had somehow been used to call the ship, balloon, whatever it was.

Hunt swung into the open door. Beyond him, Big Mike got a glimpse of soft lights and figures moving, of intricate machinery humming softly. Hunt turned back to him.

"Goodbye," he said.

"Then—then—then that cock-and-bull story you told me is true?" Big Mike exploded.

"Certainly it's true," Hunt snapped. "Unfortunately your draft system caught up with me and I found myself inducted into your armed forces. This would have been all right, but when I

made perfect scores on your intelligence tests, you immediately knew there was something wrong about me. When you began to press the matter, I was left with no choice except to clear out. But the story is true. The ship that came for me is a small flier that we use to go between your planet and our larger vessel lying farther out."

The door started to close.

Hunt's mad baldernash was true! Hunt and his race posed a tremendous and unsuspected threat to the earth and its teeming millions. No one knew that Hunt or his kind existed, except Big Mike. A thought popped into Big Mike's mind. He would be able to report what had happened. He would be able to warn of what was going on.

The closing door opened again. Hunt looked out. He seemed to know what Hunt was thinking.

"Try to tell them," Hunt said. "Try

to warn them. See how far you get."

The door slid shut. On noiseless wings the ship lifted itself into the sky, into the moon-drenched night. Big Mike watched it go.

AND on clear nights, he still watches the sky, wondering if Hunt and his people are coming down. Or did they find that earth was not worth the taking, not worth the trouble of attacking? Big Mike doesn't know. The only thing Big Mike does know is that Hunt was right when he dared him to try and tell what had happened and see how far he got. Big Mike tried it, twice. The first time it almost got him a bed in the neuro-psychiatric ward. The second time it almost got him into the guard-house. So he shut up.

All he can do is watch the sky, and wonder, wait, and sometimes pray.

What is Wrong When Prayer Fails?

Thirty years ago, in Forbidden Tibet, behind the highest mountains in the world, a young Englishman named Edwin J. Dingle found the answer to this question. A great mystic opened his eyes. A great change came over him. He realized the strange Power that Knowledge gives.

That Power, he says, can transform the life of anyone. Questions, whatever they are, can be answered. The problems of health, death, poverty and wrong, can be solved.

In his own case, he was brought back to splendid health. He acquired wealth, too, as well as world-wide professional recognition. Thirty years ago, he was sick as a man could be and live. Once his coffin was bought. Years of almost continuous tropical fevers, broken bones, near blindness, privation and danger had made a human wreck of him, physically and mentally.

He was about to be sent back to England to die, when a strange message came—"They are waiting for you in Tibet." He wants to tell the whole world what he learned there, under the guidance of the greatest mystic he ever encountered during his twenty-one years in the Far East. He wants everyone to experience the greater health and the Power, which

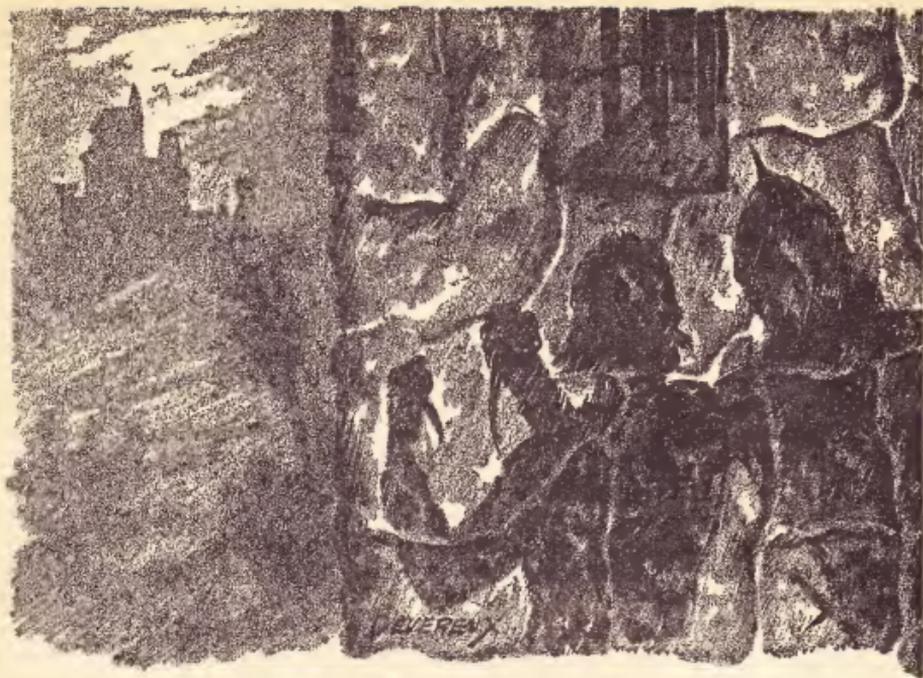
there came to him.

Within ten years, he was able to retire to this country with a fortune. He had been honored by fellowships in the World's leading geographical societies, for his work as a geographer. And today, 30 years later, he is still so athletic, capable of so much work, so young in appearance,

it is hard to believe he has lived so long.

As a first step in their progress toward the Power that Knowledge gives, Mr. Dingle wants to send to readers of this paper a 9000-word treatise. He says the time has come for it to be released to the Western World, and offers to send it, free of cost or obligation, to sincere readers of this notice. For your free copy, address The Institute of Mental-physics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. K-290, Los Angeles 4, Calif. Readers are urged to write promptly, as only a limited number of the free books have been printed.





A Year from Tonight

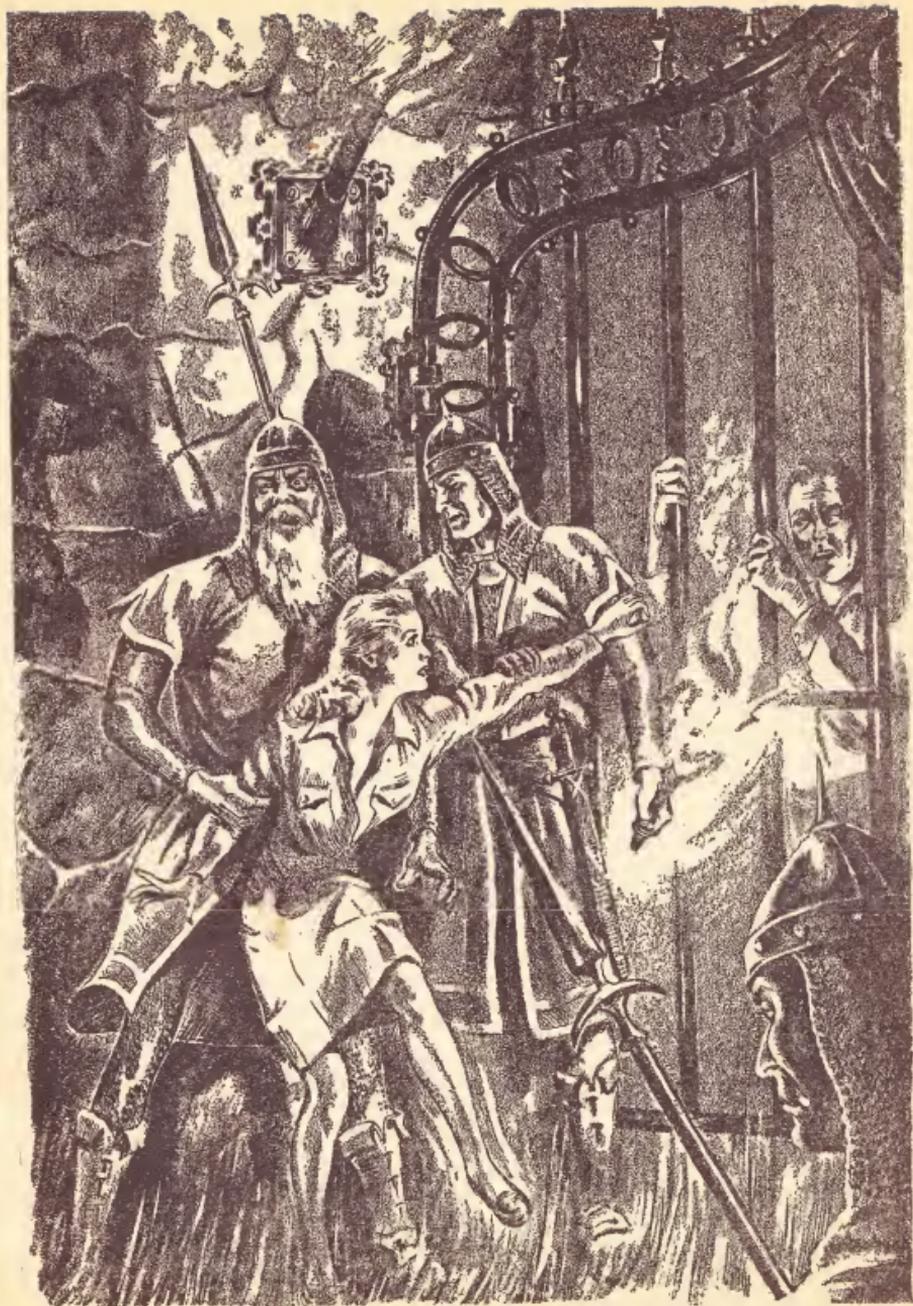
By
Dorothy Quick

*Drake entered an old castle and
found a lovely girl prisoned in the past*

Somewhere in the South Pacific
EAR BRUCE:
DI never thought when you
saw me last, a couple of days
before I shoved off with my outfit, that
I'd be taking you up on an offer you
made. Maybe you've forgotten that

when you gave me that last whack on
the shoulder, you said. "Don't forget,
Drake, old boy, if there's anything I
can do for you, no matter what or when,
you've only to spill it."

Not elegantly put, but we both had
an idea I'd be leaving soon, as I'd



"Come back!" she cried. "In one year from tonight. Please . . . !"

reached the point where I wasn't allowed "off grounds," and we hadn't been buddies for twenty years without feeling upset at the thought of separation. But we couldn't come out in the open with that. You couldn't say, "You may be killed or wounded—I may never see you again." And I couldn't say, "Damn that stiff arm of yours that kept you out of the war."

So we joked and made light of it to hide the ache in our hearts, and you said that about doing something for me "what or when."

There is something, Bruce, something important to me, vitally important, that I could only ask a pal I'd gone to grammar school with to do—a pal I've loved and trusted for twenty years. When I tell you what it is you'll think I'm goofy; that's why I didn't mention it before. But you'll do it—and that's what counts.

I'll have to begin at the beginning, which was a rainy night in October—last October, Bruce, the twenty-fourth of October. Don't forget that date. It's important. It was a while before that that my draft number had come up. I was to report at Camp Upton, so I wound up what was left of my business, then got in the old bus and went down to say good-bye. I'm glad I did for I didn't get to see the family again.

It was six o'clock in the morning when I started off. I left behind the memory of tears in Mum's eyes, an extra firm handshake from Dad.

I drove fiercely for a while. I wasn't thinking about conserving gas by not exceeding thirty miles an hour just then. I zipped along at about half the speed of Superman when he isn't in too much of a hurry, and by that time it was beginning to get dark. I was in Georgia, which wasn't too bad. I wasn't drowsy, so didn't turn up a side road and snatch sleep like I'd planned. There was time

enough for that when I felt like some shut-eye. I kept on feeling pleased with myself as the miles piled up behind me. If this kept up I'd be ahead of schedule.

Just for crowing, my luck changed. It began to rain—one of those blinding downpours that make you think there's nothing in the world but water, aiming at you with malice in every drop. At that point, to pile up things, they were fixing the road. So I detoured. It was hard seeing the arrows, even with the lanterns set out to mark them. Eventually, I must have reached a place where the lantern had been doused by the rain. To put it in a nutshell, I was lost in the back roads of Georgia, without the least idea where I was. I might be almost anywhere and I had to get back to the main road.

I DECIDED to ask directions at the first house I came to. But there weren't any houses, or if there were I couldn't see them through the sheet of water tattooing the windows. I crawled along for a couple of miles doing a lot of fancy cussing to relieve my feelings. It looked as though this vicinity wasn't populated.

I began to toy with the idea of stopping the car and taking a nap. But I still wasn't sleepy, and the rain was coming down too hard to be soothing. So I kept on.

At last I saw, on the right far ahead, a light. It wasn't steady like an electric light. It was more the kind of light that came from those gas flares they had on top of one of the buildings at the World's Fair. Probably the effect of the rain, I thought, and headed for it. Just about then the rain began to let up, and petered out to a few drops running down the windows. I stopped the windshield wiper and looked at the light. It was still flickering.

"Must have gas in these parts," I said

aloud, and remembered things I'd read about primitive conditions in some parts of the back woods.

It was just about then I became conscious of a high wall that ran along the edge of the road to my right. Built of gray stone, it was solid, forbidding and imposing. There were spikes along its top. From somewhere the moon had come to life, so I could now see quite well.

There was nothing backwoods about that wall. It looked like the beginning of a country estate. Well, that was all to the good. I could get all the information I wanted. I went on slowly so I wouldn't miss the gate.

Eventually, I came to a gate house built into the wall. It had fairy-story-book turrets, but there was a grim reality about the iron gates next to it. They were tight shut and on either side of them burned giant torches. Not electric light or gas but big pieces of sputtering, smoking wood stuck into iron holders.

"It's a strange setup," I said to myself, "where they have to burn wood with an elegant gate house and a million dollar wall. I should think they could pipe in some gas or string wires. Still," I shrugged, "maybe the storm has dunked their lights."

I drew up in front of the gates and honked my horn loudly. Nothing happened. There was no response. Nothing but the flickering light from the torches, whose effect was so ancient they might have been burning before the camp of one of the generals of the Roman legions.

I played scales again on the horn, rather impolitely. Finally I got it through my head it wasn't getting me anywhere. I shut off my engine automatically, put the car keys in my pocket, and got out, grateful the rain had stopped.

I noticed a door in the gate house

made of good stout oak banded with iron. A mere knock would never get through that piece of wood. There didn't seem to be any windows in the house, only narrow slits in the stone of which it was made. It didn't look encouraging.

I walked toward the gates. Peering through them I perceived a tree-bordered road winding upward. Far off I could distinguish lights on what appeared to be the top of a hill—flickering light and more turrets, as though the hill held a grown-up gate house.

"Some estate!" I exclaimed. "I only hope it's not deserted."

But I knew it couldn't be, for there were the lighted flares. Huge pieces of wood don't leap up into holders and ignite themselves.

THERE had to be some one around.

It was only eleven o'clock. The whole place couldn't be asleep. I decided to rattle the gates. I put my hand on them. To my amazement, as I touched the middle where the great lock was, the gates gave slowly, swinging inward. They weren't fastened at all. As they swung back, I walked through, my eyes on the flickering lights on the top of the distant hill.

Suddenly I felt as though I'd barged into a pile of scrap metal. Clanking sounds converged upon me. Metal fingers gripped and held me. I struggled, and banged my face against a curved metal surface. The gates clanged shut behind me, and I heard the sound of a bar dropping into place. I couldn't move in the grip of those steel fingers.

"Mortimer sends stupid messengers," a deep voice rumbled close to my ear. "A few seconds hiding in the bushes and they walk into the trap."

I didn't understand any of it, the plural, or Mortimer, or these men who had hold of me. I understood them less

as I had time to look them over.

They were tall, stalwart, brawny fellows—eight of them, at least. They wore armor, shiny breastplates and helmets. Then they had some kind of heavy woven kilt-like arrangement which covered them from the metal to the knees. Their legs were bare except for the lacings of their leather sandals. They wore their hair long, just missing their shoulders and, except for their faces and build, were gotten up exactly alike. In the unsteady light from the flares it took me a while to take all this in, as I endeavored to get back the breath they'd knocked out of me by their sudden assault.

Fantastic? That's what I thought. But no matter what I, or you, Bruce, for that matter, call it, the truth was even stranger.

Another man who wasn't holding on to me remarked:

"He wears no harness. Truly, Mortimer chooses odd messengers."

Mortimer again! I had my breath, now.

"See here——" I began.

"Silence," roared one of the men. "Not a word until we take you to the Duke."

As his hand was raised and he obviously intended to hit me with it while my wrists were being held by two other bull-strong mail-clad men, I shut up. Eventually, the Duke was going to be more talkative. I could wait. I jolly well had to, for they were tying my hands behind my back, and slapped a wad of brown stuff in my mouth which made a thoroughly businesslike gag. Then they tied some coarse material over my eyes. A fine mess I'd gotten into—and what was it about? The men were too old for college boys on an initiation spree. My first thought that I'd stumbled onto a motion picture company taking night scenes didn't make

sense in view of the treatment I was getting, or this Mortimer-Duke stuff. A bunch of screwballs. Perhaps that was it. Maybe I'd barged into a lunatic asylum where they let the inmates dress up to keep them quiet. I shivered at the thought and hoped the Duke would turn out to be the doctor, and he'd get me out of here quick!

"He wears the oddest livery I ever saw," one of the men said. "I have heard tell that the Lord Mortimer brought strange customs home from the East, but if this be the way they dress I would, for my own part, never leave England."

England! On a back road in Georgia. It didn't make sense. But neither did these eight men or my being hog-tied. I listened intently. It was all I could do.

A MORE cultured voice spoke now. "Do thou, Oswald and Cuthbert, guard the gate, though it's hardly like that the Lord Mortimer will send more than two spies in one night."

Two spies! Where was the other one? I certainly wasn't twins. I cut out the thinking as he was still talking.

"Henry and Bethane, resume your watch. The rest of us will take the spy to our lord the Duke. It is for him to decide what to do. But if there is to be torture, I hope that I can watch the pretty sight."

"A silver piece to a farthing this spy confesses his guilt before the third turn of the rack. What say you, Giles?" cried another voice.

"Done, Henry," Giles replied. And then, "The horses are here. Up with him."

Two men hoisted me onto a horse—a thick-set heavy horse quite unlike any southern thoroughbred I'd ever ridden. Fortunately, I had a good seat. I could keep on though the saddle seemed

like something out of a museum.

"Fare thee well," Giles cried out to Henry, who replied:

"Remember, on thy return thou must tell me all thou seest. So note well the great hall, and how my lord the Duke dealt with the other spy. I wager she did not draw the rack."

So the other "spy" was feminine. I hoped she wasn't as bewildered as I was. I was sure it was an asylum by this time—an asylum whose inmates had an early English complex.

We were moving now. Slowly the big horse was taking me up the hill. Giles had hold of the bridle I knew, for I could at times feel his leg brushing mine. We were riding side by side. From the sounds there was a man on my other side, and one before and behind. The horses were armored, too; I could hear the metal clank.

Time is hard to guess at when you're trussed up like an Eskimo baby, but I knew we climbed steadily for over half an hour. The men were silent, so I didn't glean any information. And my own thoughts weren't too pleasant. . . .

It seemed an eternity before Giles spoke. I liked what he said. "I'm going to unbind his eyes. 'Tis well he sees the strength of Torwich so, if he does go free, he can report it to his master."

There was a definitely unpleasant laugh. "Think you he will go free?"

"Our lord the Duke may send him back to Mortimer—not, perhaps, in as good condition as the puny thing is now—but able to talk."

I wondered what my draft board would say to the "puny." They had passed me as being in the pink. "Six feet of fine American manhood," they'd said. But of course they hadn't seen these big, brawny fellows who'd make any induction board's mouths water. They were physical perfection—the

very embodiment of strength.

I felt hands fumbling at the back of my head. Then the bandage was pulled off and I could see. Not much at first, but in a few minutes my eyes adjusted themselves to the light. Then I couldn't believe what I saw, and thought I must be dreaming.

The horses stood on a cobbled road in front of an old stone castle with a wide moat around it. Turrets and battlements towered above us, and a forbidding entrance from which a drawbridge was being let down was just opposite us. The men attending to that were attired exactly the same as my companions.

Reason told me I must be dreaming. Yet the drawbridge was solid enough, and the thick rope tight upon my wrists. It was no dream, but *what was it?*

THE drawbridge clanked into place. Giles pulled on my horse's bridle, and we rode across the bridge through the forbidding entrance into a courtyard. There was a well in the center. Flares, stuck along the wall in holders at regular intervals, gave light to make the well and beechnut tree look like a stage setting.

Eric and Giles dismounted, and helped me down. There were guards everywhere, with heavy, wicked-looking maces. One looked at me and muttered, "Another strange creature!"

Eric hustled me into the castle by means of an entrance in a round tower. There were towers in each corner. He hurried me through a guardroom full of soldiers, up a flight of narrow stone steps onto the floor above. There we halted while he talked to still another soldier, who was sentrying an iron studded door, another of those heavy oak affairs. I couldn't hear what they said, though I strained my ears. Presently, the soldier knocked on the door. A

panel opened. More conversation. Then the panel shut. We waited a long period in which everyone stared at me. Then the panel reopened and presently I was ushered through the door and endless corridors and rooms until finally two great doors, more ornate than any I'd seen yet, were thrown open. We stepped into a room of the past. I thought of the "Last of the Barons" (required reading at school, remember?). Well, here I was in it. If this was a wacky place it was deluxe and authentic to the period.

A rush-strewn floor, tapestries, a chest, some few chairs. In one of them my lord Duke, surrounded by what I presumed was his court. Lords and ladies all attired in feudal style. If they weren't authentic they were putting on a good act. They couldn't all be insane! You probably think I am by now, but wait.

The Duke wasn't any doctor. He was a strong man with a strong face, dark-browed, with sensuous lips. Royal, and when I say royal I mean it. He was used to commanding, used to everything. He *was* royal.

I felt like a worm as he looked me over. I don't believe there was an inch of my anatomy he missed. He had piercing black eyes which had a microscopic quality. No filterable virus could have felt lower than I.

"Come hither, Lady Blanche," his great voice boomed out like a big bell tolling, "and tell me what you think of your cousin's spy." He turned his massive countenance toward Eric. "You did well to capture and bring him here. You will be rewarded."

All this in archaic English, like something out of Malory. I had a hard time keeping up with it, myself, so I won't bore you with it, but I assure you it was authentic.

The Lady Blanche advanced out of

the throng of people. She was beautiful—just like an artist's conception of Queen Guenivere, with long, red-gold braids and eyes that were the icy blue of a mountain lake at sunrise.

She kissed the ringed hand the Duke extended to her, and smiled as he seized her wrist and drew her so close that she leaned against his shoulder.

"Well, what think you of the people your cousin sends forth?"

"Not over much, my lord," she laughed, and looked at me in a nonchalant way—a manner in which I'd hate to have even a cigarette girl regard me. "'Tis but a puny thing. And, as for that hussy who came a while ago—"

"Taunt not the bedfellow your cousin has so thoughtfully provided. I'll swear to leave you lonely for but a night, my love." The Duke laughed long and loud. "Shall we hear the puppet speak?" And, as she nodded, he bade Eric to ungag me. "Free thou his lips," were his actual words, complete with gestures.

I WAS readjusting my ideas. Whatever I had stumbled into, these people were authentic. Incredible, but it must be. Every detail, every intonation, was perfect early English. It couldn't be pretense. And yet, I remembered a story I had read once of a wealthy man who had an obsession he was Louis XIV. To keep him happy, his family had built him a small scale Versailles, with people paid to act their parts as courtiers, and let him have full sway as *Le Roi Soleil*.

This setup could be somebody like that. It had to be. I must say, the Duke seemed sane. There was no hint of madness in his eyes, no sign that he, or any of them, were other than they seemed. But they couldn't be real. My head was swimming. Also, my lips were free.

"See here," I began, "I'm an American citizen."

"What's that?" roared the Duke.

"A resident of the United States of America." I said it proudly.

"Is it, perchance, of the Indies you speak?" asked the Lady Blanche.

I shrugged. If it was an act, they were certainly keeping it up.

"What did Lord Mortimer send you to find out? Or did you, by any chance, bring a message?" The Duke was impatient.

"I never heard of Lord Mortimer. I only wanted to borrow some gas—"

Their eyes looked blank as I mentioned the word gas.

"You can make it if you eat enough!"—the Duke roared at his own wit, and even the Lady Blanche smiled—"but never did I hear of borrowing such a thing. Puppet, speak not in such witless fashion. Tell me, what make you here?"

"Nothing," I said wearily. "Let me go and I'll forget I've ever seen you or your castle."

The Duke kissed the Lady Blanche's hand. "He has nerve, the puppet. I like that. Hasten, fool! Tell us your mission here or we will wring it from you on the rack. As for leaving Castle Fotley, you shall leave it as refuse to be thrown on Mortimer's dung heap. We will see that you have just enough strength to tell him how we treat his spies. Of course, if you tell us what he intends against us, why he is interested in Fotley, then perhaps we might spare you the rack."

I looked around. All their faces were hard—unsympathetic. There was a cruel streak in every one of them. Even the Lady Blanche with her ice-blue eyes showed no pity. As for the Duke—cold steel his eyes were. He actually meant what he said. There were chills cascading down my spine.

"See here. This has gone far enough. Fun's fun, but it's time we got down to facts," I retorted. "I'm not going to be tortured just to carry out an act. This is the twentieth century, we're in the State of Georgia, U. S. A., and Americans don't do things like this. I never heard of your Mortimer. I never want to again. But I'm joining the army on the 26th, and I've got to get going so I'll be in camp on time."

My speech impressed them. I could see that. The Duke, Lady Blanche, and a couple of others crossed themselves. Several faces paled.

"Think you it is a spell?" murmured the Lady Blanche.

"No," thundered the Duke. "Or if it is, we can outspell anything a slave of Mortimer's can cast. He and the wench talk alike. Bring her hither, Eric. Perhaps we can confound them. And at any rate, it were well she witnessed the torture. It might loosen her tongue. It will surely make her more—"

"Shall we say acquiescent?" put in the Lady Blanche sharply.

The frankness with which they talked surprised me. But it wasn't hard to see that jealousy was what irked the Lady Blanche.

I DECIDED to change my tactics.

"Lady," I begged, "surely no one so beautiful could be anything but kind. I swear I never heard of this Mortimer. Will you not intercede with the Duke to set me free?" I was quite proud of that speech, and its effect on the lady.

She started, took her hand from the Duke's, and put it on his shoulder.

"He speaks true," she said. "It's obvious he knows nothing of Fotley or my history."

"I know only your beauty, lady." I wasn't slow to follow up.

"Then know more, puppet," the Duke snarled. "This lady is Morti-

mer's wife. She was sent to spy as you were—given her choice. She elected to talk and to transfer her affections to myself. Go, my love, tell him that I am kind to those who play my game." He pushed her toward me and motioned the guards to stand apart.

They obeyed, leaving the Lady Blanche and me quite by ourselves, so that a whisper could not be heard by anyone but us two, whereas, if we spoke loudly, anyone in the company could hear.

"Wouldst kiss me, puppet?" Lady Blanche said loudly, and then whispered, "Say 'yes'."

I was quite ready to. She was easy on the eyes, and I'd know quick enough if she was real if I kissed her.

She looked toward the Duke, who nodded. Then she put her arms around my neck. I bent my head. Our lips didn't meet, though. She began to whisper. "If I help you will you take that hussy with you? I hate her. A night is nothing from any man's life, but one night might lead to another. Will you take her away from here at once?"

I assured her I would. Then she whispered again. "Agree with anything I say and tell my lord that if he were half the man the Duke is I would not have stayed at Fotley. Now, puppet, you have earned your reward. You may really kiss me."

I did—thoroughly. Kissing the Lady Blanche wasn't hard. In fact, I don't mind admitting it was quite a kiss. I was sorry it was over, and I knew she was real, all right. There was nothing dream-like about that kiss.

"You agree?" she cried loudly.

I nodded, remembering what she had said.

She left me, and went back to the Duke, knelt beside him, her head on his knee. He leaned down, and they talked. I couldn't hear much, only one sentence

—hers.

"We can find out much at little cost, and save your rack for Mortimer."

Then I heard the clank of men in armor walking through the big doors, and turned around to meet my fate.

IT WAS a girl as modern as the latest radio program — or jive dancing. She was about nineteen, with blonde, upswept curls haloing her face. She had blue eyes quite different from the Lady Blanche's. Hers were soft and gentle as a forgetmenot, and that simile was prophetic, believe me. She wore a red linen dress right out of Bonwit Teller's Fifth Avenue windows, with lipstick to match. She looked like she ought to be at the Southampton Beach Club. But she wouldn't have been frightened, there. She was frightened, now, really scared. And she looked at me like I was her last hope.

Our eyes met, and Cupid must have let loose a couple of arrows at that point, for I fell quicker than a paratrooper with a stuck chute. I could see she'd taken a tailspin, too. It was plain enough to read her message, even before her lips said, "Thank God! You're real! Can you get me out of here?"

"Silence!" roared the Duke before I could reply, but I sent her a message with my eyes and nodded. I wasn't quite sure how far I could trust the Lady Blanche, but I thought she'd play square. After all, it was to her own interest not to have anyone so beautiful as that blonde lovely around. People usually do what they promise if it helps themselves. I felt I could count on the Lady Blanche. She was evidently in love with the Duke. And he was looking at the blonde girl with the kind of eyes no woman in love likes to see on a man's face for anyone but herself.

She set out to get his attention, began whispering in his ear. I knew exactly

what she was saying. "Let them talk. Wasn't that why you brought them together? So you could learn things?"

It wasn't hard to figure. I'd have done the same thing if I'd been the Lady Blanche.

My surmise was correct, because it was plain the Duke saw reason in her words by what he said. "Tell us where you come from—the truth, this time."

Evidently she had gained courage from my presence. She drew herself up and looked him straight in the eye. "I have told you many times. I come from New York, and my name is Merry Driscoll."

I could see Merry had been the right name for her. She had a heart-shaped face made for smiles. I smiled at her and she proved I was right by smiling back and revealing dimples on either side of her adorable mouth.

"I'm from New York, too," I told her. "Drake Grainger. How did you get into this?"

"I was visiting the Fosters. We went for a horseback ride. The gates were open. I rode in and they"—she gestured toward Giles and his companion—"grabbed me."

"How long have you been here?"

Only the Lady Blanche's continued persuasion kept the Duke from breaking into our conversation, so I was packing a lot in while I could.

"I don't know," she hesitated. "It seems forever. It was the twenty-fourth of October when I went out riding. I remember that because I was going home on the twenty-fifth. What date is it now?"

"The twenty-fourth of October," I told her, trying to drive away the dark suspicion that had crept into my mind.

"But that can't be. I've been here so long."

"What year did you go for your ride?" I had to ask.

"1942." She stared at me. There was no longer any sign of the dimple.

"It's 1943, now, October 24th, 1943." I said it quietly, watching the color drain out of her face.

"Stop this nonsense," bellowed the Duke. "The year 1943, he says. Every one knows it's the year of our Lord, 1050."

They were certainly consistent. They clung to England, before the Norman conquest! What had I gotten into? Had I stepped through some strange dimension back into time? Was I actually in the year 1050? But how could I be—or Merry?

I looked back at her. There was horror on her white face. Horror beyond anything I have ever seen, except in the movies. Horror, and a kind of dreadful knowledge that hadn't been there a few minutes ago.

"Drake! Drake!" she cried, and her voice shook as she swayed unsteadily. "I—I am—" Her words lost themselves in her throat as she fell down in a little heap.

I HAD her in my arms before they could stop me. Even at that moment I could tell the Lady Blanche was glad I had beaten her boy friend to the clinch.

"Get the torture chamber ready," I heard the Duke say, and there was a grim quality in his tone that made me see pictures I didn't like. "I am tired of this. I'll get the truth from them with a thousand turns of the screws, if need be."

I was aware that two of the men left the room, but not interested, for Merry was regaining consciousness. Her soft blue eyes were looking into mine, clear and lovely.

"I love you," I whispered. "I love you. I'll get you out of this, somehow."

The horror was creeping back into

her face, now. She shook her head and moaned a little.

"No. We're lost. There's no hope, now. You don't understand."

"I love you," I repeated.

Even through the horror she smiled. "And I love you. But it is too late. There's no hope."

I had to hearten her, somehow, not to mention myself, so I leaned over and kissed her.

I've kissed a lot of girls in my time, but there never was a kiss like that. It was a warm, full-blooded kiss, but there was something holy about it—something that transcended anything I had ever known or ever will know. I don't want anything or any one ever to take Merry's kiss off my lips. It was a kind of consecration.

Rude hands pulled us apart. Eric yanked me onto my feet. Giles forced Merry to stand. She looked dazed, but the horror was gone. There was even a glint of happiness in her eyes as they looked deep into mine.

For a minute, nothing mattered but Merry. Our love flowed back and forth between us as though it were a crystal stream enveloping us both.

The Lady Blanche's sibilant whisper snapped me out of the most wonderful feeling I have ever known.

"Give me the chance, and I promise you'll have no regrets."

For a second everything hung in the balance. Then I saw the Duke nod his leonine head. His whisper was louder than the average man's normal voice. "I give you half an hour. If your charms have not sufficed by then it will be the torture. I'll best Mortimer yet. Good hunting." He pinched her cheek and signed to Eric.

"Send the wench back to her chamber. Escort the man where Lady Blanche orders. Bring them both back here or to the torture chamber at the

half hour as Lady Blanche commands. Go now." The Duke was emphatic.

Merry heard him, and knowing nothing of my deal with the Lady Blanche, realized only that we were to be separated. She began to scream. "No, no! At least, let us stay together!"

Lady Blanche was close to me.

"Silence her," she hissed, "before the Duke changes his mind."

It was plain to see that the Duke didn't like competition in his girl friends, either.

I called to Merry. "Tnxay on the sob stuff. Get in the groove. I've got some cooking to do that will spring us. Don't forget I'm holding the torch for you, Merry, but please amscray."

"Silence!" The Duke's furious tone cut in. "Here is another spell. Never have I heard such mumbling. Mortimer has sent a magician. Bind his mouth."

Eric replaced the gag and rebound my wrists, but I didn't care. I'd put the message over. Merry understood my double talk. She flashed me a smile that turned on a spotlight in that gloomy place, and went out quietly with the guards.

THE Lady Blanche motioned to Eric, and we left in a different direction. After quite a jaunt, we got to what was evidently the Lady Blanche's boudoir. They pushed me in and shut the oak door on me, leaving me alone in the lady's hide-y-hole. The Duke had done well by her. The walls had fine tapestries, the bed an elegant bear skin. What a size! I supposed the Duke had killed it himself, and was admiring his prowess when I heard the door open. Lady Blanche slipped through, closing it after her.

She busied herself taking off my gag and unbinding my wrists. "I told the Duke I would make you so wild with

love for me that you would tell me all of Mortimer's plans. You will keep to your bargain, puppet?"

"Yes," I answered.

She permitted herself the only natural smile I'd seen on her face. "I thought, after that embrace you gave her, I could rely upon your word. Listen now." She became serious and businesslike. "I help you because I help myself. I have no wish to be superseded in the affections of the Duke. Neither do I wish to run any risk to myself. I could lose through his displeasure even without your lady. So I must have a tale to excuse me to the Duke if I let you and the wench go."

I resented the way she said "wench," but it was no time to show it. "Can we get her out of wherever she is?" I asked.

"I do not talk idly. Attend me. I have sent Eric for her. Eric is in love with me. He has had some favors from me when my lord, the Duke, went a-hunting. I have promised him more, to free her. He has gone to bring her here."

So that's how they played in castles in the year 1050 when the Duke was away. I was almost believing that 1050 stuff now, myself. It was so consistent. Everyone else was sold on it—even Merry.

"It is possible he won't be able to get her, but Eric is able to use his wits. The soldiers know he has the Duke's ear, so he will say that the Duke has changed his mind, and sent him to bring the girl. That will get her here. Once that's done, I know a secret way out of Fotley. So I can put you on the road to Mortimer, but before I do that you must think of some way to keep me free from blame."

The Lady Blanche had dumped the whole thing in my lap, on knees that were too wobbly to hold it. I could see

her point, too. She did need an out. It made sense, if there was any in any of this, but I had to play her way. By the grace of God I got an idea.

"If you told the Duke I'd broken down—" Seeing her look of bewilderment at the slang, I lapsed back to early English—"I'd succumbed to your charms and told you Mortimer had a secret way into Fotley and offered to show it to you, that you'd taken me up—I mean—agreed to do so, thinking you'd better learn all you could while I was ready to talk—"

She nodded. "That is good, but there are still gaps in the wall."

An odd way to speak of Merry, but I understood. What wits I had rose to the occasion. "I only knew part of the way; the girl knew the rest. I could make her talk so you sent for her and we took you to show you the passage Mortimer had built from Torwich." I was really warming up, now. "When we got there I knocked out Eric, bound you, and escaped with Merry. Perhaps there never was a passageway, or I didn't show it right, or whatever you like—but—we are gone and maybe the Duke will be so busy digging to find the passage—"

"Yes, there must be a passage. In truth, I actually know of one—from a convent in Torwich. One of the owners of Fotley once loved—but that is another story. Mortimer knew of this passage. He thought of using it. So you do come from him!" She looked at me with scorn, as though associating with Mortimer put anybody beyond the pale.

"I swear—" I began. I wasn't going to spoil everything at this late date.

She brushed the rest of my oath aside. "No matter—so you rid me of her. Poison were quicker, but that he would suspect. . . . That must be Eric's signal."

IT WAS a scratching at the door. She opened it. Eric brought Merry in. Merry rushed to me. I held her in my arms. I kissed her again while the Lady Blanche told the plans to Eric. He approved them. I expected Merry to be overjoyed but her eyes were tragic and she shook her golden head. "Too late for me," she murmured, "but for you—" There were still traces of horror on her face, and an indefinable sadness.

"No, darling, together—forever together," I told her.

"Forever together—love will hold us together—one love," she repeated, and clung to me.

"We must go," Eric announced.

The Lady Blanche flung back one of the tapestries, pressed a stone rose, and part of the wall revolved noiselessly. There were stone steps leading down into blackness. "I will go first," she said. "Hold my sleeve and follow, then you—" she nodded at Merry, "then Eric."

When the wall shut behind us we were plunged in darkness. It was tricky descending, but the Lady Blanche was surefooted and knew her way. We went down, down, down, step after step, until at last she said, "There are three more steps. Stay still until I open the secret door."

We obeyed, and a door opened on more blackness. The Lady Blanche led us through a long damp passage, explaining we were under the moat. Then there were more stairs—up, this time, finally through another door, and then clean, pure air upon our faces.

"We are outside of Fotley," Lady Blanche told us when we had the solid earth under our feet. "A little further on are the iron gates, the only way out of Fotley's Torwich keep. Can you get rid of the men, Eric, who guard the gate?"

"There are only two." Eric spoke

slowly. "I can manage. I will go ahead. When you get to the bushes hide until I call that all is well."

He vanished into the night. Merry slipped her arm through mine clinging closely as though for comfort.

The Lady Blanche took my other hand impersonally and tugged me impatiently forward.

"Come," she ordered.

We crept along through the dark. After a while I could see the flares on either side of the gate. When we were quite near the Lady Blanche signalled to stop. We heard Eric say: "That stupid fool went off too quickly too hear all my message. Hurry, Henry, and catch up with him. Bid him give this to his lordship."

We could see him now handing something small to the guard who saluted and went off quickly. Eric waited several minutes, then called softly, "My lady."

The Lady Blanche whistled softly in answer. We moved forward.

Merry whispered, "If anything happens—if I can't go with you—promise not to forget me."

"I couldn't forget you, but nothing's going to happen. In a few minutes we'll be—" I couldn't say any more. We were there. Eric had the gates open—just enough to let us through. I made for them, pulling Merry along until we stood in the opening.

"Thank you both." I held out one hand to the Lady Blanche.

"You must make it appear that we struggled," she said coldly, ignoring my overtures of friendship and standing still while Eric tied her arms as we had planned. "Knock Eric down, and then leave."

I turned toward Eric. "Sorry, old man." I raised my arm, but before I could deliver the blow all hell broke loose.

I HEARD the Duke's great voice roar. "Snare me those traitors," and saw men rush in from everywhere.

Simultaneously, Merry pushed me through the gates as one grabbed hold of her. "Come back a year from tonight," she cried piteously. "Promise—a year from tonight—promise—"

The gates were closing, the man pulling Merry back still further away from me.

"I promise," I called as the gates clanged shut. I was so close they struck me in closing, threw me off balance. I went down in a heap in the road.

"Merry! Merry!" I called.

Somewhere, off in the distance, a cock crowed.

I couldn't hear anything else. I got up. I looked at the gates. They were fastened tight. The flares no longer burned. I could see nothing behind the gates, though it was growing light. I hammered on the iron. I called. I even yelled. But there was no answer, and as it grew lighter there was nothing to see through the iron bars, no men, no sign of life, only green grass and a road overgrown with weeds. I hadn't seen the weeds last night.

A milk wagon drew up beside me. The driver, a cocky young man who looked about sixteen, leaned out. "You're wasting time rattling the gates. There's nobody at Simon's Folly."

"Simon's Folly! Isn't this place called Fotley?" I asked.

He eyed me strangely. "No. Simon's Folly."

"Is the town called Torwich?"

Again he said, "No."

There was a pause, then he questioned, "You're not a stranger here?"

"Yes, I am. Motoring from Florida to join the army. Are you sure there isn't a place called Torwich?"

"It's funny you ask that. This place was called Castle Fotley and it was

brought here by Simon Waslle from an English town called Torwich, stone by stone, wall, castle, moat. Pre-Norman, all of it, and set up here. Simon called it Waslle, but the folks called it Simon's Folly. And it sure was folly. He couldn't live in it."

"Why?" I asked, my heart doing arpeggios.

"Haunted. It seems that way back in the days when knighthood was in flower the Duke of Torwich had a feud with a nearby lord—a guy named Mortimer, who wanted Fotley. Well, Mortimer planted spies in the castle, even his own wife, so the story goes, and on a certain night in October he had them stop up all the windows and pumped a sort of poison gas into the castle. First poison gas killing on record, I guess." The milkman laughed.

I could have killed him, but kept silence, hoping he'd go on.

He did. "He'd brought the secret of the poison back from the East, where he'd journeyed. He told his wife and the other spies to get out after they'd stopped up the windows, but the timing was wrong and they were still in Fotley when he pumped in the deadly fumes. Everyone in Fotley died. Mortimer got his castle, but it didn't do him any good. You see, it was haunted, with a whole castleful of ghosts. And every year on the date of their death, from midnight to dawn, they lived again—went right on as though nothing had happened.

"They got Mortimer on one of those nights. He got away from them through some secret passage, but he never was the same after—Mad Mortimer, they called him.

"Waslle was told all this and a lot of other catastrophes before he bought Fotley. The English are honest, I'll say that for them. He didn't care, though. He laughed at ghosts. Didn't

believe in them. He did, though, before he got through. They drove him out, eventually. He stood it till that pretty New York girl got killed—"

"Was her name Merry Driscoll?" I asked.

His mouth opened wide. "Yes—but how'd you—?"

"I knew her," I said slowly, because my mind was busy with so many things.

"She rode through the gates," he continued. "The horse saw something and shied. Threw her off. She hit her head on a stone—was dead when they found her. She had heard the story. Guess she was curious to see the ghosts."

NOW I knew why the color had drained out of Merry's face—why the horror had come there. She'd known the story. She remembered it, then, and knew she was dead. That explained everything, her sadness, why she'd pushed me through the gates, returned me to life. Why she'd asked me to come back "a year from tonight" so she could see me again—explain—on the one night she would be able to, the one night her bright spirit would be free. Merry! Merry! . . .

"After that old Simon closed up Simon's Folly—padlocked the gates. No one can get in there now, short of dynamite. Nobody wants to, especially in October." He went on for a long time,

but I didn't hear much of it. I was looking at the strong padlock, reflecting that padlocks didn't keep any one out from midnight to dawn on October 24th.

Eventually I got the milkman to tow my car to the town, where I got some gas and put miles between me and Laris—that's the name of the town—Laris—where Simon's Folly is, that was once Castle Fotley of Torwich. That's where I'm asking you to go, Bruce, on October 24th.

I think there's risk for you, but I got away, and you'll be forewarned. So you can take precautions for your safety—that is, if you go. I'll understand if you don't, but I hope, with all my heart, that you will keep my date—that you will find Merry for me.

If you do, tell her I love her with everything I've got and tell her to wait for me. Explain that the way things look now she won't have to wait too long. And I'll find her in the Spirit World if I have to travel all the way from Tokyo.

Tell her I'll get her out of Fotley, and we'll be together somewhere, just like she said—forever. Tell her I think of her by day and dream of her by night. Tell her—tell her—I love her. And I'll be eternally grateful to you, my friend.

Devotedly,

Drake.

ANOTHER "FANTASY DRUG" VICTORY

CHALK up another victory for the wonder sulfa drugs for now we learn that sulfathiazole can help victims of chronic sinus trouble in from three to four weeks. These results were obtained by Dr. Roland F. Marx, eye, ear, nose, and throat specialist, at the University of California Medical School.

Working with patients suffering from maxillary sinusitis, Dr. Marx was able to bring relief to about 75% of them even though their symptoms had existed for an average of ten months. The

sulfathiazole is dropped directly on the maxillary sinuses which are located in the cheek bones. There were no ill effects either generally or locally and results were so good that Dr. Marx suggests that patients give the drug a chance before they try surgery.

According to Dr. Marx, failure of the treatment in about a third of the cases was caused by the presence of abundant chronic inflammatory tissue which lined the sinuses and prevented the drug from getting through.—*Lee Owens.*

fantastic

Facts

By LEE
OWENS

HARNESSING THE WIND

POWER, give us more power, shouts our great war industries and so science comes in to find new sources. We have always known that the wind can be harnessed and put to work, but before the war it was not commercially profitable. Today nothing that can help to win the war can be left idle and the wind is no exception.

According to meteorological surveys, wind generators can be used in about 25% of the United States. As a test of efficiency, a huge wind generator was erected in Vermont. This generator now produces 1000 kilowatts of electricity more than enough to supply a small town of 7500 people. The huge blades measure 175 feet in length and are made out of stainless steel. They rotate at a fixed rate of 28.7 turns each minute.

It is still too early to make any predictions, but results thus far have led some experts to believe that wind power may soon be driving the wheels of industry.

* * *

OFF THE BLACKLIST

REMEMBER not so long ago how doctors were warning us about the evils of nicotine? Well, today scientists are searching for new sources of nicotine in order to produce nicotinic acid, which is a "B" vitamin used to fortify white flour. In fact, the 300,000 pound demand for nicotinic acid to fortify flour has just about exhausted available supplies.

About the only use for nicotine just a short while back was to produce insecticides and even then, there were other substances that were just as good. But today these substances are on the list of war shortages and so we are trying to perfect the nicotine insecticides to take the place of derris and pyrethrum.

Practically all the credit for the discovery of these new uses for nicotine are the result of research conducted by M. J. Copley, R. K. Eskew, and J. J. Willaman of the United States Eastern Regional Research Laboratory in Philadelphia who are trying to increase the industrial uses for tobacco.

FROM FRUIT TO BOMBS

FOR some years the Florida canneries processing the citrus fruit crops were faced with a problem. They had been pressing their citrus pulp and peel waste to produce about 35,000 tons of dried pulp which was sold as feed for cattle and 61,000,000 gallons of juice. The juice constituted the problem for in order to process the pulp and peelings it was necessary to add lime and thus the juice could not be used for human consumption. Not only was the juice unsaleable, but there was no good means of disposing of it.

But for every problem, someone looks for an answer and this time the United States Citrus Products Laboratories of Winter Haven, Florida, came through. They have perfected a process whereby this juice can be converted into 190-proof alcohol which in turn is used to make explosives. It takes about twenty-five gallons of the juice to make one gallon of alcohol, but the cost is still so small that it is cheaper to produce than the alcohol made from blackstrap molasses.

* * *

TIRES THAT RETREAD THEMSELVES

WITH the present rubber shortage and the inability to replace worn out tires, an invention of Edward H. Wallace of Detroit, Michigan, seems too good to be true. His process, covered by patent 2,274,855, consists of putting small quantities of a soluble material into the tread mass of the tire. As the tread begins to wear, the material is set free and dissolves providing the tire with a new "tread" so that it doesn't become smooth. This enables the tire to maintain its gripping powers on the road.

At first Mr. Wallace experimented with starchy materials, but they had to be discarded when he found that upon dissolving these materials became too sticky. Thus instead of preventing skidding, they increased the hazard.

The present method makes use of common salt crystals and the crystals of related compounds. These crystals do the job by dissolving out cleanly and thereby save tires by giving them a new grip on the road.

THE CANNONBALL ROAD

By WALLACE WEST

THE alarm clock snarled. I pawed for the light switch and blinked at the smirking dial. Three twenty-five. Five minutes early. I'd just close my eyes for a second. . . .

"'Member wha' happen' las' ti', Ralph," mumbled a small voice from the other side of the bed. "Be'er ge' tup ri' now."

I swung my lean shanks from under the blankets and fumbled on the icy floor for slippers.

"Fine bersh i nizebox."

"What?" I snapped. "Stop talking Chinese, Sam."

A touseled brown head emerged from the covers and opened one eye.

"I said," the head articulated coldly, "that if you looked with circumspection, you might find a bowl of blueberries in the refrigerator. And don't spill





Barring the rutted road
was a group of men clad in
rags and aiming ancient muskets

**Washington's army needed
the Cannonball Road for victory;
but certainly it could not be vital to
modern war in far-off continental Europe?**

cream all over the floor the way you did last time."

Sam (Samantha to you) is like that. At three-thirty A.M., she wakes up ready to lick her weight in wildcats.

"All right, honey, all right," I purred in my best Major Bowes manner. "Go back to sleep. I'll find them."

I considered a cold shower, but discarded the fantastic idea. Shaving had to be done, though. And finally, there was the perpetual riddle of the refrigerator. The blueberries simply were not there. But I unearthed an orange, brewed some coffee, gulped it along with a slice of bread and jam and stumbled through the melting snow toward the garage.

The car was cold and as cranky as myself, which was a good thing. By the time I cozened it into operation and backed out of the driveway, I was wide enough awake to cope with Mountain Avenue.

Mountain Avenue is one of those roads which prowl the Watchung ridges of New Jersey with a fine disregard for maps and geodetic surveys. It can be met with in Westfield, Scotch Plains, Plainfield and, I think, in Summit, though how it gets to all those places I've never determined. Our stretch of it is practically perpendicular and leads down to Route 22 and 29.

After squealing my precious tires around numerous hairpin turns, I swung left on the four-lane highway to New York, lit a cigarette and began my day (lower case). Fully alive now, I faced the grim reality that, within exactly one hour and five minutes, Eastern War Time, I would be batting out fifteen minutes worth of copy for the 7:45 commentary over radio station WHJ. (An announcer would read it on the air, worse luck, and for his resounding vowels be paid four times as much as the figures on my salary check.)

My head was empty of plans for the script. Of course, I could filch ideas from the Times or Trib, and from the teletyped reports of AP, UP and INS. If those sources failed, I could fall back on "noted military observers" and "reports from usually reliable sources" to explain the day's events. But that seemed a shabby way to treat those tens of thousands—or thousands—or even hundreds of early-rising New Yorkers who might think I knew what I was talking about.

I groaned. Maybe I could "go personal" this morning, like Lowell Thomas and Don Goddard sometimes did when things were dull . . . forget the war news and deal with H.I. stuff: This road, for instance, dark as the inside of Hitler's heart, except for a greasy smear over the distant city which the dimout could not eliminate. Not even a truck in sight, except for that big fellow which loomed up at the roadside, guarded by feebly flickering flares. (Change that! Announcer Benning would tie his tongue in knots pronouncing those three "F's." Make it "lazily smoking flares.") And those abandoned filling stations, with their windows knocked out by children—the dear little animals. I could almost see the ghosts of departed attendants flagging me from beside the swathed gasoline pumps. Yes, I sighed with relief, I would dwell, this cold winter morning, on the changing American scene. Not very inspiring, but a man couldn't keep whooping it up about the war every day. To heck with the war!

I SQUINTED and started easing in on the brakes. A hundred yards ahead a man in uniform stood at the edge of the road, thumbing me down.

"Hi'yah, soldier." I swung the door wide. "Going all the way to New York?"

"Non, m'sieur," he answered as he clambered in. "*Je ne. . .* I mean, I do not believe I would be welcome in New York jus' now. I get out near Westfield."

I glanced at him sharply. That blue and buff uniform . . . that hat! He must be a sailor from the RICHELIEU, on his way to join De Gaulle.

"My name's Graves," I said to make him feel at home as the old fluid drive took hold again.

"*Charmé. I am le marquis de Androuins.*"

The name rang a bell somewhere, but very faintly.

"Are you from the RICHELIEU?" I enunciated carefully.

"From *le cardinal?*" he puzzled. "Oh, non. He is dead long ago."

"From the battleship," I insisted.

For answer he spread his hands helplessly in the dim glow of the dashlight. I tried a new tack:

"How do you stand—that is, what is your opinion about the relative merits of Giraud and De Gaulle as leader of the Fighting French?"

"M'sieur," he answered slowly. "I may as well tell you that I can take no part in your politics. I feel shame on myself for this, but when one is in the midst of a war, one has little time to, how you say, browse around. . . ."

"Well," I gasped, "what does one do in the midst of a war? Crawl into a hole?"

"Sometimes," his voice had a touch of sadness. "One does."

A pacifist, I decided. But in that case, why the uniform?

"One crawls into a small hole," he continued, "and one forgets that past, present and future are one, and that the fate of your De Gaulle and Giraud may have been decided at the battle of Lexington—or may even *decide* the battle of Lexington, *parbleu!*"

I glanced at him sharply. I had often picked up queer characters, but what kind of talk was this for four in the morning? *Le marquis*, however, was sitting serene and detached, his long, aristocratic face looking sane as a rock despite the cocked hat above it.

"Careful, m'sieur," he warned. "It makes a mist."

IT CERTAINLY did, in more ways than one. A sudden morning fog off the Jersey flats had enveloped us. I could barely make out the right hand margin of the highway.

"You must know," he resumed, "that the world we live in is one of probability, rather than of mere cause and effect. All life is as a great door, hinged in the far distant past, and extending through today into the far distant future. And when that door swings through time, all of its swings—not just the part of it which we know."

"Yeh," I humored him. "I read a story about that once. A fellow went back through time and set up a conference between the early Christians, the Jews, the Romans and the Greeks. He got them to make a united front instead of fighting over their various ideas. And when he came back to the present, this old world was a paradise."

"Ah, you make it sound so simple, *mon ami*," sighed the marquis. "But that plan is impossible. I have tried it."

"You don't say?" I threw the car into second for the fog was getting thicker while the road was getting very bumpy.

"Yes," came the smug answer. "The present can never change the past by going back *into* that past and, how you say, pulling a few strings. But the present can change the past by acting in the present, *comprenez vous?* And vice versa."

"No," I grunted. This was getting

beyond my depth.

"Let us take, then, an example. Consider the Conquistadores—Cortez, Balboa, Pizarro and the rest. In your boyhood you were taught that they were great heroes who brought civilization to millions of bloodthirsty Indians. But now your country has developed its Good Neighbor policy with the descendants of those Indians. And, *voilà*, new documents are discover' which show the Conquistadores were bloodthirsty, gold-crazed savages who destroyed great civilizations."

"But. . . ."

He waved me to silence. "Next we shall look at Julius Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon and other dictators. In times of reaction and oppression these men are held up as great heroes. But when democracy gains the upper hand throughout the world, it is found that they were brutal, power-mad scoundrels."

"Yes," I admitted. "But what does that prove—merely that historical research has uncovered facts which had been forgotten or carefully hidden by interested parties. You are confusing history with the interpretation of history."

"And can you separate the two, *mon ami*? Being a journalist, you must know that if you ask four witnesses to describe a fire, a crime or an accident, you will get four different and often conflicting stories. Therefore all past events are only interpretations. And therefore I insist that present events can alter those of the past. I know, *moi*, that if the fascists win your war their historians will prove that Washington really lost the battle of Yorktown, and that the Tories—Loyalists, they'll call them—were the heroes of the American Revolution."

"You're crazy," I snapped, forgetting that, on a lonely road, it is best to

humor madmen. "I never heard such tripe. When a battle's won, it's won, and when it's lost, it's lost forever." Then I brought up something else which bothered me: "You said I was a journalist a moment ago. How did you know that?"

He shrugged: "One who has been a friend of *le comte* de St. Germaine knows many things."

I actually jumped. The Count of St. Germaine! That rang a bell, all right. Sorcerer-scientist extraordinary of the later years of the French empire; rival and perhaps the peer of Cagliostro, St. Germaine, if I remembered rightly, also claimed to be immortal and proved it to the satisfaction of five generations of European notables.

I STOLE a glance at the marquis. He did not seem in the least annoyed by my outburst. Instead he sighed deeply. "I did not expect you to believe, *m'sieur*. I have told the same story many times along this highway in an effort to win aid for the cause which I serve. Either they could not understand at all, or they laughed—or grew angry like you. Even when I made to tell them of how George Washington cut down the cherry tree, they. . . ."

"You mean the chestnut tree," I whooped. "Why, everybody knows that story was invented by a schoolteacher who was trying to keep his pupils from stealing cherries in a neighboring orchard."

"You have of both right and wrong, *M'sieur Graves*. But do not forget that that tale was most popular in the days when Jim Fiske and Vanderbilt and the rest of the robber barons were bleeding America white. It was something for people to cling to, then—the thought that at least the Father of his Country was honest. Later, when public morals improved, the incident sounded false

and was found to be but a fairy tale."

"A clever rationalization," I grinned, "but are you trying to say that the cherry chopping actually happened?"

"*Certainement*. General Washington told me about it himself one night last week."

Just as that whopper came out, the car slid off the peak of that awful road. Rear wheels landed in ruts full of mud and spun wildly. And the motor, which had never failed me before, spluttered and died under the overload.

"Ah, I am sorry, *mon ami*," purred the marquis as we piled out and surveyed the situation. "Perhaps I can find for you a span of oxen."

"Oxen! If you'll just give her a push, I believe I can get her back on the road."

He looked at me haughtily. "A French nobleman does not push her, as you say."

Well, what could I do? "All right," I chuckled. "Lead me to that span of oxen—or better yet, an all-night garage."

Le marquis sloshed off and perforce I followed. We began to climb a stiff grade and immediately I realized what must have happened. Due to the fog and the equally muggy conversation, I had made a left turn onto some country road leading across the Watchungs toward Springfield and Morristown. Heaven knew where we were. The first thing to do was to reach a phone and get somebody to pinch hit for me at writing that commentary.

As though reading my mind the Frenchman murmured:

"Do not be alarmed, M'sieur Graves. I will have you back on your way in no time—in exactly no time at all. Friends of mine are not far from here. But do not make over-much of noise. Cornwallis' men may be on the lookout, also."

"Cornwallis who?" I asked, feeling

stupid—and pretty much bewildered.

"Lord General Cornwallis, of course. He has a strong force stationed at Westfield, about three miles away. But usually his men they are too lazy to go prowling at night."

"Now look here, my friend," I snapped, gripping his arm in the pitch blackness. "Seems to me this joke has gone far enough. I may have written wacky stories in my time, but I don't live them."

"*Non?*" he chuckled. "With me it is the reverse."

"Just what's your game? What are you up to?"

"Game? Up to?" he floundered. "If you mean what work I do—at present, with the help of General Luis Letisane du Portail and the encouragement of *le marquis de Lafayette*, I am training engineers for the United States Army."

HIS words rang true, somehow. And besides, what was the use of arguing, with mud sloshing over my shoe-tops at every step?

"If you know history so well," he continued softly, "you may recall that it was *le marquis des Androuins* who suggested that the outline of the Fortress of Verdun be stamped on the buttons of all engineers' uniforms and that their slogan be "Essayons . . . We will try."

"And what are you essaying now, m'sieur *le marquis*?"

"Simply to keep Cornwallis from capturing Morristown."

"But good Lord, man, if you're on the level you must know that the American Revolution was won more than a hundred and fifty years ago. So why are you risking your noble neck prowling the mountains at this hour?"

"*Simplement* because the Revolution has not been won. Right at the moment it is being lost, *parbleu!* General Washington is at Valley Forge. Con-

gress refuses to pay his ragged remnant of an army. And here, a few score of us struggle to build a road along the top of the mountains which will enable our commander to obtain cannon balls from the last iron mine we hold—the one at Princeton.”

“But . . .”

“No buts. The Redcoats are at Westfield. If they take it into their heads to break through the mountains, our goose, she is cook. And in 1943 your goose, she is cook, also.”

“But confound it, I know. . . .”

Before us a light flared suddenly. It was a torch held by a sentry who wore a ragged blanket instead of a uniform. By his side stood another scarecrow carrying a long rifle.

“Who’s a’comin’ thar?” asked a tired voice.

“Androuins and a friend.”

“Pass.” The rifle dropped, the torch was hidden and the two soldiers crawled back into their makeshift tepee of birch bark.

We entered a small clearing where perhaps a hundred men crouched around smoky fires before the entrances of ragged tents and holes dug in the hillside.

“This camp, and a few others like it, are all that bar the way to the British in their plan to take Morristown, cut northeast and strike at Westchester,” said my guide. “Does it look like a successful revolution?”

“No,” I had to admit as I surveyed those hollow-eyed winter soldiers. Most of them wore no boots but had their feet wrapped in pieces of bloody sacking. Many were naked to the waist and a few, who hovered nearest the fires on this cold winter night were, well, just naked. I felt my flesh crawl at the horror of the scene.

“We need help,” sighed the nobleman, “need it bad if we are to hold out

until my countrymen can come to give help. Tom Paine was here yesterday, trying to cheer up the men by reading to them from ‘Common Sense’ and ‘The Crisis’. But they were too hungry to listen. In the night they drift away by twos and threes. Soon there will be no troops left here and the path to the Cannonball Road and to Morristown will be open. That’s why I brought you.” There were actually tears in his pale blue eyes.

“But, man, what can I do?” Then with mounting enthusiasm: “Maybe I could wangle a plane and a few machine guns from the government. They would be enough to . . .”

ANDROUINS shook his head: “That won’t work. I’ve tried it. You see, my friend, one must remember that your machines are built in four dimensions—length, breadth, height, and time. When they are brought here their time dimension is, how you say, twisted. The guns jam. The motors stall, just as did that of your automobile . . . Look at your watch.”

I did. It had stopped, pointing to 4:05.

“For a time I thought of making modern weapons here. But our workmen do not have the skill or the tools. They could not make a tommygun, though they worked forever.”

“Yet there must be something . . .”

“Perhaps.” He spread his long, slim hands. “This I know. When things go really well in your time, they go well with us here. When the Axis is winning, we also lose battles . . . in 1777.”

“But look, sir. The Axis is losing on every front now, and yet you’re in trouble.”

“Perhaps . . . I do not know for certain . . . that is because you think you have already defeated Germany and Japan and are, how you say, resting on

your oars. You may be gloating over Mussolini's downfall and yet slackening your war production or allowing quarrels to grow among the United Nations or among your own people. Perhaps, while your races they riot and your factories lag in making the planes and guns, the Germans and the Japanese they are planning a big coup. That might explain why my soldiers do not rail at Congress any more, why they do not even want to get drunk. It is as though they turn to ghosts before my eyes. Consider you:"

He turned to one of the crouching men near the main camp fire and said with a great show of cheerfulness:

"How it goes, Tom? What work was done on the road today?"

"Meat," snarled Tom, who wore the remnants of a deerskin coat and nothing much else. "No meat in this cursed camp for ten days yet ye dare ask me about the road." And Tom turned back to gnawing a turnip which he held like an animal in his frostbitten hands.

The marquis walked over to another haggard man in black who was rocking back and forth before his own little fire, mumbling what might have been a hymn tune. Beside him, thin hands clasped in her lap, sat a girl who would have been beautiful had her face not been drawn with hunger and suffering.

"Reverend and Miss Caldwell," he said with a low bow, "this is *mon ami*, Ralph Graves, who has come to help us."

The pair glanced up dully, showing not the slightest interest, even in my strange clothing.

"Did any wagons pass over the Cannonball today, padre?"

"None, sir," muttered the preacher. "There's a bridge out, somewhere below, they say." He rubbed a weary hand over bloodshot eyes.

"Was a detail sent to repair it?"

"The men refused to go, sir. Said they were too weak."

"Did any food arrive?"

"Bill Jones shot a couple of rabbits. But the foragers came back empty-handed. The people in the valley have all turned Tory. And, God help them, our men shot a spy who came into camp disguised as a peddler and tried to get them to desert. I begged them to wait for your return so there could be a regular court martial, but they said such varmints weren't entitled to trial." The minister buried his face in his hands and wept.

"Strange," said Androuins as we walked away. "Reverend Caldwell's wife was shot to death by the Hessians a few days ago. His daughter was terribly mistreated. You'd think he would lust for their blood. But he is a true Christian. I have made him our chaplain."

WE NEXT approached several soldiers who were roasting a few miserable pieces of rabbit skewered on the tips of their bayonets. In his strange English, the marquis tongue-lashed them for ruining their weapons in that way. They shrugged and went ahead. Discipline was at the vanishing point.

But when he introduced me and explained that my "buggy" was stuck in the mud and needed a push, several of the Continentals groaned and rose reluctantly. Their frontier code required that they help a stranger in distress. Cursing under their breaths, they clumped after us toward the road. Once a man fell from weakness and had to be helped back to his feet.

Their combined strength could hardly have equaled my own. But somehow, gasping and panting, they managed to push the car back onto solid ground. And all the while the marquis stood aside to give directions, unconscious of

the figure he cut.

When it was done I fished in my pocket and found some quarters and half dollars I had been saving for tunnel fare. My paper money would be as valueless to them as their own worthless "continentals," I knew. But perhaps the silver could pass for shillings and half crowns and buy some food from grasping farmers.

"Here, friends," I tried to say casually. "Have a drink on me." They fingered the coins like misers as they muttered their thanks.

"Turn right at the first crossing," bowed the marquis, "and left at the second. That will put you on the highway. And if you can think up a way to help us, General Washington, *le marquis* de Lafayette and I will be eternally, *oui*, eternally grateful."

"But what can I do? I am only a writer—and not a very good one at that. If I were Tom Paine, maybe . . ."

He placed his hand on my arm: "Remember always that both our times are at a crossroads, *mon ami*. I cannot tell you what to do. I do not know: But perhaps the right word, spoken at just the right time, will be enough to turn the tide. Adieu."

He bowed grandly once more. Then, as I switched on my lights, babied the reluctant motor into action on three cylinders and threw the car into gear, I got my first real reaction from the Continentals. They yelled in terror. Several of them bolted. But one—I think it was Tom, the turnip-eater, paused long enough to send a bullet whining through this thing of witchcraft.

I found the right hand turn in the muddy trail, started to take it, then had a better thought. At the risk of stalling again, I stopped, broke off some branches from nearby trees and, for some reason I hardly understood, laid them carefully in the middle of the road so that

they marked the turn. A few hundred yards farther on I reached the wet gleam of 22-29. And there again I marked the spot carefully. Also I set the trip indicator on my speedometer and glanced at the clock on the dash. It was still pointing at 4:05. As promised, my excursion had taken no time at all.

As the motor began hitting on all six, I tooted over the empty, dead-and-forgotten highway toward New York. I kept turning around in my mind the things I had seen. And the question of how I could help still be-deviled me as I crept through the Holland Tunnel, up along the feebly-lighted West Side Highway and the even darker mid-town cross streets until I parked outside the skyscraper headquarters of ABC.

It must be, I reasoned, that the marquis had stopped me because he thought I could say something in my commentary which would . . . But what could I say? Review the news of the war, as usual, with a few stories of personal heroism thrown in to enliven the hodge-podge? That wouldn't be enough this morning.

IN THE stuffy, blacked-out office of ABC at last, I continued to wrestle with the problem, writing lead after lead; crumpling each yellow sheet into the wastebasket. And the sweeping second hands of the ten clocks, which marked the time in as many great cities of the world, kept reminding me that there were fewer and fewer seconds in which to type two hundred and twenty lines of copy. Now if I were Tom Paine. . . .

Almost automatically, my fingers began tapping out the opening lines of "The Crisis:" "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis. . . ."

After that it was easy. The pages of

copy rolled out one after another. I failed to greet other sleepy-eyed members of the early morning shift as they reported for duty. I ignored the office boy when he asked if I wanted my usual morning coffee and cruller. Instead I cut in behind the news of the morning as reported over ABC's battery of teletypes. I wrote, not of victories, but of the danger of complacency and overconfidence in times when all seemed to be going well. I lashed the native fascists who were inciting riots and racial discrimination. I warned of the danger from those at home and abroad who tried to create distrust among the United Nations.

As though the mantle of Paine himself were on me, I begged for unity in building a post-war world fit for free men to live in. At the end I described the little encampment in the Watchungs and tried to drive home the idea that we Americans of today were fighting for those ragged soldiers, as well as for ourselves and our children . . . and that they still fought for us.

I was writing 'way over my head, I realized . . . writing much better than I ever had done before.

When I finished the New York clock pointed to 7:40. A moment later Announcer Benning galloped in, glanced hurriedly at the opening sentences of the script and ducked into the studio, as he always did, just one jump ahead of the "on the air" signal.

"What's eatin' you, Graves?" asked Frank Downs, who was sitting in the slot, writing the eight o'clock news, as I grabbed a pair of headphones and prepared to listen in to my brain child. "You seen a ghost?"

"Several," I tried to grin as I waved him to silence.

Benning, the stumblebum, began as usual by fluffing three words in the first five lines. Then the meaning of what

he was reading seemed to hit him, for once. He continued like an angel. And when he came out of the studio, his eyes were shining. "Boy," he yelled, "that's the kind of stuff I like to get my teeth in. Wow! What a broadcast. Congratulations, Ralph. PM sure will pick us up." And he fled toward his next air assignment.

I HEARD a door open and turned with sinking stomach. Tarlington, the ABC news editor, was emerging from his office. Now what the devil was he doing here at this hour? Undoubtedly he had been listening, too.

"Nice rabble-rouser you wrote this morning, Graves." His black eyes were glittering, not shining. "But don't you think it was a little too much of a good thing for Benning? His forte is straight news, funny stories and tear-jerkers, you know. And," he continued, warming to the subject, "how many times do I have to tell you fellows that this is *not* an editorial room? It's a news room. Let the other networks produce 'Open Letters to the Nation' and stuff like that. ABC is here to report news, NEWS! Who do you think you are, anyway? Major Fielding Eliot?"

The phone rang. I answered it to stay that flood of words.

"Lo," gulped a small voice. "Is this station WHJ? Yeh? Well, I want to tell you how swell that 7:45 broadcast was. I . . . well I'm a welder out at the Navy Yard. I ain't feelin' so good and was goin' to lay off today. But, well, if things are the way you say, I'll get on the job right away. I . . ."

"Wait a minute," I broke in. "The head of the news room is standing right here. You tell all that to him."

Another phone rang. Downs stopped collecting teletype stuff for the nine o'clock to answer it. "Yeh," I heard him drawl. "Glad you liked it. What's

tnat? You wanted it repeated this afternoon so that members of the board can hear it? Weelll, I'll let you talk to the boss about that."

A third bell tinkled. And a fourth. Phones were ringing all over the place. In fact, I seemed to have rung the bell as few people had done since Orson Welles' Martians prowled the Watchings and scared the eastern seaboard out of a year's growth. The good old American public was reacting enthusiastically to my—or was it *my*—appeal. Catching the beatific expression on Tarlington's square mug, I let the bells toll and ducked out for breakfast.

At noon I started home, with a note of praise from an ABC vice-president in my pocket, leaving behind me a controversy which had hit the first pages of the afternoon papers. I was so excited that I almost forgot to look at the speedometer when I climbed into the car. But I *did* look. The trip indicator said 22.5 miles.

I re-traced my morning route carefully for the same distance. Then I braked to a stop and ruefully surveyed an unbroken stretch of Jersey woodland to my right. There was no road!

Getting out, I walked up and down the highway until at last I found it—the branch I had broken off that morning and placed so that it would point a way into the past. It lay just to the right of a long, low mound. Despite its covering of grass and weeds, that mound showed unmistakably that it was the remnant of breastworks used in some old battle.

I wheeled the car off the concrete and drove over the branch straight at the woods. Perhaps the sunlight flickered for a moment. I'm not sure. But where the foot-thick trees had stood, there now was only farmland sweeping up toward the mountains. My tires squished into the same ruts they had

made ten hours before and my motor developed asthma. A few white farmhouses dotted the countryside, but of the broad highway I had just left there was not a trace to be seen.

Finding the second marker was simple, as was location of the spot where the Continentals had pushed me out of the mud. Leaving the car there, I started up the hill on foot. But I had not gone far when the distant barking of an order made me look over my shoulder.

Half a mile away, advancing over the stubby field in close and perfect formation, like a collection of lead soldiers on a carpet, came several companies of Cornwallis' best. The attack upon Morristown which the marquis had feared, seemed to be starting.

I **SPRINTED** for the forest which lay, dark and forbidding along the flanks of the hills. Not a shot was fired after me. Sniping, apparently, was beneath the dignity of the English.

As I scuttled into the timber, however, a long arm reached out from behind a tree and collared me.

"Not so fast, stranger," snapped a harsh voice. "Who be ye?"

"I'm looking for the Marquis des Androuins." I squirmed impotently in that grip of steel.

"Oh, ye be that feller whose devil buggy I pushed out of the mud last night," grunted my captor. "I dunno . . ." He fingered a bowie knife at his belt. And only the appearance of the marquis saved me from dying more than a century before my time.

"None of that, Tom," snapped the engineer-commander. "M'sieur Graves, he is friend. Bend your eyes on those Redcoats. But don't fire until you can see the whites of theirs."

Turning to me, he added: "I hoped you had of the vision to find your way

back. And I know not what you did in the twentieth century, but the results, they are of abundance. A food train broke through from Princeton, so we have eaten. And a runner, he came from Philadelphia with news that Congress has appropriated money to pay the army. My men, they are as of new." He waved proudly toward the forest which, I now saw, was bristling with rifles and muskets.

"The stuff I wrote seems to have pepped up the Britishers, too."

"Pepped up? Oh, no. This attack, she has been preparing for long. Had she come yesterday we would have been *fini*. Now, I do not think so, perhaps."

Peering about in the half-darkness, I found it hard to share his optimism. Oh, yes, I had read about the deadliness of the long rifles of the backwoodsmen. And the effectiveness of guerrilla tactics could not be denied. But still that picturesque scarlet column, moving forward across the valley to the tune of fife and drum, looked plenty formidable to an armchair strategist.

"I know of what you think, M'sieur Graves," smiled the marquis. "But be of such kindness as to remember the slogan I have chosen for the army engineers. 'Essayons!'"

By now the enemy were so close that it seemed they meant to march straight into the tree trunks. How far *could* one see the whites of a man's eyes?

Almost at once I found out. Our first ragged volley sowed death and destruction in the parading ranks below. Redcoats fell like ripe poppies to lie screaming and kicking in the mud. One more volley, and . . .

But there was no second volley from the Continentals. Glancing to my right, I understood why. Tom, the lanky fellow who had grabbed me, was laboring with ramrod, powder and ball to reload. His hands moved like light-

ning, but . . .

"Fix bayonets! On the douuuble! Charge!"

That order was shouted by a faultlessly uniformed captain whose beardless face was surmounted by a white, foot-tall shakko. Immediately the woods swarmed with red and yellow uniforms. I ran like a rabbit. There were a few more shots from our side.

Then my companions turned tail also, without waiting for orders.

As I ran, I found myself crying for the first time in my adult life. For the lack of a single tommygun or a few hand grenades the battle was being lost . . . lost . . . lost! And just possibly the battle for Europe was being lost with it up in that strange, unreal epoch of nineteen forty-three.

LIKE Lot's wife, I could not resist looking back. My foot caught in a root and I sprawled on my face, the breath knocked out of me. As I rolled over, a giant Hessian sprang at me. He lifted his bayonet for the kill, a grin on his doughy face. Before the knife descended, a rifle cracked and Fritz crumpled at my feet.

"Hey," yelled my lanky friend as he busied himself with his ramrod once more. "Be ye foolish? Run for the camp."

Rifles were cracking all about me again as I scrambled to my feet. The attackers were falling right and left. But still they came on, incredibly maintaining their line despite the trees. And still they withheld their fire, intent on driving us into some clearing where they could exterminate us.

That clearing—the one which contained our miserable camp, soon loomed ahead.

"To the left, city feller," whooped Tom, grabbing me again. We managed to keep to the trees somehow, but our

pursuers did not. They marched straight on, to come face to face with a battery of three small cannon. Two soldiers, matches in hand, bent over the nearest guns. The third cannon was manned by none other than Caldwell.

"Fire!" screamed the minister, "for the glory of God and the damnation of all Hessians." The guns belched flame and grapeshot and "the thin red line of heroes" now found it their turn to break and run . . . as many as still could run.

"That settles it, I calc'late," grinned Tom, wiping his face with the tail of his shirt.

But Tom was wrong. Somehow the enemy had managed to drag several field pieces after them and soon a well-aimed fire dismounted our pitiful weapons and sent us scampering through the woods once more toward the crest of the range.

But this time the marquis managed to keep his men in hand. From every tree, from every clump of bushes, unseen rifles kept cracking. True, the Redcoats came on; but now they began to falter. Once Tom pointed out the young British captain belaboring his men with the flat of his sword to make them advance.

"That red squirrel is my meat, even at two hundred yards," whispered the backwoodsmen. He cuddled his rifle to his cheek, took careful aim and sent the officer and his tall hat rolling in the mud.

On our side, Androuins and Caldwell were everywhere. The minister was thundering out hymn tunes when he wasn't wielding a borrowed rifle. The Frenchman alternately patted his men on the back, praised and cursed them in his wonderful English, and threatened at any moment to kiss outstanding fighters on both cheeks.

"Do not let *les Anglais* reach the Cannonball Road," he pleaded over and

over. "They must not even learn of it, else Cornwallis will send his whole army to break it. Hold them, *mes amis, pour le gloire, pour la patrie.*"

"Hey, Bill," yelled Tom, after the battle had lasted for an hour or more. "Ye got any waddin' left?"

"Only a mite," answered a bush at my right.

"Toss me a piece. I've run out."

A small wad of cotton flew through the air and landed at our feet. Tom rammed it down on top of his powder and fired once more.

But now other disembodied voices took up the refrain. "Waddin'. Waddin'. Who's got some waddin'?" And the answers were few.

THE firing from our side dwindled and soon we were running again. A few more yards up the hill and we broke into another clearing. This one contained a deserted settlement of perhaps half a dozen log cabins. And in the center rose a small white church. As we approached I made out Miss Caldwell, kneeling, white-faced, on the church steps, praying for our victory.

The marquis and the minister were doing their best to rally the Americans. But to little avail.

"No meat, no pay and now no waddin'," shouted Bill, a great hulking fellow in a pair of pants and nothing else. "We got thirteen kings 'stead of one. I'm fed up. To hell with this war."

The minister's gaunt face went white. "Do not blaspheme," he thundered. Then, in a lower tone: "What is it ye lack?"

"Waddin' for the guns," shrieked Bill. "Without it we're like sheep in a slaughter pen."

The preacher rubbed his long chin. "Would paper do?" he finally asked.

"Of course, man. But where is paper in this wilderness?"

For answer, Caldwell leaped up the church steps, placed his broad, skinny shoulder against the door and pushed mightily. The portal splintered and he sprang inside.

Moments later he staggered out, his arms full of books. "Here ye be, boys," he shouted, hurling the volumes in all directions. "If ye don't have wads, boys, give 'em Watts! Give 'em Watts."

As the Continentals began ripping leaves from the books and ramming them into the muzzles of their flintlocks, I picked up one which had fallen near me. It was Watts' Hymnbook!

That called for a song, so I lifted my voice in "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition." And it was to that tune that we reformed and in the next three hours chased the enemy all the way to the outskirts of Westfield. For the time, at least, the Cannonball Road and Washington's headquarters at Morristown were safe.

After the celebration was over—meat might be non-existent, but there was plenty of hard cider in our ruined camp—Androuins' men escorted me to my "devil buggy" and bade me a tearful farewell. Then the worst happened. The marquis reverted to type and kissed me wetly on both cheeks!

Looking back, just before the time flicker blacked out that little bloody

band of winter soldiers, I saw the Frenchman stoop and pick up the branches which I had used to find my way into the past. Although I understood from that that my work was done, it made my throat hurt to realize that now I could never return. . . .

SAM was waiting for me as usual when I pulled into the garage at 1:15.

"Hello," she grinned. "On time as usual. Have a busy day?"

"Sort of." I kissed her funny nose.

"Oh, look," she cried. "What happened to your windshield?"

"A stone, I guess. A passing car must have flipped it at me off the road."

"Two stones, you mean." She lifted one eyebrow as she always does when she catches me in a lie. "There's a hole through the rear window, too."

"Uh, say, Sam." I tried to change an uncomfortable subject. "You ever heard of the Cannonball Road?"

"Sure." (My wife and I know most everything.) "It runs along the top of the ridge back of our farm. They say Washington built it during the Revolution. Why?"

"Well, let's pack a picnic lunch and walk up there this afternoon. I want to look it over. And besides, I've got a story to tell you."

This was the story.

FARMING FISH

MANY cotton fields in the South have become so worked out that it is no longer profitable to grow any land crops and yet the owners cannot afford to let the land remain idle and unproductive.

Drs. H. S. Swingle and E. U. Smith of the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station in Auburn, Ala., have devised a plan to save the day. Their plan is to turn the land into buge, shallow ponds and raise fish. A low dam is built around the field and water from one of the nearby creeks is diverted long enough to form the ponds, which are stocked with bass, catfish, bream, and

several other types.

Fertilizers that were formerly used to enrich the soil now provide the food for the fish. The fertilizer produces a growth of microscopic water plants which are eaten by microscopic animals. These, in turn, are eaten by the fish. Yields as high as 600 pounds of fish per acre have been reported and the cost to the farmer runs around five cents per pound.

The production of fish has done much to save the farms of many a Southern farmer who finds a ready market for his "crop" because of meat shortages.—J. Nelson.

TAGGART'S TERRIBLE TURBAN

By DON WILCOX

***What mystery and terror could there
be in a mere turban that
could send its wearers into strange antics?***

WHEN Joe and I left the ranch and came to the big city with our guitars, I knew we were in for excitement—but I never reckoned it would hit so quick.

Here it came this first night in the concert hall, we sitting in the third row alongside our playboy pal, Walter Montzingo.

Constanza was singing again, thrilling some terrible high notes, the kind only a highbrow concert will stand for. The old dame could yodel, all right, you had to give her credit.

But was she mad! Everyone in the house knew it. She was sore about that flashy turban on her head.

"I've got a five," Joe whispered to me, "that says she won't wear it to the end of the show."

This was her third song. For the first one she'd worn it; the second, she hadn't; and now she'd come back with it on again. But it didn't agree with her; you could tell that by the way she made faces.

There was something mighty lively about that turban when you stopped to look at it—a sort of sparkly, wavy ef-

fect like a Christmas tree at a New Year's party.

"It's slippin' round on her head," Joe whispered.

Someone in front of us pointed at it, and all at once Constanza flew off the handle. She was singing, "O-le-la! O-le-la! O-le-la!" and the flute was going "Woo-wee-wa" keeping right along with her, when suddenly she yelled out.

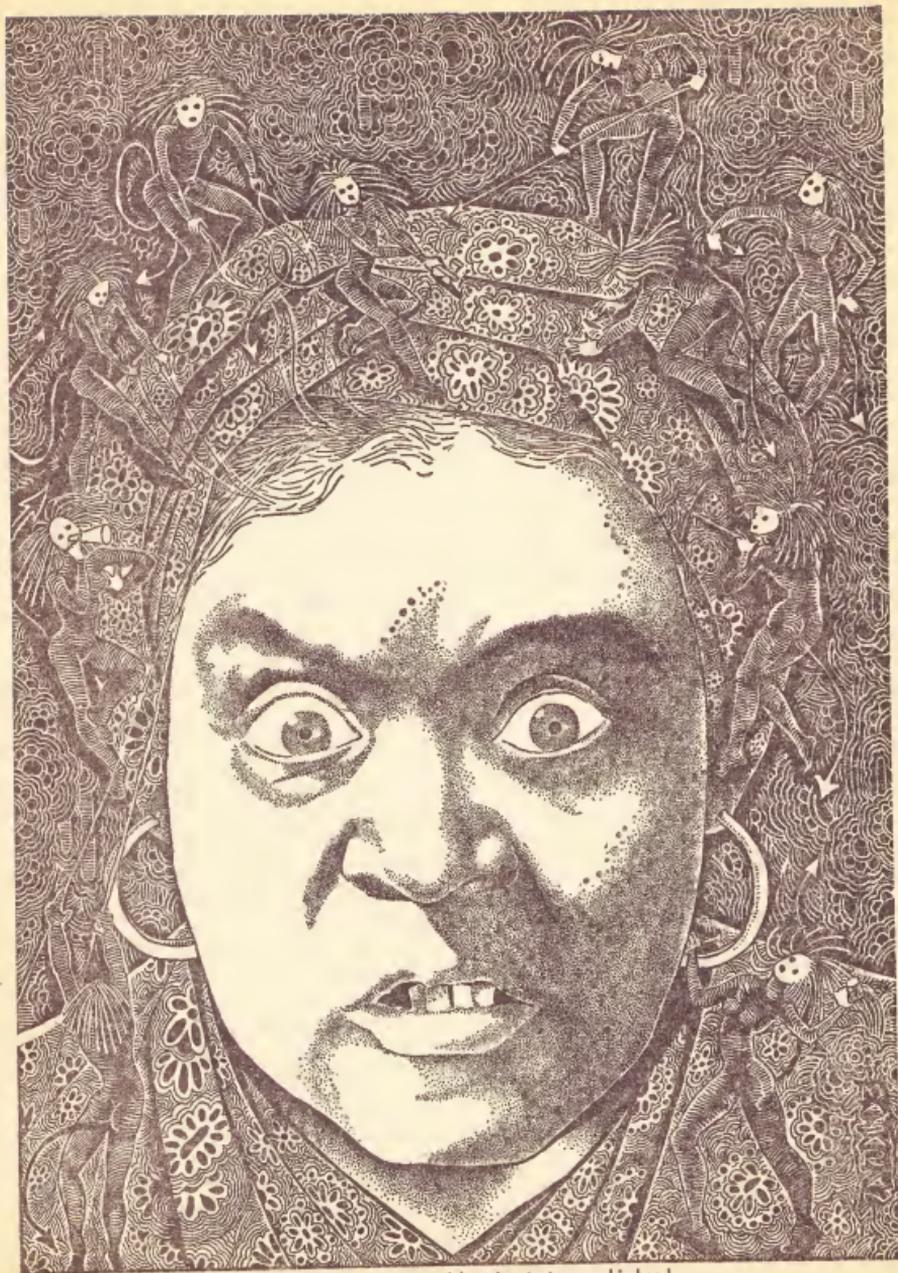
"Yeeeeeeek!"

She snatched the turban off her head and threw it. A gasp went over the house that might have bent the walls in. That turban sailed right over the front row, and you'd have thought the Yankees had knocked a foul into the grandstand the way we jumped for it.

Joe jumped clear off his seat. His long arms and skinny fingers pulled it down.

A ripple of laughter went through the audience, and then, by jingo, the house quieted down and Constanza coasted through the rest of her song like a freight train on a down grade.

Joe chucked the shiny turban inside his coat, so the folks who craned around at him couldn't see anything, and Joe



Vicious imps seemed heaping torture on his head . . .

can look as innocent as a hungry calf.

But the darned thing must have had a pin in it or something. Joe began to scratch.

"It tickles," he whispered.

Walter Montzingo, this rich play-boy who had brought us here, nudged me and pointed to something at the bottom of the printed program:

Costumes by Taggart

Between numbers he muttered. "That's the cheapest publicity stunt they've ever pulled. Let's get out of here. Ten to one Taggart will have camera men lined up for pictures, and tomorrow he'll sell two thousand turbans."

Maybe Montzingo knew what he was talking about. We tried to sneak out, but a little crowd at the door had seen everything. They followed us out to the street, and three or four photographers were among them.

"Give us a look, big boy!" they yelled. "Hold the turban up!" "Pretend you're catching it out of the air!" "Let's have a close-up—"

Smack! Joe lost his temper all at once. He'd had enough. He was too flabbergasted to say anything, so he showed them with his fists. Two reporters and a camera man nibbled the concrete. And those long skinny arms of his were still whipping up a breeze when some big men in blue uniforms led him away.

"I'll see you in jail, Steve," Joe yelled. "Bring my guitar when you come."

IF YOU ever get jailed in this city, it's a good idea to know Walter Montzingo, because he knows the right people to get you out. But don't depend on any help before morning. Monty's influential friends are either awful sound sleepers or they all go to night clubs. Come one o'clock, Monty tossed the telephone book back in the slot,

mopped his forehead, and said it was time to quit and get some sleep.

"Your pal is in for the night, Steve," he said, leading the way to the bar.

"Just so he's safe," I said. "If they'll keep him back of stout bars so he won't go picking fights with the cops—"

"Does he have such a mean disposition?"

"He's a reformed horse thief," I said. "I taught him to play the guitar to keep him out of trouble. But he still believes it's every man's right to steal horses—and to fight."

"Better take his guitar to him," said Monty. "I want him to be peaceable. If we can turn this deal into useful publicity, okay. I want you boys to do a special radio program this next week, and you'll need a good press."

"A press and a shine," I said. "And we'll get our spurs polished."

"I'm talking about the news press," said Monty. "If the critics like you, I'm going to keep you. You and Joe. At my expense."

"Wouldn't it be cheaper just to leave Joe in jail? He's an awful hearty eater."

"You and Joe are my big gamble. Your cowboy music is solid and I've got a bet that I'll have you lined up for a concert at the Hall of Arts before the season's over. You two can do it if you'll work with me."

"You can call the tunes, Monty. We'll sing 'em."

"That's the talk. You put that over with your long-legged pal and we'll get back in the groove." Monty downed his drink and paid the bill.

It was two o'clock by the time I got into the jail with Joe's guitar. One cop was dozing over a crossword puzzle, and another farther down the corridor was snoring gently in a tilted-back chair. According to the cell numbers Joe was parked right around the next corner, I

figured.

My figuring was busted in on by a voice that made me jerk my hands up in the air.

"Keep 'em up, Mister."

But the voice wasn't meant for me. It came from around the corner. A nice little girl's voice, and I thinks to myself, Oh-oh, so this is the kind of bandits they have in the city.

I HADN'T even been seen, but I acted on a hunch and draped myself on the floor, rested my head back on the guitar, and closed my eyes as if I was just a part of the jail scenery. It made me feel safer about listening in on this bandit act.

"Now, Mister," the girl around the corner said, "fork over that turban."

Joe's voice sounded in an uneasy mutter. "Darned glad to get rid of the thing. Feels like a prickly pear inside my coat doin' an' old-fashioned hoe-down. Are you sure you want it?"

"Without any monkeyshines. This gun's nervous."

"It oughta be plumb scairt with all these cops around. A good-lookin' gal like you shouldn't be totin' a gun," said Joe, in a slow, sugary drawl. I squinted one eye open, knowing this gal must be an awful good-looker or Joe would never talk in that tone. Joe never figured himself to be much of a ladies' man. He said, very sweet-like, "Before I give you this turban—what you gonna do with it?"

"I've got to have it—to square myself. My boss thinks I made it wrong. But I didn't know about those little creatures—"

"Creatures? What kind of creatures?"

"Haven't you *seen* them?"

"I don't getcha," said Joe. "You mean this turban is full of fleas? Is that why old lady Constanza—"

"Not fleas. Something much bigger. As big as tadpoles—but you wouldn't understand. Here, give it to me."

"You take the turban and the tadpoles," said Joe, "and I'll take the artillery."

I heard the girl gasp. "Why, you—"

"Sssh! You better trot on home,"

Joe warned. "There might be a sleep-walker among these cops."

The girl's footsteps clattered angrily around my corner. She gave a little jump of surprise and hurried past me, and my eyes snapped open for a good look. No kidding, that gal was a good-looker, with the kind of face and figure that do well at bathing beauty contests, and with a lot of fluffy yellow hair that bounced against her shoulders as she walked.

I rounded the corner and leaned the guitar against the bars.

"Hi, Joe," I said. "Hi and so long."

"Come back here," Joe barked.

"Haven't time," I said. "I've got a date with a gal bandit."

"I've seen her before," said Joe.

"That made me stop and turn back for a minute, because I thought the very same thing.

"Do you know where we saw her?"

"Sure. She runs the elevator in the Hall of Arts. She's the one that took you and Monty and me up to see about getting a studio to practice in."

Joe was right, and I must admit I was surprised at his good memory, because I had thought this big city had him so dazzled he didn't know from which side to mount a street car. Now I saw that he was as clever at remembering faces as he was at stealing horses.

"What do you think she wanted with that turban, Joe?"

"I think her boss must have sent her here after it," Joe said. He scratched his ribs. "I wonder if any of those tad-

poles got into my clothes."

"Tadpoles don't live in turbans," I said. "You shouldn't have let that thing go. We could have made a couple swell neckerchieves out of it. It's ours by right."

"It was mine," said Joe, "and I gave it to her. Come back here. Where you goin'?"

"I figure I'll find out what happens to that thing," I said. "Stay right where you are, Joe. Play yourself a lullaby, and Monty will spring you tomorrow. So long."

CHAPTER II

A Night of Moon Street

MY TAXI closed in on the big blue limousine, and a stop-light put me right alongside. The couple in the back seat of the limousine didn't notice me because they were busy unwinding the turban and inspecting it under the dome light.

I could almost hear what they were saying; it was plain this pretty yellow-haired elevator girl was scared over what she'd been made to do. The fellow was a heavy-jowled old cuss with a partly bald head, surrounded by a bank of blue-black hair as thick as mud. He was built like an ox, with an oversize neck that melted into massive shoulders, and his starched collar and dress suit didn't keep him from looking like a second cousin to a gorilla. A sort of Japanese gorilla, with high-powered executive manners.

Was this her boss, I wondered. He was pretty hard-boiled about the turban incident, it seemed, and this led me to suspect he had some connection with the Taggart Costumers who had furnished the costumes for the concert.

He passed the bright colored goods across the light and frowned at it.

"I don't see a thing," he growled. "It looks all clear to me."

"Then she can't blame us, can she, Mr. Taggart? It was just her imagination."

"They got away," he said.

The traffic light changed and his chauffeur called back, "Straight ahead, Mr. Taggart?"

I slipped a bill to my taxi driver, and he got the idea. On the next six stop-lights he moved up beside the blue limousine so close that I could have autographed Taggart's bald head. I'd catch a few words of their conversation, then off we'd go—and the traffic through these business blocks was still thick enough at this hour of the night that they didn't notice us.

"That fellow Taggart must like these four blocks," said my taxi driver. "This is the third time around."

The rectangle we kept driving around took in one block of the skyline buildings facing the park and ran in four blocks deep, through the heart of the business district. Certain landmarks were getting as familiar as the old coral gate back home. Facing the park from Park Avenue and Moon Street was the Taggart Building, twenty-two stories of it, with more ornaments up the facade than a Japanese temple. At the street level and upward to the height of two or three stories, the front was lighted with parallel lines of colored neons that followed the curve of the pagoda-shaped entrances and windows. All this fancy Oriental architecture was more conspicuous than beautiful.

You might have thought that a place of this sort would have earned a few brickbats in the Second World War. However, it was all quite new and may have been built in the five years since the war ended. Even so, it seemed to me a pretty nervy idea of Taggart to

use so much Japanese architecture, and I spoke to my taxi driver about it.

"Taggart has lots of money," he said.

"What's his nationality? Is he an American?"

"Naturalized—but who knows? . . .

Yes, he's lived here in the city for a long time. Got his start as an Oriental importer, I've heard. It's hard to say how much he's worth today."

With this sidelight I studied the face of this man Taggart with new interest each time a stoplight or a Slow sign brought my taxi abreast. There was something doggoned strange about a man's spending the night this way, driving in round and round, quarreling or arguing with this pretty girl, who seemed obliged to sit there in the car with him and listen.

ONCE, as we approached the colored neons of Moon and Park Avenue, he was trying to hug her. That was when I told my driver to stop and let me transfer—but I changed my mind just then, because something she said (which I couldn't hear) made him behave himself. He sat back in his corner like a sullen child.

Each time we passed the corner of Moon and Park he looked back at his building and kept looking all the way down the block. There were other buildings—why didn't he look at them?

There was, for example, the Hall of Arts.

It was a long, low, greystone building, only twelve or fourteen stories high at the domed towers at either end and as wide as some of your modern state capital buildings.

The Hall of Arts faced Park Avenue and offered one of the most impressive facades along the skyline drive. Here in the deep of the night it was rather gloomy looking, because there weren't more than a dozen of its hundreds of

windows lighted. But there were all-night floodlights on the big bronze statues of armored knights that guarded the arched entrances at each end.

Again I called on my taxi driver for information.

"As long as they were spreading this Hall of Arts over such a wide area, why didn't they fill out the whole length of the block with it?"

"It's a long block," said my driver. "Besides, this Taggart Building was already there on the corner. When it came to finding room for the Hall of Arts they couldn't buy up more than three-fourths of the block. Ever hear of Mr. Bondpopper?"

"Who might Mr. Bondpopper be?"

"One of the richest ginks in the country. Fat and white-haired and always laughing. He gives his money away right and left. He's one of the biggest contributors to these operas and art shows. They say he tried to buy out this corner of Taggart's, but there was some sort of hitch."

"You can't blame Taggart," I said, "for hanging onto a corner like Moon and Park."

"That's what I say," said the driver. "There's only so much space on Moon Street. There's only so much on Park Street. Taggart's properties run west on Moon from the corner, and he wants more."

"Does he own many buildings along these four west blocks?"

"I couldn't say how many," said the driver. "If I knew real estate I wouldn't be coaxin' this taxi along. He owns scads of property, I've heard. But he's like everyone else—they all want more. Mr. Bondpopper would like more space along the front, here—" he pointed south down the Park Avenue skyline. "And there's Montzingo who would like to buy up more front footage up the street to the north. Of course,

everything east of us belongs to the city. It's park all the way to the waterfront."

"Montzingo?" I asked. "Is that the bachelor millionaire?"

"Uh-huh—Walter. He was an All-American fullback. Now he's big business all right, but he doesn't take himself as serious as some of these other big shots. Too busy playing around."

"I know Monty," I said. "He's the fellow who brought my pal Joe and me to the city. Hey! Watch it there!"

The driver did a skillful maneuver to nose out three other taxicabs and come in behind the blue limousine, which was coming to a stop along the curb. We stopped, as if waiting for the traffic to move on, and so we got in on Taggart's pick-up. His voice was as hearty as any county-seat politician's on election day.

"Why, hello, hello, if it isn't the commissioner himself!"

The rotund, bespectacled commissioner and his two starchy gentlemen friends were evidently just winding up a session of night-clubbing. They stepped up to the blue limousine and there was a lot of handshaking and palaver, and you'd have thought Taggart was just taxiing this pretty female employee home after an unusually long day at the office.

"Get in, gentlemen. I'll give you a lift. . . . Certainly, we're going your way."

My taxi driver had made a pretense of trying to get past, and now we skimmed back into the line of traffic. The blue limousine loaded up and came alongside.

Again we gave it the lead, and once more, believe it or not, we were off on the same old course around the rectangle.

I was about to groan, "Take me home; they're all drunk and they'll go

round in circles all night."

But something happened just then to make me swallow my words and drown my thoughts.

It was a flash of light at the corner of Moon and Park.

"See that?" my driver barked. "What was that?"

"An electric wire must have broken down," I said.

"Wire, hell," the driver gulped. "The damned doors are falling down."

Believe me, here was something to see. Something was happening right at the front of the Taggart Building that sent a bunch of those colored neons crashing out into the street. All at once I almost forgot the blue limousine. I almost forgot the girl—but not quite.

"Step on it, driver. I've got to see what that smash-up's all about."

"We're stopping right here," the driver growled. "Look's to me like the damned street's caving in."

CHAPTER III

Turban Creatures

I JUMPED out of the taxi, threw a bill to the driver and was on my way to the scene of action before the cop on the corner could blow his whistle.

And what do you think? Half a thousand people were there ahead of me. Ten minutes later there would be three or four thousand. There's something that Joe and I had to talk about afterward, by the way.

Out on the prairie where we came from, a crowd of a couple thousand or so is something that has to be planned and worked up with a promise of some lively entertainment and a handout of grub; or, if it's a political speech—beers or watermelons. If you're a rancher you've got to know there's something in the air or you're not going to run the

plow into the shed and turn the team out to pasture and milk the cows early and jump into the car for a fifty-mile spin over to Squashville to help make a crowd.

But here it was a couple of hours before dawn, when all civilized folks are supposed to be sleeping, and what happens? A bit of sidewalk falls through and some bright lights start crashing to the sidewalk, and almost before the policeman can clamp his teeth over his whistle there's a whole mob of people on the scene.

There was a traffic jam and a pedestrian jam and all the excitement of a fire or a hailstorm.

But I didn't quite forget the blue limousine.

"Gentlemen, this is extraordinary!"

Those booming words escaped the lips of this man Taggart, right beside me, and they caught in my ears. I didn't know why. Somehow they just didn't sound like what you'd expect a man to say when he's really surprised. They sounded like a set speech.

I put on my brakes like a racing hound in a cartoon comedy.

It was a funny flash of thought that came to me just then. I had an intuition—or, as Joe would put it, a spark of ignition—that this big blusterer named Taggart *had somehow set the stage for this job.*

What it meant I hadn't the slightest idea. But it was a cinch he'd been riding around these blocks waiting for *something*. And it was five to one he had put off this *something until* he had this city commissioner right by his side to be an eye-witness.

"Gentlemen, this is extraordinary!"

By gollies, he'd rehearsed that. He was ushering the commissioner out of the car and the other two men followed. Up the street they went, and Taggart had more booming words on the tip of

his tongue.

"Gentlemen, the city engineers have done that with all their haphazard utility tunnels. They've cut the foundations right out from under my buildings, I'm telling you. This is going to cost the taxpayers a pretty penny."

Off they went to elbow their way into the gathering throng.

Meanwhile, as I say, I had put on the brakes like the hound in the comedy and pulled up to a short stop. There was still that pretty gal in the blue limousine. It seemed that her escorts forgot her the minute Taggart's doorsteps and pagoda entrances started shaking down.

As for me, I took one look up the sides of the twenty-two-story building and saw that the main structure was sitting as solid as Pike's Peak, and then I knew.

"It's a fake, lady," I said. "Some screwball has loosened a couple of bolts. It's a fake. Don't you agree with me, lady?"

This pretty gal turned her wide-open eyes from the scene of smoke and dust, which was all that was left to see from this angle, and she gave me a look that made her eyes narrow.

"I don't believe I know you."

"Sure you know me. I'm Cowboy Steve—Steve and Joe, the Cowboy Songsters, you know—Monty Montzingo's prodigies. Hey, don't be afraid of me."

FOR some strange reason this girl jumped to the conclusion that I had come to recover Joe's turban, evidently. She still had the bright colored thing in her hands, but the instant I said "Steve and Joe" she turned into a bandit again. A guilty one. A bandit with one purpose—to get away with Constanza's crazy turban.

She chucked the thing inside her coat

and made for the opposite door of the limousine.

"Hey, lady, one of the tadpoles dropped off!"

What was I saying?

I gulped and swallowed my words, and my eyes bulged out. It's a funny thing—that bit of talk about little creatures had almost shot over my head because somehow it sounded so strange. You'd hardly suppose an old-time opera star like this Constanza would even have fleas, let alone tadpoles. And so I hadn't made anything out of this talk—and I knew this girl and Taggart hadn't seen anything when they held the turban to the light.

But here and now I saw one of the things. And this yellow-haired elevator girl bandit was seeing it too, the instant she looked back.

And by my spurs and chaps, brother, believe it or not, *the doggoned thing was seeing us!*

Maybe I shouldn't have been so surprised at that. A mouse will look you in the eye, and this creature was almost as big as a mouse.

When a mouse looks at you, you know what he's thinking; namely, Omi-gosh, how do I get out of here?

A rattlesnake will look you in the eye, too, and you know what he's thinking; namely, Git the hell out of my path, Stranger, or I'll strike.

But the little creature wasn't anything like a mouse, or a rattlesnake, or yet a tadpole. I didn't know whether it was friend or foe, good or evil, poison or good eating when fried in butter.

The thing was eyeing me one moment. The next thing I knew it jumped straight up like a flea. This girl wanted to close the car door, and the chauffeur, looking back, wondered why she didn't.

The reason was, evidently, that she was afraid of striking this funny little creature.

Now the chauffeur saw, and the creature looked up at him.

"What is it?" the chauffeur asked. "A mechanical doll?"

"It's alive," said the girl.

"It looks almost human," said the chauffeur, and there was something in what he said. It was to all appearances an animated doll. It had a mop of stringy yellow rag-doll hair, a pink face with no expression whatever, and bright black eyes. It wore green tights over its tiny womanly body, and had a long curved tail that was a sure-nuff devil's tail—pointed arrow and all.

"Look out!" I yelled. The thing was jumping toward the car door again.

The girl swung the end of the unwrapped turban toward it. The little creature made another jump, caught on with tiny outstretched arms, and *disappeared into the turban.*

CHAPTER IV

High Above Moon Street

THE girl held the turban up to the light. Nothing in those long strips but fanciful designs.

"Well, for ridin' on the rim!" the chauffeur gulped. "Did you see that, Miss Morris? Your silly little doll went out like a spark."

"Charles!" the girl spoke sharply.

"Yes, Miss Morris?"

"You know what Mr. Taggart has told us."

"About not talking? I forgot, Miss Morris. But this doll—did you see it jump into that cloth? Where is it now?"

"There isn't any doll," the girl said, casting a suspicious glance at me. "It was just your imagination—and yours, too, Mister Cowboy."

"Let me get this straight," I said. "You folks both work for Taggart,

don't you? Why can't you talk about things?"

"Mr. Taggart don't want his business discussed," said Charles. "Shall I wait for you, Miss Morris?"

"Don't bother. Thanks," said the girl. "If Mr. Taggart asks about me, tell him I've gone home. I'm taking the turban with me. And one thing more, Charles."

"Yes, Miss Morris?"

"Keep this cowboy with you till I catch my bus. He might have some notion of following me."

"I wouldn't blame him, Miss Morris—er—just as you say. Sit yourself down in that back seat, Mister Cowboy."

I did, just to be accommodating.

"Take me on up to the corner, Charles, so I can see where the concrete fell through," I said, as if I owned the limousine.

"Very good, sir," said the chauffeur out of habit. But he caught himself. "I don't know whether I should—"

He didn't need to finish. I knew what I was doing. In spite of his being a halfway chummy old codger, he wasn't the one I was interested in. I was already out of the car with a bound and right on the heels of the girl.

"Hi, Miss Morris! It's me again," I said. "Don't be walking off before we've had time to get acquainted."

"Am I annoying you?" she said, and went right on walking.

"I'm just a harmless cowboy," I said. "Any girl bandit could teach me things about walking into a jail and holding up a prisoner with a gun—"

"How'd you know?" She stopped suddenly and faced me. She was scared, I guess, yet something made her smile just a little. "I'm no bandit—but how'd you know—"

"I was there. I heard you pull that hold-up act and rob my pal of his tur-

ban. Bad business, Miss Morris. Somehow it don't mix with runnin' the elevator at the Hall of Arts."

She was off on her heel, trying to walk away from me again. The faster she walked the faster I talked.

"Come on, Miss Morris, let's not go chasing around like a runaway horse. Let's dodge into this coffee shop and talk things over."

"Just what do you want?" She stopped and faced me defiantly.

"I want that turban. I want to know all about that little jumping-jack that melted into it. And I want that gun. You're not safe with it."

"Your friend in jail took the gun away from me." She was laughing now. "You cowboys are so chivalrous, trying to keep me out of danger. But this turban—if I lost that, too, Mr. Taggart would be wild. I shouldn't tell you this, but he's terribly angry because something went wrong at the concert tonight—"

"There *were* creatures in that turban?"

"I'm not supposed to say anything. He'd probably murder me if he knew—but that's the reason I've got to keep this scarf goods and work with it to get a more harmonious design. Within a few days Taggart's new turbans will be on the market and you can buy all you want." Miss Morris pressed a finger to her lips. "Please—you mustn't know anything. What you thought you saw—it was just your imagination. Now, please forget—"

SHE broke off short. Two of those curious little turban tadpoles crawled up out of her coat collar. One of them began yanking at her hair, the other beat a tattoo on her throat.

It must have been a signal. Instantly she turned to look down the street. She caught me by the arm.

"Quick! Into the doorway. I don't want to be seen. It's Heptad."

We dodged into the entrance-way of an Oriental jewelry shop, trying to hide ourselves from any passersby.

Those little pixies, by heck, had crawled out of the turban to warn her of some sort of danger. Now they disappeared again.

"Maybe Heptad didn't see us," she whispered. "Don't look back."

We stood there watching the lights and reflections in the dark window. Pedestrians and cars were flowing back from the corner of Moon and Park. Two or three buses rolled by. A cop glanced at us and passed on. I kept watching for the blue limousine. If the corner ahead was still blocked, Taggart and his chauffeur Charles would have to do a U-turn back this way. Somehow I would feel much safer as soon as I knew the blue limousine was home in its garage for the night.

"Hush! That's him—Pug Heptad," the girl whispered, as white and scared as a rabbit. "Put your arm around me and don't let him see me."

I obeyed her, but I felt awkward as the deuce. If this beetle-browed, bullet-headed little man coming past was such a bad actor, why shouldn't I turn around and take a sock at him? That's what my pal Joe would have done, and the fellows back at the ranch know I'm almost as quick on the fist action as Joe.

Well, this pug-ugly Heptad ambled past, and Miss Morris breathed like she'd just been missed by a bomb. But just as she started to look up over my shoulder, one of those turban creatures jumped up and smacked her on the cheek and two more chased themselves around her coat collar.

"Hello, there, Heptad!"

I KNEW without looking that that bellow came from Taggart. Heptad

came trudging back.

"What's the dope, Big Shot?"

"See here, Heptad," Taggart was as mad as a rattlesnake. "What happened up there on the corner? You caught three persons in that crash. You were supposed to clear the way—"

"You didn't give me time, boss. You flashed the signal for right now. What's three people more or less? You put it over with the commissioner, didn't you?"

"Yes, but there's no sense in bungling—"

Their low voices were right at the corner of our entrance-way. We were no more hidden than the cop on the corner. As the men edged another foot closer their voices choked off, and we could see through the glass that they were staring into the darkness trying to make us out.

"What's up?" I whispered to Miss Morris. "Shall I start throwing punches?"

"If you want to see me killed," she whispered back. "Hold me up, Cowboy. I'm about to faint." She took a couple deep breaths. "I'm all right. Oh-oh—just as I thought."

A motion from Heptad brought three other tough-looking bruisers to the vicinity of our doorway. They pretended to be gazing at the window displays, and thus attracted no attention from the passing pedestrians, most of whom were talking excitedly about the sidewalk cave-in.

Now Taggart sauntered toward us and we turned to face him. Out where I come from a fellow with his hunched-down head and savage eyes and over-thick shoulders would be in danger of getting mistaken for an animal, even in a dress suit. His lips curled in a mean smile.

"Well, Betty Morris, it's a small world. I thought you'd gone home."

"I met a friend," said Miss Morris. "He's taking me over to the bus."

"I see you've picked the very man we wanted. One in the clink and the other comes right to us. What a convenience."

"What are you talking about?" I snapped.

This tough-looking Pug Heptad and his three henchmen all gave me a quick look to see if I was going to pull anything. I mustn't have looked very fierce or else they felt mighty darned sure of themselves.

"What I'm talking about is turbans," said Taggart, as smooth as oil. "Something tells me you and your cowboy pal know all about my business. So—"

Taggart hesitated while a policeman walked past following a pair of drunks.

"So I may have to cut you in—both of you—if you know how to be sociable."

"I'm one of the sociablest singers that ever strayed off the range," I said.

"Come get into my car," said Taggart. "You, too, Betty. I'll take you to your bus."

I wanted to ask if he had taken the commissioner to his bus, but it's one thing to be sociable and quite another to be impertinent. Those four thugs following us made a fellow think twice before saying anything.

We went straight to the blue limousine. Charles the chauffeur dropped his jaw in surprise to see me again, but he didn't say anything. Taggart did all the talking.

This bullet-headed Heptad got in the front seat. His three men followed us in another car.

TAGGART began nagging at me with a lot of unwholesome sarcasm. He didn't think I was a cowboy and he was darned sure I wasn't a singer, and he doubted if my name was Steve

Smith.

I let him rant, because all the time he was exercising his jaw something else a heap more interesting was going on. Betty, sitting on the other side of me, had begun with powdering her nose and retouching her lips. Now she had a tiny pair of scissors at work inside the flap of her coat. While Taggart growled and guffawed and waved his hands around in truculent gestures, Betty Morris carefully cut an end of the turban off and slipped it into my hip pocket. By the time we reached the bus line it was all done on the sly and the scissors were out of sight.

"Here's your stop, Miss Morris," said the chauffeur.

"Have you still got the turban?" Taggart asked.

Betty displayed a corner of it. "I'll work it over and you can try it again tomorrow," she said.

Taggart and Heptad exchanged scowls and Charles the chauffeur blinked his eyes like an owl.

Taggart grumbled. "Tomorrow night, then. And watch your talk."

So we left Betty Morris standing on the corner and the rest of us went for a ride. It didn't seem to make any difference to these birds that I wanted to catch a bus, too. They had other plans for me.

"You've never been to the top of the Taggart Building, have you, cowboy?" asked Taggart. "It's still an hour till daybreak. Just the proper time to go up."

"It's a good place to see the sun rise," Heptad joined in. "Only maybe the sun won't come up this morning."

Charles looked around and blinked his big eyes innocently. "Sure, it'll come up, Mr. Heptad. Say, I never did see the sun rise from the top of a tall building. Couldn't I go along?"

Heptad and Taggart both gave a

snorting laugh. "Keep your eyes on your driving, fool." Taggart bent forward and swung a solid slap at the chauffeur's face. That was when I decided to say goodnight to this party. I flung the door open and jumped for the pavement, and landed running.

Doggone it, I'd slipped up. I'd forgot to figure on that other car. In fact, I hadn't had time to figure anything. Brakes squealed, and right now the three men were out of the car and after me.

I whirled, leaped for the curb, saw Heptad coming from the other way, dodged back and stumbled over a fire-plug. I went down yelling.

It was a wonder they didn't shoot me for that. As I discovered a minute or two later, Taggart and his men were the masters of the law in this block. The policeman who came running up stopped and stroked his chin cautiously as soon as he saw what was what. Taggart's men pounced on me right under the eyes of the law.

I fetched a kick at one of them and he took a flipflop over the same fire-plug and got up looking for his teeth. I knocked the ankles out from under number two and he smacked an ear to the ground.

But I was outnumbered by three men, a cop, and a couple of guns—and out where I come from I'd learned a healthy respect for guns.

When Pug Heptad said, "Git up on your two feet; you ain't hurt," I got right up and wasn't hurt.

When the officer said, "Nothing wrong here, I hope," I was ready to admit there was nothing wrong.

BUT it took the master mind, Taggart, to make everything perfectly all right. He strode back to us from his limousine, gave the officer a casual greeting, and turned to Heptad.

"There, Doctor, is a demonstration of how this patient behaves. I thought we could get him down to the clinic without a strait-jacket, but I was wrong. Excellent work, men. Thank you for your help, officer. We'll walk him right over to the clinic."

"Clinic, hell!" I blurted. "There's nothing wrong with me!"

Taggart shook his head sadly. "More delusions. A very difficult case, I'm afraid."

"I'm not a case, I'm a cowboy," I yelled. "Hey, you cop, get me outa this."

"You're right," said the cop to Taggart, "he's violent. He's got a bad look in his eye."

"Delusions. He thinks he's a cowboy. He thinks he can sing. We'll get him right in for a diagnosis. A little psychiatric jiu jitsu is what he needs first."

The cop grinned, perfectly happy to think I was as loony as a tumbleweed.

And so they steered me along like a reluctant calf on the road to veal chops. They took me into an entrance next door to the Taggart Building.

The fleeting impression as I passed down this corridor was that I'd been shoved into a Tokyo skyscraper. These decorations were a throwback from the pre-war Japanese imperialism, or I missed my guess. The nightwatchman knew Taggart and made a deep bow. Out where I come from we'd kick a man out of the house if he carried on that sort of grovelling.

Up on the fourth floor we went into the Clinic of the Far East.

I was trying to take in everything that met my eyes, but it's hard to recall what all I saw. I didn't see a baseball bat or a club or anything else within handy reach that my eyes were looking for.

We went on into a dark store-room

full of musty books, charts, and what looked to be war maps gathering dust on the walls. Odd stuff to be collected right here in the city's crowded business district. Where were they taking me now?

My sense of distance told me that we'd reached the east wall of this building. Well, there was still another door. And when we passed through to the next room, I was sure, from the thickness of the wall, that I was crossing into the Taggart Building on the corner.

A couple minutes later I saw I was right. We entered a dusty freight elevator and emerged on the twenty-second floor. Taggart left us there.

"Take him up on the roof and let him see the sun rise," were Taggart's parting words.

The boys were right—the roof of this building gave a fine view of the sky. There was no sign of dawn yet. There were a few friendly stars off in the east above the street-lighted park. The neon-lighted city was way down below us, and back of us; and on to the west were the really big skyscrapers high above us. It was a pretty inspiring view for a cowboy from the flat prairie country, and if I'd been in the right mood I could have written a song then and there.

But this hard-boiled Heptad and his three thugs were no respecters of a fellow's poetic moods.

"Stop talkin' about songs," Heptad growled. "We brought you up here to teach you a lesson; see?"

"I don't need any lessons," I said. "Never took a lesson in my life."

"You're gonna take one now."

"What are you aimin' to do to me?"

"Get rid of yuh."

"You'll get in trouble if you do that. It wouldn't be wise." I was talking as fast as I could but I wished I could have Joe here to help me. "So I'm

warnin' you—"

"Dry up. Who do you think you are? Don't answer that. We'll do the talkin'. Your turn'll come later. When we get that buddy of yours up here, you'll both talk. Then we'll decide what to do with yuh."

They tied me to one of the eighteen or twenty pillars that supported the pagoda topknot of this building. A couple stringers of red neons glowed down on us, and I could see that Heptad's beetle eyes had taken on a pretty nasty look. When he finished the last knot and gave me three whopping whacks across the cheeks for good measure, I decided not to say anything more about anything.

So they left me, tied there on top of the world, waiting for the sunrise.

CHAPTER V

Man Overboard!

WHEN a fellow's all alone, that's a good time to think things over.

Why had I walked into this jam anyway?

One answer was that strip of turban kicking around in my hip pocket. I reckon everyone is born with curiosity. I was born a twelve-pound baby, Mom used to tell me, and ten-twelfths of me was curiosity.

Even after I weighed fifteen times that much and was beginning to get my growth, the proportions hadn't changed much. I remember riding three hundred miles to get a look at the two-headed pig born on the Curley-Q ranch. And another time I took a Sunday off to gallop over to the county seat where folks were coming from miles around to walk into old man Kenilworth's barn and see a horse with his tail where his head ought to be.

But that turned out to be an awful fake. It was nothing but an ordinary

horse standing there with its tail in the manger. And old man Kenilworth was charging you a dollar on the way in and laughing at you on the way out. We decided to hang Kenilworth for that.

We would have gone through with it, I reckon, if it hadn't been for Joe. Joe said we should steal his horse and let it go at that. So we did, and from that time on I've had great respect for Joe. It isn't often you run across a fellow ingenious enough to turn horse-stealing into a virtue.

Funny, what thoughts will chase through your mind when you're clicking off what may be your last hours of life.

As if the ropes weren't uncomfortable enough, that strip of turban was cutting up again. One or two of those creatures had come along. Why had that girl wished this on me?

What was that? Footsteps returning? Yes, and Heptad's gravel voice.

"Make it snappy, boys. They'll be up here in a minute. They mustn't find this prisoner."

"Or us, either," said one of the thugs.

The four of them came thudding up the last stairs and onto the roof. Three of them made straight for me. They were in an awful sweat to get me out of sight.

"Look here, cowboy," said Heptad. "There's a pair of meddlesome building inspectors coming up to look around, and we don't want any noise out of you. You understand, don't you?"

I understood. This break-through of steps on the sidewalk level had already echoed to the city engineers and they were sending a night crew out to take a quick look. Whatever Taggart might be up to, staging the fake cave-in, he'd better get his guard up or he'd cave in too.

For a moment I thought this all

meant that I was small potatoes and they wouldn't bother to fry me.

"Just undo my hands and unhitch my waist. I'll go peaceable—"

Glop! It was a mistake to open your mouth around these lads. They clamped a gag on me, and before I had time to offer any more ideas about making an exit, they took care of me.

This wasn't so pleasant. By George, it looked for a minute like they were going to end my life without ceremony.

You see, one of them signalled from the twenty-second floor that these inspectors were already on their way up. There wouldn't be time to get me down off the roof.

But they didn't dare run off and leave me or a scandal would break. (You could tell from their talk that this sunrise party was a regular feature of their regular gangster tactics.)

So what did they do but hang me over the roof where I'd be out of sight?

Out of sight and out of circulation and practically out of my mind.

NOW a twenty-two-story building isn't tall as skyscrapers go. But there's something weird about finding yourself hanging against the high vertical wall just above that twenty-second story.

"He'll be all right there. He can't talk and he can't bounce around much," said Heptad breathlessly. "I'll lay this old mat over the rope where it shows. Now. The way this ledge sets out they ain't apt to see him even if they look over."

"Come on, Heptad," one of them yelled. "The elevator's almost up."

I heard them bounce down the stairs. Then there was a hasty shutting of doors, and I knew they were on the freight elevator going down.

The inspectors came up and looked around, and from their talk I knew they

were quite mystified over the sidewalk cave-in.

They couldn't find anything wrong with the building, evidently. And if they looked over my edge of the overhanging roof, they didn't see me. They went away just as the eastern sky was turning, and I had the sunrise all to myself.

Now we have some doggoned fine sunrises out on the prairies, but never in my twenty-six years of life on the range was I ever so much impressed as now.

This sun wasn't any pinker than the prairie sun. It didn't come up any faster. It didn't promise any hotter day than I'd seen before. It was just as silent as any sunrise—no trumpets, no blasts of thunder, not even a good cowboy song or cook-shack yodel to greet it.

It was more impressive because of the pains that went with seeing it. When you're hanging by a single rope around your middle, your hands are tied behind you and your mouth is pasted shut—well, you just can't find the words or gestures to express yourself. And that's the way I was.

The only thing I could do about that glorious dawn was to kick about it; I could do that if I didn't mind wearing down the half-inch rope that held me.

I breathed and gulped, mainly.

What little thinking I did was inventive. I imagined some choice tortures for that gang, saving the best ones for Heptad and the big shot, Taggart.

And then I asked myself again—why did I let myself in for this mess?

CURIOSITY. Curiosity over a turban. Curiosity over those tadpoles that weren't tadpoles, that seemed to live within the turban goods with the ability to melt themselves into the design at will. Curiosity over a girl that

held up my pal like a bandit, and resisted a kiss from this tough, dressed-up gorilla like a proud lady, and talked to me for a moment like she wanted to confide her fears, and then took the bus home and left me in trouble.

What did those fellows have on Joe and me, anyhow?

Did we know what they were up to, making those magic turbans? No.

Did we have any intentions of horn-ing in on their business? No.

Were we cops, or detectives, posing as cowboys? Certainly not.

Was I in love with that girl at first sight? Not in the slightest. If anyone had shown any tendencies of that kind, it was Joe, not me. She was his type, not mine. He was the one that remembered where we'd seen her; I'd forgotten her till she crossed my path the second time. But I'll admit my fighting spirit was up when I saw Taggart acting so overbearing toward her in the car.

What business was it of Taggart's to order her around? Why should she be running an elevator for the Hall of Arts and working hand in glove with him at the same time? Was she good or bad?

If she was a gangster along with the rest, I was a damn fool to be hanging up here by a half-inch rope with nothing but a two hundred and fifty foot drop below me.

If she was a good kid, like I thought she was, then it was no more nor less than my cowboy courtesy that hung me up; and whatever happened, it was up to me to take it on the chin.

"Quit tickling, you turban critters," I yelled now and then as I went through these thoughts. There were two of the little creatures and they were getting much too playful.

If I had been hanging on the north or the east side of this tower, I could have looked down the street. As it was,

my view looked to the south. The line of sunlight gradually crept down over the domed towers at either end of the Hall of Arts. One of those corner studios ten floors above Park Avenue was ours—Joe's and mine. We were supposed to practice there today to get ready for the radio appearance Monty Montzingo promised us.

However, my hands were so numb by this time I was sure I wouldn't be able to make my guitar really talk for a week.

A week? That was a strange thought. I've heard that a man tied to a railroad track will do the same thing. He'll lie there wondering how he's going to get his summer suit out of hock for the Fourth of July picnic. And then it'll come to him with an awful chill that he may have to miss that picnic. But all the while the fool will lie there hoping against hope that it will be a friendly freight train and it will hiss to a dead stop just as the cowcatcher cuddles up against his ribs.

I admit it—I had been just as optimistic up to this moment.

All at once I chilled to ice. The rope had jerked with a quiet little snap.

I was leaning forward at an angle something like a flagpole bending in the wind. I tried to straighten my back so as not to pull outward on the rope. But the darned rope was stretching. I craned around and saw that one of the strands had broken.

I looked down. How many inches, I wondered, would that rope have to give before I could tap that twenty-second story window with my toe? An utterly insane hope. Two feet of space divided my feet from the window. But—someone should be in that room sooner or later, a scrubwoman or a janitor perhaps.

Listen! Was that rope giving again? Thump, thump, thump. Something was

working on it!

The turban creatures.

Turning my head back I could see the two of them. They had stationed themselves near the center of the rope; they were just above the broken strand. Broken? Or cut?

They were guilty. Doggoned if they weren't. Yes, they were at it this very minute. They were hanging onto the rope with their feet, and swinging sharp little axes with their arms.

"Stop it!" I tried to yell through my gag. "Stop it, or down I go!"

Thump, thump, thump. The shreds of fibre flew like chips from the woodsman's tree.

Sunrise! The yellow rays were highlighting the armored knights that guarded the two ends of the Hall of Arts.

Thump, thump, thump. A few more strokes and down I would go.

Thump, thump, thump.

Down I went.

CHAPTER VI

Mae Wing Speaking

NOT every girl who begins her musical career as a night-club singer has my good fortune. I've had breaks, good and bad. When the good ones came, I made the most of them. This year I was called to the Hall of Arts, and my heart turned a series of flip-flops.

"We are inviting you to use one of our choice studios, Miss Wing," the Committee told me. "This is our way of encouraging popular singers like yourself. Will you accept?"

Would I accept? Well, I should hope to yodel!

Now the Hall of Arts, as everyone in this city knows, is meant to be a center of music and art for the whole com-

munity—you and your aunts and uncles and your banker and the motorman on your street car.

Your motorman and your banker may not agree on what's good and what's bad in music.

Your aunt may prefer Constanza. Your uncle may prefer me—the chances are he does. And you may have a weakness for Latin American rhythms or cowboy music.

But whoever heard of a Hall of Arts that would encourage night-club crooners or cowboy singers? Right there was the bone of contention.

For several weeks before those two cowboys came to town, Constanza was running around like a rat in a maze, if you'll pardon the comparison. She was in and out of studios and publicity offices and bankers' conference rooms. I heard her speak at the luncheon in the Hall of Arts court.

"What is this world coming to?" she asked, singing out the words in her deep contralto. "Has music lost all its self-respect? We who are the artists—"

She paused, and her eyes took in the faces of some of the really fine singers among her audience.

"We who are the artists," she repeated, "deeply resent the insults—yes, I said insults—from a few of our leading business men who are threatening to bring cowboys into our midst. Cowboy music!"

She drew a deep breath for a barrel-chested shout. "Cowboy music! Of all the hideous noises that the human ear has to endure, the worst is cowboy music!"

Most of her listeners cheered. One of the really fine singers shouted, "Brava!" Two others just sat with their arms folded, and you could tell they weren't interested in starting any petty quarrel.

As for my part, I cheered. You see,

I've always had a pet aversion to cowboy music. It's just a matter of taste with me. I've never cared for pancakes or court broadcasts or dog shows or cowboy music.

Several persons looked up at me. I cheered before I thought. You see, I wasn't a part of Signora Constanza's audience. I was watching from my studio window which looks down on the court from the second story.

"If there's anything more outrageous than profaning this hall with cowboy singers," Constanza continued, raising her heavy arm in a dramatic gesture, "it's bringing these dreadful night-club singers into our midst. What do they know about music? Show me one that has ever studied in Europe!"

I almost fell out of the window. No words had ever struck me like those. A slap in the face would have been less brutal.

I'm not saying that Constanza knew I was listening from my studio. But what she said was sure to get around to me and all my friends, and she knew it.

"Night-club singers! Modern music! Cowboys! And we call this the Hall of Arts!" That was her speech, and she marched haughtily to her seat. The luncheon crowd gave her a good round of applause, but you could tell that several persons were disturbed. This looked like the opening of a war right here within the walls of this institution.

And here I was, a perfect target.

Again several persons cast glances in my direction, and a few were sneering as if to say, "Why doesn't she applaud now?"

IT WAS awful, and I should have fled from their sight. But I was just stubborn enough to stand my ground and fight. My bright black eyes can be defiant when there's something to fight

for.

But I was grateful for the kind look from one of those really famous singers who looked up at me and shook her head slowly. She seemed to be saying, "You're all right, Mae Wing. Don't you mind anything Constanza says. You know her. She's overplayed her popularity. She thinks she can run over everybody."

The next time I saw Constanza was at the concert, and that was when the fur began to fly.

Fur flew, and *turbans* flew, and right away the chaps and spurs and neckerchiefs were in on the fray. For Monty Montzingo had made good his threat and brought two good-looking cowboy singers to town.

The war was on.

Maybe those two cowboys didn't know it, but they were right in the front line.

However, there was another war on, under the surface, much deeper and more serious than any clash between brands of music. It was something that I didn't know much about. Hardly anyone knew about it—but the whole city was in its grip.

I went to the concert with Mr. Bondpopper, and while I sat there suffering through Constanza's opening number, my eyes caught on a line of the printed program:

"Costumes by Taggart"

At the end of the number Mr. Bondpopper whispered to me, "What did you think of that creation by Taggart? Did you notice the turban?"

"On Constanza it was terrible," I said. "But it was a dazzling thing. I wouldn't mind having one myself."

"It would look divine on you," Mr. Bondpopper said seriously. Then he gave a funny chuckle. "You'll think I'm just giving you a line."

"Aren't you?"

Mr. Bondpopper gave a comical laugh, raised one eyebrow at me and adjusted his necktie. He was a funny old codger, all of seventy, more than three times my age. Everyone who knew him loved him because he was so jolly. Very generous, too. Not many men of such wealth would be as democratic and friendly as Mr. Bondpopper.

"Do you know Betty Morris, the elevator girl?" I whispered. "How would you like to see that turban on her?"

"I've already thought of that," said Mr. Bondpopper.

Another number was on, so I couldn't ask him the meaning of his mysterious comment about Betty. It puzzled me, and I was still wondering about it when Constanza appeared, a few minutes later, for a second song. This time she wasn't wearing the turban.

"I wonder why she left it off," said Mr. Bondpopper. And you could hear whispering all over the house.

"Don't tell me she's starting a strip act," I said.

"I wouldn't know what you're talking about," said Mr. Bondpopper, drawing himself up with an air of respectability, but giving me the faintest twinkle from the corner of his eye.

I was smart enough to catch a warning out of that sly response. There's no doubt about it, Mr. Bondpopper was respected by everybody around this Hall of Arts. Even the most snobbish artists—and I'm thinking of Constanza—would never find anything to criticize in him. But what she thought of me wouldn't be very complimentary.

That's because I had blossomed out of the night-clubs and theatres. To me, that was something to be proud of; and here at the Hall of Arts I had more determination than ever to work hard and be worthy of this musical scholarship. But Constanza and her kind thrived on

taking slaps at folks like me. A singer who hadn't had an expensive education, preferably in Europe, was nothing.

CONSTANZA'S second number was too painful. The most ardent lovers of operatic classics stirred restlessly. Someone in Mr. Bondpopper's party suggested that we all treat ourselves to an intermission before her third number.

And so it happened that we were in the lobby when Constanza gave forth with a hideous shriek in the middle of a song. The spine-chilling echo carried to us.

"I've heard that number a thousand times," said Mr. Bondpopper, very gravely, "but that note was definitely new."

The four of us crowded into the rear of the auditorium. The song was going strong again, but Constanza's orange-dyed hair was in sad disarray and there was no sign of any turban. Right away we learned from the whisperings around us what had happened.

The turban had somehow driven her to distraction, and she'd suddenly yelled out, snatched it off her head, and flung it over the footlights.

"That tall, slim cowboy down in the third row caught it," said one of our informers.

Right after that number who should come bolting up the aisle but Monty Montzingo and the two handsome cowboys he'd imported from the sticks.

Monty looked mad, and he was muttering something about a cheap publicity stunt; he was going to get out ahead of the cameras. Personally, I couldn't see that Taggart and his turban stood to gain anything by what had happened. It certainly didn't agree with temperaments like Constanza's.

We followed them to the street entrance out of curiosity. Mr. Bondpop-

per was interested for more reasons than one. He and Monty Montzingo had a friendly bet that Monty couldn't bring these two cowboy singers to the city and put them over with the Hall of Arts talent committee.

The tallest of the cowboys, the one they called Joe, was awkward about getting himself through the door. He was too busy gazing at the elevator girl, Betty Morris. In his confusion he bumped into me.

The other cowboy, the one they called Steve, apologized for Joe. He said, "Don't mind my pal. He's not used to the big city . . . Say, haven't I seen you before?"

"No," I said.

"I thought maybe you were one of my fans. Lots of pretty girls send me their pictures. Do you like cowboy music?"

"No," I said. "Sorry."

Then Monty called to Steve to come on. The three of them got to the street just in time to run into a batch of cameras and newsmen. It did look as if this turban-throwing had been a publicity scheme. If so, Constanza would make trouble over it. Taggart or whoever was guilty of putting pins in her bonnet would probably boil in oil.

Joe, it seemed, didn't like all the bossing he was getting. They photographed him holding the turban, catching it, folding it into his coat, lifting it up to the light. But when they tried to get him to put it on he went berserk and did things with his fists. He scattered cameras and newsmen all over the sidewalk.

The policemen marched him away, and the last I saw of him he was still in possession of the turban.

I turned to find that Mr. Bondpopper was hurrying off down the street all by himself. He had walked right off from his party without saying anything. I

didn't know what to think.

But just then he whirled around and started back.

"How absent-minded of me," he said. "My business—er—where's the rest of our crowd?"

"They went back in to finish the concert," I said. "Don't mind me. You go ahead."

Mr. Bondpopper gave me a sharp, critical look, like a talent scout trying to decide if you're dependable.

"Miss Wing, come with me. You're level-headed and you're quick, and I can trust you. I need someone to talk to. Are you game?"

"Remember," I said, "I'm Mae Wing, a night-club singer, and you're—you're Mr. Bondpopper—I mean, popper."

"Don't start calling me popper," he said, overlooking my confusion. "You've got plenty of nerve, girl, and where we're going there may be danger. Are you game?"

"Lead on," I said.

CHAPTER VII

Taggart's Basement

MR. BONDPOPPER and I went directly to the Taggart Building, just north of the Hall of Arts.

The elevator took us up to the twenty-second floor where Mr. Taggart has his suite of offices. There was a young man secretary on night duty handling telephone calls and stray visitors like us.

"Very sorry," he said in a tone and accent that reminded you he might have been a Japanese. "Mr. Taggart is not in. May I take a message?"

Mr. Bondpopper presented his card. The young man frowned at it and I thought he turned a little pale.

"What did you want, Mr. Bondpop-

per?" he asked bluntly.

A hearty smile from Mr. Bondpopper failed to dispel this secretary's uneasiness.

"Nothing at all pressing, as far as I'm concerned," said Mr. Bondpopper. "I've been asked to donate ten thousand dollars to some worthy cause that originated with Mr. Taggart."

"Oh!" The young man was much relieved. "Oh—you!"

Mr. Bondpopper's manner stiffened. "Is there anything so strange about my giving ten thousand dollars to a worthy cause? Is it possible you haven't heard of my charities?"

"I beg your pardon," said the young man, and his accent again smacked of Japanese. "I'm sure Mr. Taggart will want to see you soon. The project concerns our newly created turban, does it not?"

"It does," said Mr. Bondpopper.

"And have you seen a demonstration?"

"That's why I've come," said Mr. Bondpopper, presenting a letter. "You see, Mr. Taggart suggested I visit his laboratories."

The young man considered. He would be on the switchboard until midnight and would be glad to call us if Mr. Taggart or one of his assistants came in before he closed up for the night.

Mr. Bondpopper left the phone number of a nearby restaurant. He paused to admire a painting on the wall—obviously a Japanese print, though the young man stubbornly denied it. While the two of them tried to make out the signature on the painting, I picked up two yellow cards from a stack on the desk.

On our way down I gave the elevator man a friendly smile and let him glance at the two yellow cards. "We'll be back later," I said.

The elevator man bowed deeply. "Any time, Miss."

At the restaurant Mr. Bondpopper and I had a talk over our sandwiches and coffee. He did most of the talking, and I did most of the catching on.

"You're a very clever little lady," he said. "Those bright eyes of yours make me wish I were forty years younger—er—ahem! Let's get down to brass tacks. That laboratory of Taggart's—"

"You've never seen it?" I asked.

"Never—and I'm amazed that this invitation came to me. What mysterious equipment he has installed no one knows. There's reason to believe, however, that he carries on experiments for the manufacture of all sorts of new products."

"How did you learn that?"

"Through Betty Morris, the elevator girl. By the way, what do you know about her?"

My answer was rather vague. I knew that Betty had come in from a small town downstate and that she was bright and energetic and was already giving excellent service as an elevator operator.

"Do you know that she considers you one of her very best friends?" Mr. Bondpopper asked.

"I'm happy to hear it," I said. "I lent her some money one week. The poor kid was trying to bear the expenses of her family. There's been a heavy burden of sickness and hard luck—"

"Do you know that she's holding down two jobs—one at the Hall of Arts, the other with Taggart? That's right. She goes off the elevator at ten at night and walks right over to the Taggart Building. From ten until four in the morning she works in that little Oriental gift shop that catches the night-club trade. Isn't that amazing?"

"She's very remarkable," I agreed.

"But what does she have to do with Taggart's laboratory?"

"I'll tell you," said Mr. Bondpopper. "If you'll watch the clerks in that Oriental gift shop, you'll see that they're never idle. Between customers they're always at work on something—sketches, carvings, maps, or—well, *turban designing*."

"Oh!" I saw that Mr. Bondpopper was not his usual calm and jolly self; he was tremendously excited. "Then Betty Morris told you—"

"Yes," he said. "She told me in strict confidence—for some reason she decided I was the one who should know—she told me that she was doing the experimental designs for this new turban. Taggart expects it to be sensational. For artists, musicians, orators, writers, inventors—for everyone with a talent this design will be the most revolutionary discovery of the age."

"How?"

"It's a design that's supposed to carry some peculiar power over your talents or special abilities—and that's where Taggart's request for ten thousand dollars comes in. He believes these turbans can be turned out in mass production so that every artist or musician who needs encouragement can have it."

"Encouragement from a turban?"

"That's the idea."

"No!" I exclaimed. "How could that be possible?"

MR. BONDPOPPER eyed me intently, and I felt that I had spoken too hastily. He evidently wanted to believe in this curiosity.

"How could it be possible, Miss Wing?" he asked slowly. "Have you heard of brain waves?"

"Brain waves?" I frowned. "I'm only a night-club singer, Mr. Bondpopper. All my waves are in my hair."

"Don't worry—you have brain waves. Everybody does. They're electrical and they work right along with your thoughts. They can be detected by instruments and registered on oscillographs. Do you follow me?"

"I think so."

"All right, now let me ask you, Miss Wing. How do we know that there might not be certain substances or colors or designs that stimulate these waves?"

"Are there?"

"I'm not prepared to say definitely. But I'm open-minded on the subject." Mr. Bondpopper sketched wavy lines on the back of an envelope. "Somewhere I've read that light and heat and color are all waves of energy. Wouldn't it be wonderful, Miss Wing, if we could discover the combination of delicate waves that would reinforce the energies of our brains?"

I answered with a little gasp of amazement. Mr. Bondpopper was deadly serious now. The visionary light in his eye was bright. I was beginning to understand.

The part I understood best was that his boundless generosity was running away with him. He was just the type. If he could make himself believe he had found a new way to encourage a lot of talented musicians and artists, he'd think nothing of spending ten thousand dollars.

Somehow the idea chilled me. I was afraid this mysterious Mr. Taggart was about to play him for a sucker. I tried to tell him so.

"You said we might encounter danger, Mr. Bondpopper," I said. "If this proposition is on the level, why should there be any danger? Why should that office clerk on the twenty-second floor have acted so suspicious? Why—"

"It's a secret formula," said Mr. Bondpopper. "Just think—if it makes

good, Taggart will have a monopoly on the most revolutionary product in the country."

He went on with great enthusiasm, making such funny gestures I began to feel that the revolution was already on.

"Eventually everyone might wear this peculiar design. I don't mean that your business man will wear turbans necessarily—not if he can get the same effect from a scarf or a necktie or a handkerchief. You see, don't you—"

I found myself nodding an affirmative to everything he said. Somewhere I'd heard that the wrong kind of wallpaper can set your nerves on edge. If that was so, maybe colors and textures and designs could be pretty important.

"You're getting the idea, Miss Wing," he said. "Now in your case this turban, once perfected, might save you a year of study. You see, the brain waves that go with your musical talent would be reinforced."

"I hope it wouldn't cause me to shriek the way Constanza did," I said. "Or is her talent yelling instead of singing?"

Mr. Bondpopper sputtered without saying anything, and I thought he was going to lose his temper. Then he laughed.

"Maybe yelling is her talent," he said. "Sometimes I wonder."

No telephone call came to us from Taggart's office. It was now after midnight, so we knew the twenty-second-story switchboard was closed for the night.

SO WE might have given up our venture and gone home. We very nearly did—and I often wonder how things would have turned out if—

But we were too deep in the spirit of adventure to let go so easily. And when I reminded Mr. Bondpopper that I did have the passes, which I had simply

filched from the office on the twenty-second floor, he toyed with the idea that we might barge right in. We could take our chances on squaring things with Taggart.

"I'll tell you what," I suggested. "We can go over and talk with Betty Morris. She should be in the shop by now. Maybe she can tell us all we want to know."

We went over and browsed through the Oriental Art Shop, but Betty wasn't there. . . . Later I was to learn that she was riding around these blocks with Taggart himself. In fact, he had sent her on a mission into the jail with a gun—a very daring exploit, even though the gun wasn't loaded. She obeyed against her will, of course. She confronted the imprisoned cowboy, recovered the turban and returned to Taggart's car—after which the two of them continued to ride around while waiting for certain other events in Taggart's frame-up to transpire.

But all of this was unknown to me while Mr. Bondpopper and I sauntered through the Oriental Art Shop.

"We won't wait any longer," Mr. Bondpopper said to me. "These clerks don't know where she is, and they're getting suspicious because we're so insistent."

Ten minutes later we passed through the huge steel doorway that bore the engraved copper plate, "Taggart Laboratories."

This was a sub-basement, two flights below the street level. My first impression was, what immense rooms! The first laboratory chamber we entered must have extended west to the end of the block. And there were other rooms beyond.

At this time of night the few scientists to be seen were apparently too busy to pay any attention to us.

"Looks as though we have the run

of the place," said Mr. Bondpopper. "I do hope someone here can give us a demonstration."

The elevator operator who had glanced at our passes had supplied us with long, white coats to wear over our evening clothes.

"Will you know your way around without a guide?" he had asked. But he had refused to leave his elevator to guide us. He assumed that we must have been here before or Mr. Taggart wouldn't have given us passes. I began to feel pretty guilty over what I had done. And frightened, too.

But Mr. Bondpopper was so gay and funny that I tried to tell myself everything was all right. Still, I wondered if he was scared, too, and just putting on an act.

"Look at that big glass bowl of lime-ade," he said.

"And there's one of strawberry pop," I laughed. "Or is it cherry?"

"Those are the biggest punch bowls I ever saw," he said. "They make me thirsty."

Then we both laughed, for neither of us knew anything about all these big crucibles or what they contained. And it gave us a queer feeling to wonder what might happen if we were foolish enough to drink any of the bright-colored liquids.

"They must be dyes," I suggested.

"Of course. Why didn't I think of that?"

We walked down the long line of great mixing vats. There were automatic paddles and automatic dippers, and it was fascinating to watch the colors change when a dipper swung round and poured several gallons of a deeper blue into a tank of pale blue dye.

But just as we began to catch the idea of these dye mixers we bumped into something so strange we could hardly believe our eyes.

I made the discovery when I stepped up onto an elevated platform to look down into one of the dippers. As I turned I noticed the long steel trough that ran along the ceiling. From this height I could see that the top of the trough was covered with glass. Every few feet along this glass top there was a glass spout.

This all attracted my attention because of what the trough contained. It was carrying a stream of purple liquid and several thousands of tiny swimming bodies.

These little figures were kicking, jumping, squirming, diving, turning flipflops—behaving like all the world's circus clowns being run through one narrow tunnel.

I cried out, half terrified. "People!"

Mr. Bondpopper kept staring at me, wondering what was the matter, and I kept pointing, too excited to say anything but "People, people!"

CHAPTER VIII

Samsons in Miniature

MR. BONDPOPPER came up to look and very nearly fainted. He clutched his head and began to weave; I helped him down to the floor. He was in a cold sweat for a minute or two, but after I swabbed his forehead with a handkerchief he pulled himself together.

Two or three of the laboratory workers had turned from their tables to stare at us.

"Better get ready to answer questions," I whispered to Mr. Bondpopper. "I've got a feeling we're trespassing on private property."

In fact, I knew we were; for the past twenty minutes of roving around we had simply disregarded all no-trespassing signs.

Mr. Bondpopper took me by the arm and we were off again as if nothing had happened, and the laboratory workers ceased to pay any attention.

"It's the most amazing thing I ever saw," Mr. Bondpopper whispered. "I couldn't believe my eyes."

Again we ascended the elevated walk that gave us a view of the steel trough overhead. Thousands of these little human jumping-jacks, did I say? Hundreds of thousands!

Where were they coming from? Where were they going? What were they?

Where did they get those little funny faces, those cunning hands, those perfect little human bodies? All of them wore neat-fitting tights of green or blue or orange that made them as shiny as bright metal toys.

They looked like toys, with their shocks of stringy yellow hair and their long curly arrow-pointed tails. Mr. Bondpopper tried to make himself believe they were toys. But that was impossible. They were much too active. They were marvellous little animals—little demons!

And acrobatic! They must have been tremendously strong for their size, considering the way they could hurl each other along down the glass-covered channel.

"That glass roof," said Mr. Bondpopper, "keeps them from falling out. And those little glass chimneys scattered along seem to be ventilators. See, there's a bunch of them stopping for a deep breath."

The little cluster of creatures under the air-spout hesitated for only a moment. Then they were off like a football team bound for a touchdown, only with much less order. Some of them dived through the purple stream, others raced along the sides where the liquid in the curved trough was only knee

deep. One of the last three of the group picked up the other two and threw them bodily. They sailed up close to the glass ceiling and landed six or seven feet downstream, turned three or four flipflops and came up on the run.

"Where on earth," Mr. Bondpopper gasped, "did Mr. Taggart ever get these? Did you ever see anything like them?"

"I don't like it," I said. "It's not right."

"What's not right?"

"It's inhumane."

Mr. Bondpopper caught me by the hand. "Let's get out of here."

I can't explain the gruesome feeling that came over me. As if I had just witnessed the world's most dreadful evil. As if these cunning little animals were things of hate. As if their marvellous power was something to be feared.

And yet I was attracted.

Mr. Bondpopper stopped me. He was looking up at the steel trough. "Where do they go? There's a side-track across to that shelf. Let's take another look."

It seemed that what we had seen was only the beginning. This shelf proved to be nothing less than an elevated floor of a wide room which these thousands of little demons used for a playground.

A GAIN we had to ascend five or six steps to an elevated walk before we could get a view through the windows. The playground floor extended back thirty or forty feet. Eight or nine feet above it was a ceiling of steel with a corrugated surface, striped with indentations for indirect lights.

The space in this room was filled with huge stones and chunks of concrete, most of which were not at rest. They were bumping around. They were jerking and jumping and splitting in two, crowding along the walls and

spinning around like tops.

They were undergoing these actions under the propulsion of the little green and blue and orange demons.

Now those little demons couldn't have weighed more than a few ounces. According to Mr. Bondpopper, the stones must have weighed five or six hundred pounds. But these little creatures moved them as if they were toy balloons.

There must have been some layers of shock absorbing material under the floor; nevertheless, we could feel the jar through our feet, the same as you can feel a train or a street-car rumbling past.

"There's one little fellow working all by himself," said Mr. Bondpopper. "See, that little man over there under the pink light. He's hacking away with an ax."

"He thinks he can break it. I think he's cut out a year's work for himself."

It was a stone about the size of a steamer trunk. The little demon was working around the perpendicular side, hanging on with his feet and the arrow point of his tail. As Mr. Bondpopper had observed, he was one of the masculine variety, with broad shoulders and narrow hips. As fast as he was working he must have thought he was capable of breaking that whole stone by himself.

Well, he did it. I didn't know where he got his power or what sort of magic came to his assistance. I have since learned that it isn't so much the force of the blow that makes a stone split as it is the crucial point at which the force is applied. This little fellow working under the pink light knew exactly what he was doing.

Amazingly, he was successful, and the top third of the big trunk-sized stone split off. As it shuddered with the telling blow he grabbed an edge in his

hands and heaved. The stone tumbled as if it had been struck by a pile-driver. Where would it fall?

"Look!" I gasped. A catastrophe? A dozen or more little creatures were hopping around on the floor right in the path of the falling stone.

In that split second my sympathy for these little fellows leaped. But I needn't have wasted any pity on them. They knew how to take care of themselves.

The air current must have warned them. They glanced up just in time to lift their arms and catch the weight. For an instant we could see their knees bend under the impact. Then up they came with a concerted spring. And up went the stone.

Straight up, and straight down upon them a second time!

With perfect co-operation they gave it another toss, this time far to one side. It must have landed on several other groups of little demons, for we could see it go on bouncing along over the floor, only a foot or two off the surface, until it fell through some hidden exit at the farther corner.

THE muscular little fellow who had started this business stood on his perch under the pink light watching the fun. His hands were on his hips, the ax caught in the curve of his tail, and he was gazing across to the exit laughing for all he was worth.

Then he turned and seemed to be looking through the glass at us for a moment. But he didn't pay any attention.

On we went. There were many streams of traffic over our heads a little farther on. To our bewilderment some of these led into some of the huge vats where more dyes were being prepared. It was hardly conceivable that these funny little things would deliberately

get themselves mixed up with dyes.

Or were they somehow employed to help with the mixing process?

These mysteries eluded us for the present. We couldn't see into all these steel troughs. The ceiling of this north room was thick with them.

"Those men are watching us again," Mr. Bondpopper whispered. "Let's go."

"They're coming over to us," I said. "What'll they do if they decide we're spies?"

"I'm afraid," said Mr. Bondpopper, "that we shouldn't have passed those no-trespassing signs."

"I'm afraid, period."

But just then something happened to spare us our conference with these laboratory workers. An electric bell sounded. They leaped like little green demons. You'd have thought it was a fire or an air-raid the way they hurried off to their stations.

One of them must have touched a button or pushed a lever or struck a match. I didn't see it happen and neither did Mr. Bondpopper. But it was obvious that what happened had been well planned.

There was a sudden grinding and crunching of concrete away over in the northeast corner. The partitions kept us from seeing exactly what happened. My first thought was "Earthquake!" The building was falling in. There was a ripping and roaring of falling rocks and the dust came rolling out of the northeast corner room.

The laboratory workers were right on their toes, like a well trained team. Their leader held them back in a group for about fifteen seconds. Then he snapped his fingers and they all ran forward and acted as if they were in a panic.

The result of their waiting was that they were only three or four steps ahead

of the officers who rushed in from the outside.

That was our chance to get out, we thought, for we had been forgotten the moment the electric bell rang.

The sounds, however, were suddenly fading. The rumble of the falling concrete had ceased, to be followed by the confused voices of people up on the street—and that was how we knew that a section of the sidewalk had fallen through. But those sounds, and the rush of feet down the steps, suddenly went away and we were in almost complete silence. Only the dull grinding of stones from the demons' playground remained.

"Did you see what happened?" Mr. Bondpopper asked. "They've raised a glass partition between us and the other end of the room."

"A glass partition?" I could see that he was right. A few steps ahead we encountered this almost invisible wall that cut us off from the scene of action.

WE COULD see, but we couldn't be seen. It took us several minutes to prove this to ourselves. As the traffic of officers and pedestrians filtered down to this basement level, we did our best to attract some attention, because we wanted to get out. But no one could see us.

We looked on impatiently. Two or three persons had evidently been caught in the fall of concrete. Men in white came down with stretchers, and it was several minutes before they bore the last of the victims away.

"We're locked in," said Mr. Bondpopper nervously.

"We've just witnessed a deliberate crime," I said.

Mr. Bondpopper nodded. "I don't know what it's all about, but they timed it to the second. . . . Sooner or later they're going to remember that we saw

them answer that signal."

"And where will we be?"

"Right behind this glass wall, if we don't find an exit."

"You mean they put this wall up just to catch us?"

"Well, hardly," said Mr. Bondpopper. "This glass wall is their way of hiding their whole main laboratory from the public. Twenty-four twenty-fifths of this plant is closed off with us. There isn't much left on the blind side of this one-way glass, is there? Not a single stream of those little human bugs."

He was right. The officers and others who came down didn't get a glimpse of this vast, mysterious laboratory.

We were prisoners, and the night was passing. It was up to us to find an exit, and we went back to work like little demons breaking rocks.

We should have sketched a map before we started. If we had put our ideas together, we might have saved ourselves a lot of trouble. I don't mean to boast, but my sense of direction was undoubtedly better than Mr. Bondpopper's.

You see, I knew that in our first tour of these mazes we had come all the way around a closed-in rectangle that was walled up from the floor to the ceiling and bigger than the biggest indoor swimming pool I ever saw.

Now I maintain that when you circumnavigate a path all the way around a rectangle of walls, you must be in a big rectangular room with a smaller rectangular room closed off inside it. If so, it's not likely you'll find your way out of the building by entering the inside room.

Of course, there could be hidden stairs or false doors, and I suppose that's what Mr. Bondpopper thought when he drifted into the long, narrow tunnel of an entrance into this inner

rectangle.

"Don't come this way," he called back to me.

"I'll wait here," I said, "but I think you're on the wrong track."

THERE was a brief silence, broken only by the sounds of his footsteps along a wet, slippery track. I couldn't see him now. The tunnel was solid blackness.

"I'm sure you're on the wrong track," I called. "Don't you remember, up at the other end of the laboratory we rounded a wall—"

"I think I'm on the wrong track," Mr. Bondpopper called back. His voice sounded a mile away.

"Then come back," I called.

"This floor's coated with grease," his voice came again, still farther away.

"Come back!"

I waited for several seconds. Then—

"Miss Wing! Are you still there?" The voice was miles and miles away. "This leads down. . . It might get us out."

"Come back, you — you — come back!" Where did the fool think he was going? We didn't have to break our necks to get out. We could wait until morning.

But Mr. Bondpopper must have been in a panic. Once more he called.

"Miss Wing. . . See if you can find another way. . . I'll wait here by the blue light. If you find a way, call me."

Blue light? Somehow that relieved me. If the inner room was lighted, he must not be in danger.

I took him at his word and went on in search of some other exit. Within five minutes I found a door at the end of an aisle between rows of tables. It was a narrow door; the lock was on my side. If I went through I might not find it easy to get back.

Carefully, silently, I opened it about

half an inch and peeked through. I wouldn't have been surprised if I had found another room full of pixies.

No, what I saw was the street. This was the entrance of an Oriental jewelry shop. My door was one of the two narrow panels that flanked the door to the shop. Before my eyes was the display window with jewelry, and out beyond me was the street.

I took such a deep breath of the cool, fresh air it's a wonder I didn't attract the attention of the couple who were standing there by the window.

I couldn't see their faces at first. I didn't care to be seen, for my situation was very embarrassing, to say the least.

All I wanted was to get back to Mr. Bondpopper and tell him I'd found a way out. But for the moment I didn't dare move.

And that was how I happened to hear the girl's words and recognize her voice.

"Maybe Heptad didn't see us," she whispered. "Don't look back."

It was Betty Morris—yes, and one of the cowboy singers, Steve.

CHAPTER IX

Cowboy in Mid-Air

IT DID my eyes good to see something familiar; my head was still swimming with the weird things of the laboratory. The wonder is that I didn't call out to Betty.

The fact is, something in her manner warned me there was trouble on her side of the door as well as mine.

"Hssh! That's him—Pug Heptad," Betty whispered, and I saw she was white with fright. "Put your arm around me and don't let him see me."

Steve acted embarrassed. I trembled, for I was certainly seeing things. It appeared that Betty had a highly colored scarf—or was it Constanza's tur-

ban—in the flap of her coat. The light caught it and as it flashed it somehow reminded me of all the colored dyes in the laboratory. And upon it was one of those tiny little human beings, flattening himself into the brilliant design.

I reeled. Was I being haunted with hallucinations? Was I to see these little creatures everywhere I looked?

Betty was watching the ugly, brutal-looking little man who had stopped a few feet away; but at the same time she was apparently aware that little creatures were playing around her coat collar.

Then there was a low-spoken conversation between this cruel-faced Heptad and someone he addressed as "Big Shot." The light was right for me to see their expressions as they talked; but they were unaware at first that Betty and Steve were taking in their conversation.

I guessed the Big Shot to be no other than Taggart, for I had seen his picture in the papers. I was sure as soon as he said, "You were supposed to clear the way. But you caught three persons in that crash—"

"You didn't give me time, boss," Pug Heptad said. "You flashed the signal for right now. . . . You put it over with the commissioner, didn't you?"

A moment later these men discovered Betty and Steve; and a motion from one of them brought three thugs on the scene. Together they closed in on Betty and the cowboy.

This Big Shot proved to be Mr. Taggart himself. He began to use some pretty sarcastic talk on Betty, and it was plain that the cowboy wanted to swing at him. But Betty was playing cautious. Poor kid, my heart went out to her, because I could see she'd got herself into this mess just by trying to accommodate her employer.

This Mr. Taggart was a stocky,

swaggering, egotistical guy who looked about as charming in his dress suit and high hat as a gorilla. He began thrusting hard remarks at Steve; he seemed to have the notion that both cowboys were in on the secrets of his turban game.

"So I may have to cut you in—both of you—if you know how to be sociable," he said, and his tone was ominous.

"I'm one of the sociablest singers that ever strayed off the range," Steve said, barely holding back with his fists. Betty was gripping his wrist to make sure he didn't lose his temper. You could tell by his expression that he'd have taken his chances with the whole gang if it hadn't been for her.

"Come get into my car," Taggart snapped. He made Betty come, too, saying that he'd see to taking her to her bus.

And so, away they went, and there I stood looking through the crack in the doorway. I could already imagine the headline: COWBOY VICTIM OF GANG MURDER.

What could I do?

I had exactly one inspiration, and it would have been a good one, *if!*

That inspiration was to get back to Mr. Bondpopper and tell him what I'd seen. Of course, I might have gone straight to the police—with the likely result that I'd have got myself tangled up in red tape and got nowhere. But Mr. Bondpopper was a man of influence. Let him tip off the police and blow the lid off this whole hidden nestful of mysteries.

If only I could have found Mr. Bondpopper!

THE long, black, tunnel-like entrance to the room that he had insisted on trying was about as friendly as a cellar full of ghosts. I kept edging

deeper and deeper into it, calling his name, getting no answer.

"Are you there, Mr. Bondpopper? . . . Answer me . . . Misssterrrrr Bondpopperrrrr! . . . Are you in there?"

The floor was coated with grease, as he had warned me. It was not a level floor, but sloping. I kept creeping a little farther, hoping for a glimpse of the blue light he had mentioned. Soon I could hardly keep my feet under me.

I called again, and when I got no answer I decided to go no farther. The odors of this dark passage were stifling; they reminded me of something I'd smelled elsewhere in the laboratory, which at the moment I couldn't identify.

I dug the toes of my pumps into the crusty grease and hurried back to my starting point. I crossed to the partition of one-way glass to make sure it hadn't lifted. The laboratory employees and a few other men were still rummaging around the corner room, leisurely piling some of the debris outside the door. Apparently their night's work was over and they were well satisfied with it.

They didn't come back into the big laboratory, and of course they couldn't see me, so I made my way back to the little panel door and out into the street.

Where was I to find an officer?

No one seemed very eager to help me, and I could readily understand why. Everyone thought I was intoxicated. I was dizzy with fatigue, my evening dress was soiled, and the toes of my pumps were clogged with grease. I was carrying the white laboratory coat under my arm. After what I had been through I could scarcely talk straight.

"If you're asking for a policeman," someone on the street corner said to me, "there's one right out there. But he looks kinda busy."

I stared. Yes, there was an officer,

and he was busy, all right—busy dodging his duty.

They had Steve!

It was that ugly Heptad with his three thugs, and between them they were having a tough time getting their cowboy under control. But just then Taggart hurried up to the scene, and whatever it was he said to the cop evidently made everything just ducky. And so the gang of them led Steve down the sidewalk as if he were an escapee from a hospital.

I watched them go. I saw the door they entered. I put the distances together in my mind and tried to visualize what part of the laboratory would be under that entrance. I was too dizzy to visualize anything. I went across the street to the restaurant where Mr. Bondpopper and I had been earlier in the evening. After a cup of hot coffee I began to get my nerve back.

Suddenly I glimpsed a ray of hope. I got up, leaving a sandwich and a second coffee half finished. It was as simple as ABC, so far as Mr. Bondpopper was concerned. As for Steve and Betty—well Mr. Bondpopper would have some ideas, I hoped!

I entered this second building, and the elevator man gave me a deep bow.

"Please tell me where I can find Mr. Taggart," I said.

"At this hour of the night? I'm sorry, Miss—"

"But he's here in the building. I saw him come in less than a half hour ago, and I know he hasn't come out. Didn't you see him?"

"I do not recall—"

"But you couldn't help seeing him. He came in with a party of men. One of them was a cowboy. I must find Mr. Taggart, please. A friend of his needs him."

The elevator man gave me an arched eyebrow and smooth words. "Miss, it

is possible that Mr. Taggart passed through this lobby on his way to another building. If you are his friend, you may know where his office is." He shifted his eyes slightly to the right. That was all the cue I needed.

To the right was the Taggart Building on the corner.

And so for the second time this weird night I entered this corner building.

I THOUGHT I would know exactly what I would say if I could find the man I was looking for.

"Mr. Taggart, at your request Mr. Bondpopper came to see you tonight. I was with him. We visited your laboratory and Mr. Bondpopper got lost. Please help me find him at once."

But I never got to use my speech. In the hour that remained before dawn, I came within the sound of Taggart's voice a few times, but I never saw him. Instead, I dodged him. And for good reason.

Everything I heard convinced me that Mr. Taggart and his men were contriving to do injury (if not murder) to the cowboy Steve.

Steve's fate was in the balance now. And I was in a panic. What I remember of the awful hour that followed was the confusion of racing up and down stairs, dodging persons I was afraid to see, trying in vain to get into the basement again; imploring scrubwomen frantically to let me into Taggart's office or some other room with a telephone.

At last I was convinced they had taken Steve to the roof to give him the works.

I had just dodged some building inspectors who had come up to check over the pagoda on the roof. The cave-in of steps and sidewalk at the street level had evidently given them a false scare over the safety of the building.

If my theory about Steve was right, why hadn't they discovered him on the roof?

Had he found his way down a fire escape or something?

I leaned out a twenty-first-story window and peered down at the vertical wall below me. The light of dawn highlighted the projecting pagoda-style window ledges. Gray mists clung to the ground around the lower floors of the Taggart Building and the Hall of Arts.

I glanced upward. My heart stopped. My fingers froze on the window-sill.

The cowboy Steve was hanging over the edge of the building. He was bound, gagged, and completely helpless. All that held him was a slender rope.

I dashed away from the window with the terrified conviction that they had hanged him.

But no, the rope wasn't around his neck. Or was it? You can realize what a panic I was in. I ran back to the window to make sure.

The rope was around his waist, and he was very much alive and kicking—though I couldn't quite see his feet for the ledges. What I did see was more of the little green demons.

I almost reeled out of the window. Those dreadful little creatures were haunting me. If I could believe my eyes, they were clinging to the taut rope that held Steve. They were chopping at it with little axes. Tiny shreds of rope were floating down, and one caught on my sleeve.

I ran through the hall screaming. Two scrubwomen followed me back to the window. I pointed, and they looked up. And then it happened.

The rope snapped and he fell.

Maybe that cowboy was a trapeze performer, or maybe he was just naturally clever. The instant his body broke free, and it seemed nothing could save him, somehow his toes hooked the

narrow ledge above the twenty-second floor window.

Consequently he swung down like a weight from a pair of hinges, cut a swishing arc through the air, and crashed headlong through the window. Broken glass clanked along the side of the building as it fell, but I never heard it strike, for I was racing to the twenty-second floor, one flight up.

I almost knocked the door down before the scrubwomen got there to help me. They turned the key and we rushed in.

There lay the cowboy across Taggart's desk. His clothing was slashed and his arms were bleeding. He was groaning, and he could thank his lucky stars he was able to groan.

He wasn't dead, not by a long shot. He heard us coming in, and his groan changed to a grin.

"Hi, there," he said. "You're the gal that don't like cowboy music. Pardon me for intruding."

And then, darn it, I was so relieved from being so scared that I fainted dead away. And when I woke up I was in a hospital.

CHAPTER X

Steve Speaking

IT WAS too darned bad about this gal, Mae Wing, having a nervous breakdown.

They say she claimed she'd seen thousands of little tiny people, and so they had to take her to the hospital and let her rest up. Her mind was misbehaving, they said.

I felt bad about that because it was partly my fault. It was all on account of that terrific night that started with Joe and me listening to the concert and ended up with Joe in Jail and me hanging from the top of a building. On the

wind-up of that wild night Mae Wing and I sort of rescued each other.

She bound up the glass scratches on my arms and ankles. But I had to carry her to the elevator and out to the ambulance she ordered for me. For some reason she was as tired and limp as a dishrag. Why? Search me.

She admitted she hadn't got to bed all night. But when I tried to find out what was wrong, she started this talk about thousands of little tiny creatures.

That was when these white-suited ambulance guys picked up their ears.

I tried to explain. It was these turban pixies. I figured she'd seen a few of them between mirrors, probably, and thought she was seeing a whole army.

I tried to explain. But Mae Wing could talk fast when she was excited. And her pretty black eyes were so bright you could practically hear them snap. The attendants hushed me so they could listen to her. From her talk you'd have thought she'd been through a laboratory bigger than a stadium. They began to shake their heads.

She kept saying, "Mr. Bondpopper got lost in it. Those millions of little people must have carried him away."

"They've carried you away," said an attendant. "You tell all this to the doctors."

Well, it was decent of them to fix her up for a nice, comfortable rest.

She rested, and during visiting hours I held her hand. The doctor didn't object.

We talked a lot, and I admit that her story sounded pretty impossible. Not that I doubted that there were these little turban creatures. Not after being chopped down by them. Whatever her experience had been, there was something awfully strange going on in the vicinity of this Taggart fellow.

All this week, however, I forgot to worry about anything because I was so

busy getting acquainted with Mae Wing.

"You're the first real cowboy I ever knew," she said.

"You got nothing on me," I said. "I never figured I'd ever talk to a nightclub singer."

I brought her flowers and magazines and candy. The doctor didn't object.

I brought my guitar one afternoon and started to play her some cowboy music. The doctor objected.

These doctors have funny notions about what's good for patients. Now you take cowboy singing—well, for instance, I had a dog one time that lay sick for four days until I tried some cowboy music on him. Then he got right up and walked off. I often wonder what happened to that dog.

THE newspapers ran headlines about the disappearance of Mr. Bondpopper for three days. There was no joke about it; Mr. Bondpopper was gone.

That's when I began to get mad at the doctors and reporters and everybody. Why wouldn't they listen to Mae?

"She knows something about where he went," I declared to the doctor. "If you'd only give her a chance to talk—"

"She has delusions," said the doctor. "Nothing she says can be taken seriously."

"She was down in that big Taggart laboratory that night with Mr. Bondpopper—"

"She thinks she was. The laboratory she imagines doesn't even exist. We've checked with Taggart and his employees."

"Maybe they lied."

The doctor scoffed at such a notion. After all, Mr. Taggart was a very prominent citizen with business buildings all up and down Moon Street.

"As long as this girl insists she has

been faced with all these tiny people, she is not well," said the doctor. "If you want to help, you must try to make her see the importance of discriminating between what is real and what is a figment of her imagination."

"If I want to help," I said to myself, after leaving the doctor. "I'll give Mae Wing a chance to prove what she believes."

And so the two of us began to lay a plan for her to escape and go back to look for the figments of her imagination.

Meanwhile, Joe and I were put on a rigid schedule of rehearsal.

Joe had been rescued soon after that momentous dawn that I viewed from the top of Taggart Tower. Monty Montzingo had gone straight to the police court and squared everything within a few minutes.

"I've kept it out of the papers, boys," Monty explained, "because I want you to make your debut in high musical society with spotless reputations."

"Our reputations is only jeopardized," said Joe, "when the cops don't give us a fair chance to fight. Now, back in my real fightin' days when I was stealin' horses for a livin'—"

"Sssh!" I gave Joe a crack with my elbow.

Monty changed the subject. He said we should all go down the street for a bite of lunch and he had something to show us.

We rounded the Taggart corner at Park and Moon, and I sandwiched myself between Monty and Joe for safety. After what had happened to me I never went anywhere without Joe or Monty.

You see, I had apprehensions that I was being shadowed. The way Pug Heptad and his gang had gone for me that night after the concert, I thought they'd follow through and murder me in bed.

But something had caused them to pull their punches. Either they'd discovered that Joe and I weren't trying to hook onto their secret turban business, or else they were afraid of our playboy pal, Monty.

Then, too, these Taggart blocks were pretty thick with city investigators, who hadn't satisfied themselves on Mr. Bondpopper's disappearance. You could feel the suspicions in the air when you rounded that corner.

Passersby would stop and point at the freshly laid slab of sidewalk and say, "There's where it fell through. Taggart blames the city, and the city blames Taggart. And that isn't all. Bondpopper, the big philanthropist, disappeared somewhere around here on the same night."

And then these idle talkers would speculate over whether the missing Bondpopper might have fallen through the sidewalk and got lost in a conduit. There were rumors, too, that a girl had gone insane that same night.

Under the impact of all these rumors you'd have thought that Taggart's various businesses might have suffered. I think it worked the other way. Maybe curiosity helped bring big crowds to this corner. I noticed, when we tried to get past the Oriental Art Shop that the place was lousy with customers.

MONTY took us into a restaurant and we ordered. Then he took this package out of his pocket and opened it.

"For the two best cowboy singers west of Broadway," Monty said proudly, "with my compliments."

All that flashy color in the box turned out to be a couple of silky neckerchiefs. Jumpin' broncos! Were they ever nifties! They glistened like precious stones.

But when Monty held them out to us

we both drew back.

"It's all right," Monty laughed. "They won't bite you."

"That's what I wondered," said Joe.

We put them around our necks in place of our old ones, and the people in the restaurant sort of opened their eyes. We were used to being looked at, since we always went around in our cowboy outfits, but these new neckerchiefs gave us that really dressed-up feeling.

"Do you feel anything?" I asked Joe.

"Not yet. But I'm suspicious. I know darned well that these things were designed by my girl friend, and she's suspicious of everything Taggart made her do."

Joe was referring to Betty Morris, of course. Ever since he got out of jail he'd been nuts about her. He'd spend his off-hours just riding up and down the elevator, grinning at her.

And to me he would confide the most lovesick sentiments I ever heard. Just because she'd had the nerve to come into the jail that night and hold him up with an unloaded gun, he'd doped her out to be the ideal mate for an ex-horse-thief.

The latest was, he was writing a song entitled, "This Cowboy Traded Off His Horse, He'd Rather Ride with the Elevator Girl."

Well, Monty wanted us to wear these neckerchiefs, and we wore them. He said this style was all the rage this week.

"Ain't this pretty close to the same style as that turban that made Constanza howl?" Joe asked.

"It's a refinement of that design," said Monty. "The artists and musicians are all going for it. I expect it to do something for you boys."

"Listen, Monty," said Joe, gathering himself up. Then he turned to me. "You tell him, Steve."

"Listen, pal," I said, tapping Monty's sleeve, "in case you haven't

heard, that turban of Constanza's was alive. It was full of wild animals."

"How many drinks have you had?" Monty asked.

"Joe and I saw enough of this funny business to know what we're talking about. Why do you think Constanza turned her song into a yelp?" I said.

"She's temperamental," said Monty. "When you've hung around artists and musicians as long as I have, you won't be surprised at anything. I've known them to get annoyed at the wallpaper and fly the track. There was one high-strung soprano with a double studio who decided she wanted the partition removed. So what did she do?"

"What did she do?" Joe and I asked in a duet.

"She got an ax and hacked away."

"It's lucky," said Joe, "that this Constanza didn't have an ax when she got mad at her turban. She might have chopped off her musical career."

"It's probable," I said, "that these turban tadpoles had the axes. I've known them to chop at a rope that held a man up two hundred feet in the air."

WALTER MONTZINGO thought he was being kidded, but he wasn't a fellow to get sore. He passed our remarks off with a good-natured grin. He wasn't sure whether we were born liars or born horsethieves, but he still had hopes for our musical careers.

Well, Joe got a serious expression in his eyes and said that if Monty didn't realize it, there was such a thing as turban creatures.

"We've seen 'em," said Joe. "Steve and I and Betty Morris and Mae Wing—all four of us could testify in court."

"That's right," I said. "They flatten themselves right into the turbans somehow, and they come out as thick as fleas."

"And do what?" Monty asked.

"Ask Betty," said Joe. "She knows a lot more about them than she dares to tell."

"The ones she got out of Constanza's turban were trying to befriend her," I added. "She must've known how to work 'em. They didn't behave so well for me."

"I never did get the low-down on what happened to you that night," said Monty. "You and Mae Wing must have smoked the same brand of opium."

"If I told you all I knew," I said, "they'd put me in the boobyhatch, too."

Walter Montzingo gave me a long and searching look, and he stopped eating. Finally he broke his silence.

"Boys, if you're superstitious—if you're really afraid of these neckerchiefs, take them off. But I was trying to do you a favor."

Joe smoothed out the silk on his shoulders. "It feels all right."

"Mine is bothering none," I said. "We could be wrong."

"To tell the truth," said Joe, "the thing feels kinda good."

"Let's get this dinner over," I said. "I've got a couple of ideas for new songs."

"Now you're talking, boys," said Monty. "Half a thousand artists and musicians can't be wrong. This turban design is proving its way every day. It's magic and vitamins and sunrays and the right wallpaper all rolled into one. *It's the supreme talent magnifier.*"

Monty pounded the words out with his index finger.

"What's he talkin' about?" said Joe to me.

"It's a gag," I said. "It's Taggart's scheme to get a ten-thousand dollar gift out of Bondpopper to pep up all the half-baked artists."

"It's no gag," said Monty. "In a three days' trial it has already proved itself. This design is scientifically right

to stimulate your creative brain waves."

"What's he talkin' about now, Steve?" said Joe.

Monty went on enthusiastically. "The theory is that anything that can stimulate your creative brain waves is going to give your special talents a boost. Now, suppose you two cowboys are naturally gifted at making up cowboy songs. And suppose you start wearing these Taggart neckerchiefs or turbans, like five hundred artists are doing this week. Your special ability goes right to work, double strong. Maybe triple."

"Honest?" Joe's long face twisted with curiosity.

"You've proved it yourself," said Monty, emphatically. "Within ten minutes after you put these neckerchiefs on you both got inspirations—"

"Excuse me," said Joe.

"Where you goin'?" I asked.

"See you later," said Joe, and he hurried off.

MONTY and I took our time about getting back to our studio in the Hall of Arts. I had a very curious feeling about this neckerchief.

Obviously the turban material had been changed from the earlier design. Maybe "refinement" was the word. At any rate, no tiny creatures were climbing out to whisper in my ear or take whacks at me with an ax. I wish I could have saved that scrap of the original turban to make a comparison; but that had been lost the morning I hung from Taggart Tower.

"Why don't we stop in and have a talk with Constanza?" I suggested, as Monty and I ambled back to the Hall of Arts. "Maybe she'll tell us what happened."

"She isn't easy to talk to," said Monty. "And you'd never catch her being sociable to a cowboy singer."

"Why not? Because she's a grand

opera star?"

"Because she's Constanza," said Monty. "But we'll try. And now is a good time. Your pal Joe evidently got a brain-storm to compose some music, so we'll not break in on him right away."

We went up to the lobby across from Constanza's studio and hung around all afternoon waiting for her to appear. She didn't come.

Meanwhile I wondered what the neckerchief was doing to me. It did seem as though some brand new songs were bubbling up to the surface. One phrase that began to spread out into a plaintive little lovesick melody was:

"He went to the night-club in search of a song,

At the night-club she gave him the air—"

Monty broke in on my mental melodies. "Let's go on up and see how Joe and his talents are getting along."

Joe and his talents, we found, were getting along just fine. He was leading an old swaybacked horse from the fire escape into the studio.

Betty Morris had stopped her elevator to see what was going on, and she looked horrified.

"It's all right," Joe called to her. "These old broken-down nags off the milk-wagons ain't much account. But when a feller gits an inspiration to follow his art—"

A police siren swallowed up his words. So Monty, to save time, went right to the telephone and made a date with the police judge.

CHAPTER XI

Park Avenue Shakedown

AFTER the newly repaired sidewalk in front of Taggart's Building had been walked on by the first hundred

thousand people, it ceased to look new and the city forgot it had fallen through.

However, on the next bright Saturday morning one of the two great bronze knights on horseback in front of the Hall of Arts quietly sank into the earth.

I saw the picture in the eleven o'clock extra. Apparently a twenty-five foot square of concrete simply got tired and gave way.

How come there wasn't any earth under the base of this sixteen-ton statue? Well, the newspapers carried about six columns of opinions. It seemed that the city engineers and other experts weren't entirely in agreement. Some said that seepage had eaten away some layers of limestone.

There was one heck of a stir over this little event. The Hall of Arts had been proud of these two great knights in armor. Now one of these bronze boys was a sorry sight looking like a rider coming up through a tunnel from China. His horse had one forefoot hooked over the edge of the sidewalk; otherwise you couldn't see anything of the horse but his ears.

The knight had one eyebrow on a twist; his visor was wrapped around his jaw, and his right elbow was in his left ear. One of the newspapers captioned its photograph "Knight on a Bender."⁴

While the various investigators inspected the city's Park Avenue utility tunnels for clues to this trouble, the Hall of Arts did the noble thing. Acting through its executive committee, it agreed to put on a benefit concert to restore the horse and rider to an upright position.

This was a pretty decent gesture, I thought.

When Monty came to Joe and me and asked if we'd donate our talents to this concert, we jumped at the chance. It would mean that our names would be

listed right along beside the big artists.

"Is Constanza going to be on the program?" I asked.

Monty shrugged. "No one has been able to talk with her since the night she wore the turban. I've tried dozens of times to get an appointment with her. Sooner or later I'm going to make her tell me about that night. I'd like to explode all your funny talk about these little creatures."

Joe and I looked at each other but we didn't say any more. Whenever the subject of those tiny human-like creatures came up, it would strike me like the memory of a distant dream.

You know how it is when you take in certain unbelievable shows like a hypnotic demonstration or a mind-reading expert. At the time you see it for yourself and you can't deny it. But it's so darned bizarre that later you begin to ask yourself questions. Did you really see it or was it just an optical illusion?

If it hadn't been for Betty Morris and Mae Wing, Joe and I might have talked ourselves out of this weird thing we couldn't understand.

But every time Joe and Betty went out to lunch together, she gave him a line about Taggart. She must have thought Taggart was about the smartest man that ever lived, and the most dangerous. She no longer wondered what he was up to with all his bold schemes. She was too scared to ask questions, and generally too scared to disobey orders.

Every time I went to see Mae Wing I came away convinced that she actually knew what she was talking about and that there was an immense hidden laboratory somewhere under the Taggart buildings, and that I must somehow help her escape so she could prove these things.

But I started to tell about restoring

this mounted knight statue.

JOE and I had gone through with our first job for Monty Montzingo, and the fan letters and telephone calls that we got would have made Constanza burn up with envy.

So we signed up to help out on the benefit concert.

Then we got a personal letter from the executive committee that made us roll on the floor and practically crumble away with laughter.

"We wish to commend your generosity," the letter ran, "in offering your musical services to help restore the statue. May we interpret your offer as a willingness to restore any part of the statue which needs repairs? Please do not take offense at this question, for the executive committee does not intend to play any favorites. However, some of the artists, because of their cultural prejudices against cowboys, are willing to sing for *the knight only, not for the horse . . .*"

We laughed until we almost had to sweep ourselves up. When Monty wrote back to the executive committee for us he simply said that we'd be proud to sing for the restoration of the horse.

Joe told Betty Morris all about it, and Betty, who heard practically all the gossip on the elevator, told us that the whole issue had been started by Constanza out of spite against cowboy music.

This made us half sore. But Betty gave Joe a mischievous wink.

"Don't forget," she said, "your boss Monty has a drag with the committee. I'll be surprised if he doesn't bring you out on top."

Sure enough, Betty's hunch was good. The big night came and the auditorium in the Hall of Arts was packed.

We came on fourth and gave them a few old favorites around an imitation

campfire, and we went over bigger and better than ever. I'll swear those Taggart neckerchiefs were all to the good.

We stayed backstage to wait for the grand finale. Interesting things were going on back there. Constanza was there and she was trying to bulldoze the executive committee.

Monty whispered to us, "She still wants to sing, but she wants to be coaxed."

That wasn't all she wanted. She saw a chance to throw some insults against night-club singing and cowboy music. She was insisting that the chairman, in his financial announcement, should make it plain that some of the artists had assigned their donation to the repair of the knight, not the horse.

"If you'll do as I say, I'll sing," said Constanza, tossing her head haughtily. "Otherwise I'll let the audience go home disappointed."

Well, Constanza knew how to play her temperament to best advantage. Just before the end of the program the chairman made an announcement of a special treat not listed on the program. Constanza would sing.

The audience came through with the expected applause.

Constanza came out, took a bow and sang.

I noticed that Monty was having a quiet chat with the little nervous French sculptor who had been hired to mend the statue. That is, Monty's end of the talk was quiet. The little Frenchman was as jumpy as a young bull terrier.

CONSTANZA sang, in her over-ripe voice, a couple passages from an opera. Then she encored with a little humorous and very original number about a girl that had said no to a boy but had afterward relented by tying plums on a mulberry tree. It made

everyone laugh and applaud.

Then Constanza drew herself up with a barrel-chested breath and said that before she sang her final and most difficult number she knew everyone would like to hear a special report from the chairman about how the artists had assigned their donations.

Constanza stood aside and smiled while the chairman walked into the spotlight and did the best he could.

With grave dignity he announced that, in accordance with the fitness of things we cowboys had assigned our evening's contribution to the restoration of the horse; whereas, artists so-and-so wished it known that they had lent their voices to the repair of the knight.

"To this latter service," the chairman concluded, "goes the contribution, also, of our incomparable Constanza."

Constanza took a bow.

But just then the agitated little Frenchman rushed out onto the stage. There was a correction to be made.

"Ze knight has all been taken care of!" he shouted. "Ze special donation from Mr. Walter Montzingo has just untwisted ze final eyebrow. But ze horse, she is still in need of one repair. So zis bee-you-tiful song by Signora Constanza, she is just right to feex ze bend to ze rear of ze saddle."

Constana fainted, and she didn't come to in time for the finale.

Well, you know how things like that go. A half dozen fellows ganged around Monty Montzingo to help him laugh up his sleeve. That's what was going on when the final curtain rang down on us. And that's exactly when this policeman bounded up the stairs calling for Monty.

"Are you Montzingo? Well, have your laugh out, fellow, 'cause what I've got to say won't leave you anything to laugh about."

Monty sobered and so did the others.

"This must be a soundproof building or you'd have heard it," said the cop. "You must've felt it."

"What?" said Monty.

"You own the Parkside Building at 20 North Park Avenue, don't you? Well, it just came down with a crash. The front foundation gave way and the thing fell all over Park Avenue. There's a couple hundred rescue workers on the job digging out the cars and bodies."

CHAPTER XII

Talents on a Rampage

Poor Monty! This was one of his finest buildings. The horror of it! No telling how many lives might be lost. Would Monty be responsible?

Joe and I chased after him out into the night. Before we got to the corner of Park and Moon we lost him because the crowd was so thick. The motor traffic was tied up for blocks back of us.

Ahead of us, just north of the intersection at Taggart's corner, the great heap of wreckage was all over the pavement.

Some fires had started, though the scanty blazes and smoke columns were the least of the catastrophe. The police and firemen and scores of volunteers were digging for any waving arms or kicking feet that stuck up through the debris.

Only the top six or seven floors of the building had fallen—roughly the top third. But shortly after midnight, about an hour after we arrived, there was another rip and roar of stones. The whole facade swung down like a falling mountain.

Brrrrrr! Rip! Krackety—rippety—rappety—CRASHHH!

The boom that followed seemed to echo back and forth through every big building in the city.

So there went the rest of Monty's big Parkside store building. By this time, luckily, the rescue work from the first crash was done, and I don't think anyone was caught for more than minor injuries on this final crash. It had been expected. Since the front section of the foundation had apparently dissolved like sugar, the building was doomed.

Right in the middle of all the excitement I happened to see someone I knew. He was a hard-boiled egg with a bullet head and nasty eye. Pug Heptad!

He was standing about twenty feet away from me. The way the crowds were thronging around this far side of the street I was fenced off from him by a hundred or so people. But that was no protection at all from a murderous thug like Heptad.

Had he seen me? He wasn't exposing his face to the streetlight any more than he could help. But I saw his eyes flick in my direction. He wasn't lookin' at me; he was lookin' at my neckerchief.

Joe and I had got separated. So whatever I was in for, I'd have to handle it alone.

The next question was, were Heptad's henchmen with him?

It was curious that he should turn away and pretend that he had not seen me. So he wanted to catch me off guard, did he? Well, it was time he learned that I had another talent beside music. All at once some lazy brain waves came through with a rush. Maybe that neckerchief was working. Right now I wanted to fight.

IN LESS time than it takes to tell it, I dodged through the throng and came up to him, face to face.

"Lookin' for me?" I asked.

"I don't even know you," said Heptad.

He started to turn away.

I grabbed him by the shoulder, swung him around and let go with a solid right that knocked his head lopsided.

He gave a surprised yelp and tried to back away. I swung a left that grazed his forehead, then followed through with another right that spun him around. The crowd began to make a ring for us. Pug Heptad didn't want a ring. All he wanted was escape.

He plunged through the phalanx of bystanders like a fullback through the line. I charged after him.

Darn it, a bow-legged man let him get away.

A minute later a couple of cops tried to break into our section of the crowd, but I didn't stay to see what they wanted. I smoothed out my neckerchief and edged away quickly in search of Joe.

I finally found him on the outside of a huddle of city commissioners and millionaire property owners. Apparently these dignitaries had come together for an emergency conference.

Joe had been listening in and he gave me the low-down. "It began when Taggart and one of the commissioners came up looking for Monty," said Joe. "Taggart was roaring like a mad bull. He said this damned street was hoodooed."

"The question is," I said, "who dood it?"

"Yeah," Joe whispered, "I'd have bet ten to one that Taggart was behind the whole thing if he hadn't been hit right along with the rest. Here he is shouting for action. Maybe we've figured him wrong from the start."

That week the city sent for fifteen out-of-state engineers to come and inspect Park Avenue's damages. The buildings of that vicinity were guarded day and night, and every few hours the

earth beneath their foundations was tested.

"Everything is solid," the radio announcers would repeat almost hourly. "There is no need to avoid the buildings along Park Avenue. The engineers have declared them to be perfectly safe."

But you know how people are. Three mysterious crashes within a block are enough to make most folks superstitious.

The debris was cleared from Park Avenue immediately, for such an important traffic-way had to be kept open. But the motor cars preferred to take the long way around. According to the newspapers there was a ninety percent drop in the traffic during that week-end.

That wasn't all. Several business offices and clothing stores immediately cancelled their leases and moved to another part of the business district. Not without a lot of trouble, of course. The lawyers must have had a fine thing out of it. According to the papers, there had never been such a real estate emergency in the history of the city.

When the owners of buildings tried to hold their clients on the strength of engineers' proofs that the building was safe, the tenants dodged behind other clauses that let them out. The contracts, in some cases, had guaranteed a certain average weekly volume of pedestrian traffic along the block. However, the pedestrians weren't coming through. Their healthy caution, if not superstition, held them back.

Monty's other buildings lost so many tenants that those remaining rattled around like peanuts in a barrel. For the first time Joe and I began to see this easy-go-lucky young playboy in a mood of downright worry.

"If I could only talk with Bondpopper," Monty would say. "He was a wise old cuss. Any time I've ever been

hit by real business troubles in the past, he's always been the man to help me straighten them out."

MEMORIAL services were held for Mr. Bondpopper. The papers printed stories of his philanthropies. The city seemed to take for granted that the man was dead.

But there were a couple of clues that argued otherwise. Maybe they didn't amount to much in the eyes of the lawyers or the police investigators. But they looked big to Mae Wing, and she pointed them out to me.

Number one was a dated document. A facsimile was printed in all the papers and it aroused quite a little curiosity. It was a single typewritten statement:

"My last will and testament will come to light within a few weeks. None of my property is to be disposed of until this legal document appears."

It was badly typed, and the investigators were terribly disturbed over that. However, the signature was declared to be genuine. It was also witnessed.

The document was of such recent date that many people jumped to the obvious conclusion: Mr. Bondpopper had planned to commit suicide and had arranged everything before erasing himself.

Whoever the witness had been, he would no doubt show up with Mr. Bondpopper's will in due time.

But Mae Wing said no. I sat with her in the solarium at the hospital and we went over the newspaper together.

"He wrote that statement to give him time to make a will," said Mae. "When I last saw him he was trying to find a way for us to get out of that awful room full of little creatures. Does that sound as if he was planning to commit suicide?"

"When do you think he wrote it?"

"After he disappeared," said Mae.

"He didn't dare date it back very far, because the fresh typing and signature would give him away. He's still alive, and he doesn't want to see his property mismanaged. He's probably busy making out a will right this minute."

Then Mae stopped to regard the second very glaring clue. This witness who had signed the statement with him who was he?

"D. A. Edton. What do the papers say about him?"

"He's a maverick," I said. "They can't seem to name his brand. Do you know him?"

"Never heard of him," said Mae. "I think he's a phoney."

"Don't think too hard," I said. "You know what the doctors say, you need rest."

Mae Wing gave me a look that flashed fire. "So you're getting that idea, too. Let me tell you something, Steve. If you got put into this hospital for trying to tell the truth the way I did, you'd get out in twenty-four hours."

"I was planning to get you out," I said.

"You've been talking about it long enough," said Mae.

She had me. The fact was, I'd kept putting off the plan because I had a hunch that folks get themselves in trouble when they steal patients out of a hospital. That was part of the reason.

Then, too, I sort of liked coming each day to visit her. I'd discovered she liked flowers and candy and magazines even though her education had been neglected along the lines of cowboy music. As long as she was here I had a continuous date, so to speak. I could come here and hold her hand. The doctor didn't object, and neither did Mae.

When I left that day, it seemed to me that she was in a pretty desperate mood. As I thought it over I realized

that she might try to break out by herself. But I didn't realize how well satisfied her doctor was with her progress.

THAT night I had dinner with Joe and Betty Morris. They were so gay that I turned my worries out to pasture for the evening.

"Haven't you heard the latest?" Betty asked. "Joe is teaching me to sing cowboy songs."

"She can do 'Home on the Range' already," said Joe, proudly.

"I practice all day, going up and down the elevator," said Betty.

"As soon as she gets good, Steve, she's going to quit her night job at Taggart's. Joe rolled his eyes at her. "Ain't you, honey?"

"If Taggart will let me."

"He'd better let you, the big over-educated ape," said Joe, showing his teeth and hunching his shoulders to give us an imitation of Taggart. "You've given him a new fortune in turbans and neckties. What more could he want?"

We fell to talking about the turbans and the sensational success they were having all over the country. Taggart had struck a bonanza on this idea of magnifying talents.

You see, the darned thing actually worked.

One way or another they got results. No one was exactly sure how or why. Maybe it was some electrical brain stimulation, as the advertisements would have you believe. Or maybe it was just your own psychology. You'd put on one of these fancy neckties and say to yourself, "Now I'll paint a better picture than I painted yesterday." And you'd do it—all credit to the necktie or the turban.

In some of the variety columns in the paper you invariably run across items about talents and abilities that got mag-

nified to amazing degrees.

Here was this chap in Oregon that was gifted at collecting newspaper clippings. He started wearing a turban at work. Now after he'd finished with a newspaper, nothing was left but the margins.

Then there was a lady gambler in Jersey City who started wearing a turban and broke eleven gambling joints in a row.

And there was a yarn Joe had picked up somewhere—I can't vouch for the truth of this one—that a guy named Sleepy Limbo in Tennessee had made a specialty of dreaming weird and scary dreams, and afterward telling them, to give his friends an awful chill. Sleepy, it seemed, made a night-cap out of a turban his wife had discarded. For the next three mornings he told the most hideous and horrifying dreams anyone ever heard. But on the fourth morning he didn't tell anything because he didn't wake up. The coroner concluded that he had scared himself to death.

Another gink prided himself on being able to take a lot of different kinds of patent medicines. After he started wearing a talent-magnifying scarf he got too ambitious and swallowed a combination of ingredients that added up to nitroglycerine. When last seen he was riding a porch pillar over a haystack.

But most of the published items were milder in tone and generally a credit to Taggart's Turban. Artists, editorial writers, campaign managers, sportsmen, business executives—all of these, and bridge players, too—had good things to say about this remarkable talent magnifier.

BETTY MORRIS had a friend who knew a good-looking New York lady who went out to this summer resort town and picked up the bridge

prizes right and left. It made everybody jealous. So, come tournament time, they made it up to give her the dumbest partner in the club. But when the New York lady arrived for the event she was wearing a Taggart turban. So they simply handed her the prize and called the party off.

"And to think," said Joe, patting Betty's hand proudly, "you designed that turban yourself."

"Not exactly," said Betty. "All I did was to follow instructions. Confidentially, it was a matter of catching these turban creatures at just the right stage."

"Catching them for what purpose?" said Joe.

"To mix them in with the dyes and press them into the design. You mustn't tell anyone. Taggart would kill me if he knew I told you, because it's a secret process—"

A waiter approached our table.

"Pardon me, sir, are you Cowboy Steve? . . . There's a telephone call for you, sir."

It was Mae's doctor on the phone. Something was in the air.

"So you *are* at the restaurant," he said. "All right, I was just afraid this might be another of Miss Wing's delusions."

"Oh! . . ." I said, not knowing what he meant.

"I had agreed to let her out on good behavior," said the doctor, "provided she wouldn't try to resume her night-club singing right away. So she told me her plans before she left this afternoon. Now I was just checking up."

"I see. Then everything's O.K.?" I asked.

"If she's there with you everything is all right," said the doctor.

"Everything is all right," I said, and hastily hung up.

I returned to the table. Betty and

Joe wanted to know why I was so pale. "Did Mae run away?"

I groped for an answer.

From what the doctor had said, I judged that Mae had fled like a deer the instant they gave her her release. There was no telling where she would go.

"Speak up, cowboy," said Betty. "Has she had a relapse?"

"I'm afraid that—" My trepidation suddenly burst like bubbles. "Hell, everything's swell. Don't you folks worry about Mae Wing."

My quick change of mood was caused by the sight of Mae herself. For at that moment she appeared in front of the restaurant window. She caught my eye, gave me a little signal of silence by touching a finger of silence to her lips, then glanced at her wrist-watch.

All of which plainly meant that she was waiting to see me alone.

Ten minutes later Betty and Joe were on their way. I found Mae waiting for me a few doors away. Her eyes were full of an intense excitement that was beautiful to see.

CHAPTER XIII

Hope for Mr. Bondpopper

"I'M ON a sure trail, Steve," said Mae. "I could hardly wait to see you. You're the only one who would understand."

"Let's go back into the restaurant," I said, "just in case your doctor doubts whether you kept this date."

It was nearly midnight and she was sure the doctor hadn't approved of her plan to be out at this hour. But she meant to be honest with him. No night-clubs or all-night parties.

"All I want to do is deliver a letter," she said. "Here, Steve, can't we both sit on this side so we can watch the

street? Can you see the entrance to the Oriental Jewelry Shop?"

I could, by edging a little closer to her, and I didn't mind.

"Do you remember that spot from some previous night?" she asked.

"Er—yes, sort of. Betty Morris and I dodged in there the night Heptad and Taggart closed in on us." I must have reddened a little as I went on. "We tried not to show our faces, and I put my arm around Betty to hide her. They were talking about putting something over with the commissioner."

"I heard that conversation," said Mae. "They're making it their racket to bring about these cave-ins. When Monty's building fell and all those people got killed, Taggart and his men were the murderers. For some strange reason, by some unknown method they've started out to make that whole street unsafe."

"I might swallow that if I knew how and why they're doing it," I said.

"I've got a good hunch on the how. It's those turban creatures—the thousands and thousands of them that I saw."

"Take it easy," I said. "You're out on probation. You're saying some peculiar things. In the first place, you're the only person who has seen any such number of these little people. Even Betty Morris, who works there, has never seen more than three or four dozen at once. In the second place—"

"Go ahead," said Mae. "You can argue down everything I say, but I still know I'm right."

"In the second place, a turban creature is much too small to get mixed up in the business of undermining buildings."

"Did you ever hear of termites?" asked Mae. "They're even smaller."

"In the third place, if Taggart is responsible, why should his own steps

and sidewalk get broken down? Doesn't he know any better than to destroy his own property?"

"He did that to avoid suspicion," said Mae. "It cost him almost nothing. That was a smart move to put himself in the clear."

"He's smart, I don't doubt," I said. "Betty thinks he's too damned smart—"

"He was smart again when he called Monty and some other property owners into conference to demand that the city get to the bottom of this thing. Just another blind for his own guilt."

"Hm-m-m. You might be right at that. Is that why Heptad turned tail and ran the other night when I took a notion to poke him? Another blind?"

"That was the night Monty's building fell," said Mae. "At such a time Taggart was smart enough to keep all his men as quiet as mummies. You'll be on their list for action soon after their present troubles blow over."

"In the fourth place," I said, "How did you know about that doorway conversation in the first place?"

"I was there," said Mae Wing.

"Again, please?"

"I was there." She smiled at me in a mischievous and tantalizing manner. "You think I'm joking? I'm not. I was just inside that panel to the left of the door. It's an entrance to Taggart laboratories. . . . Well, why don't you say something?"

I gulped and stammered my surprise. I had to believe her when she looked at me like that.

"We're going over there," she went on, "as soon as the midnight traffic thins out a little. Do you think you can break the door down, the same as movie cowboys do?"

I counselled in favor of calling on a night watchman. Or, if it was urgent, a cop or two. Door-busting wasn't one

of my special talents.

"Just so we can deliver this letter to Mr. D. A. Edton," said Mae with quiet determination.

SHE kept watching the street. Pedestrians passed the Oriental Art Shop and sauntered along in front of the display windows, but no one ever even noticed the name panels that flanked the door.

"D. A. Edton," I said absently. "I've heard of him before."

"He was the witness to Mr. Bondpopper's signed statement," said Mae, "and he is a phoney, I'm quite positive."

"Then why are you sending a letter to him?"

"In hopes Mr. Bondpopper will get it and know that we understand what D. A. Edton means," she said.

"What does it mean?"

"Spell it backwards."

"N-O-T-D-E-A-D."

"That's right," said Mae. "*Not dead.* What could be plainer?"

We crossed the street to the Oriental Art Shop. I knocked against the panel. As a door it was as stubborn as a stone wall—until the cops came over to help us. Now I would have been satisfied just to slip the letter through the narrow crack at the foot of the panel.

But these cops seemed ready to listen to our ideas, so Mae gave them a pretty thorough account of what we were up to.

I was surprised at how very obliging and useful these officers of the law turned out to be. If this was a secret doorway, you'd have thought they might be puzzled over it.

But, as luck would have it, they struck the very combination of hidden buttons to open the thing. It opened immediately.

"Walk right in," one of them said, "and we'll follow you."

CHAPTER XIV

Down the Dark Incline

WE WALKED in and they followed.

Right away we were in a big room, all right—about the biggest walled-in jungle full of glass tanks and pipes I ever saw. In one glance you could tell there was as much going on here as in a corral at rodeo time.

"Looks like you two youngsters have discovered something," said one of the cops. "Now just what was it you wanted down here? A visit with Mr. Bondopper? Shall we help you look for him?"

Mae didn't make any answer. She only gave the three policemen her most suspicious look. I was too slow-witted to get it, being overwhelmed by all the wonders.

At once everything that Mae had formerly told me, that I had taken to be her bad dreams, came back to me.

Those metal troughs overhead must be the rivers full of purple water that all the little turban people would race through. I climbed up onto an elevation to get a look.

I glimpsed the sparkle and splash of purple water. I had a dizzying impression of thousands of tiny human beings dashing along in it knee-deep at break-neck speed. But that was as much as the cops thought I ought to see. They ordered me down and they seemed pretty sour.

"Come on, you," one of them said. "You're holdin' up the party."

Seemed to me I'd heard that voice before. Mae gave me a quick little frown which meant that all wasn't well.

"So your friend Bondopper went down this way to look for an exit?" said a cop. "You sure he wasn't lookin' for a swimmin' pool?"

They were leading us into a narrow tunnel-like entrance to a walled-in section in the center of the big laboratory. For all you could tell it might be a swimming pool. But the lights were off. I didn't like the idea of descending this greasy incline in the dark.

"Any cop on night duty oughta carry a flashlight," I said.

One of these uniformed dopes came back at me with a surly snarl. "Who said anything about cops? We're just having ourselves a little masquerade party."

Another one said, "Pug Heptad had to miss the party on account of a black eye, but we promised him we'd make up for it."

"Good joke, but I don't get it," I said. "If you fellows ain't cops, this would be a low-down trick. It would make me feel like passing out some more black eyes—like this!"

I swung my fist like a baseball bat, and the nearest cop folded up against the wall. You could tell that wall was awful solid the way it stopped him.

We were at it, then, like a pack of mad dogs. The phoney cop was out for about twenty seconds—time enough for me to throw about fifty blows, many of which went wild. It was so dark I could hardly see. Mae Wing stifled a scream. The danger was that she was getting mixed up with these haymakers.

The dog pile broke for a moment. One of the cops flashed on a light, then covered me with a gun.

In that instant I was not sure which end of the curved tunnel was which. But there was no chance to make a dash. This plug-ugly meant business. Mae's eyes were full of terror, but her sharp wits were working. She gave a quick nod, and I knew which way our exit lay.

We would have made it if that cop on the greasy floor hadn't been faking.

I thought he was out cold, which left us the job of running two cops and a gun.

Before anyone could speak, I got one of those bozos by the wrist and throat and swung him around like a shield. The gunman tried to sidestep. I gave him a run for his money, crowding him with my temporary prisoner.

"Get out, Mae! I'll follow you!"

I would have sworn the path was clear in that split second, but the knocked-out cop sprang a joker. He threw out an arm and tripped Mae. Springing up, he got her by the shoulders and hauled her down the wrong side of the tunnel. Mae fell and *slid*. She tried to catch herself. The pitch of the floor was steeper than I thought. Mae was screaming, trying desperately to stop herself. I dashed after her.

The last I saw of the three fake cops, they were standing there in the light, watching us. Then the curve of a wall closed them off from our view. This devilish slippery slide had us.

Down, down, down. We passed under a dim blue light, and for an instant had hope of stopping our descent. We rolled toward the wall, but it, too, was coated with wax. Darkness again!

If you can imagine sliding down a coal-chute into a swimming pool of purple water, you have it. All that Mae had told me about Mr. Bondpopper's disappearance came back vividly now. We fell in with a splash that re-echoed within this enclosure. Faint blue lines outlined the rectangular walls and illuminated the glowing purple liquid. The pool was alive with tiny creatures.

CHAPTER XV

Turban's-Eye View

IN MY cowboy career swimming has never been one of my major sports.

Fifteen minutes of wallowing around in a mudhole on Dry Creek would exhaust me. So I was more than a little surprised to find how well I was able to swim in this pool. Mae and I swam for hours, not from choice, but necessity.

The strange fact was that the longer we swam the more energetic we felt.

The trouble was, our destination kept retreating from us. We had seen at once that the opposite end of this pool offered steps and a railing. At every other side, ascent appeared impossible. Hence, we made for the far end, which I concluded to be not more than thirty strokes away. The pool was growing. These thousands of little human creatures jumping out of our course were expanding. Even the waves and the splashing drops of water were enlarging.

How large are the drops of water that stream down over your eyes when you are swimming? These expanded until they were like basket-balls in front of our faces. And yet their weight did not exhaust us. Our physical power was multiplying by leaps and bounds.

"We're being reduce to the size of these turban creatures," said Mae.

I couldn't believe it. I felt husky enough to tear the walls down.

But by the time we reached that remote end of the world a great change had come over us. What had been tiny blue light bulbs in the ceiling now appeared to be vast blue moons in a great expanse of sky.

As Mae had so aptly noted, our sizes had changed. We weren't quite so small as these little turban creatures swimming around us, but small enough that they no longer looked like tiny dolls.

They looked like miniature Japanese, and that's what they were.

When they talked in their little, squeaky voices, they talked in Japanese.

We were to get plenty of proof of this later.

"Let's swim some more," said Mae. "I feel like swimming some more."

"My sentiments exactly," I said, and so we plunged in for another round of the vast purple ocean.

* Take my word for it, I couldn't understand this overwhelming desire for exercise. It was still with us when we emerged the second time. By then we were almost as small as these little Japanese moppets. The purple liquid had given us entirely new suits of clothing along with our diminished forms. We were now wearing neatly fitted purple tights. Our hair had changed to silky tassels, and I felt like a brightly colored rag doll.

But Mae still looked like Mae to me. Her hair and eyes were as black as ever, and her smile was present again in place of the expression of terror I had seen when we slid into this trap. She was by far the prettiest thing in the pool.

"I feel stout enough," I said, "to juggle a ton of concrete."

"There's an exercise ground some place if we can only find it," said Mae. "Let's follow the crowd. Shall we?"

ONCE we started to explore we went everywhere. Tubes led us out of this swimming room and we got into the troughs that circulated through the big laboratory. How immense everything looked! I don't know how a mountain might look to an ant that is used to an ant-hill. But you should have seen some of those objects through our eyes—light switches, nail heads, a stray pencil mark, a pile of dust. Every glance brought a surprise.

We rested, at last, from a long and exhilarating game of catch played with a stone that must have been as large as a bass drum. (It seemed larger than a building.) We sat on the edge of a

tank of crimson dye and swung our purple legs and laughed over what a funny experience we were having.

Then we sobered down and began to think of our responsibilities.

Mae said, "Steve, I never supposed that these turban creatures could be such happy, carefree little imps. From the first sight of the thousands I was repelled. But now—"

"Now," I said, "we'd better do some serious thinking before we forget what brought us here. You're going to be missed by your doctor."

"And Joe is going to miss you."

"But what we're going to find out about Mr. Taggart," I said, "will make up for a lot of missing."

Well, we learned to get around. And right away we discovered we had two big advantages over all these little Japanese creatures we were mixed up with.

In the first place, we knew our way around from the viewpoint of the big folks.

In the second place, we had our wits about us. These little Japs were driving in definite directions, but their drive was almost automatic. As if they'd lost the power to direct themselves. A strong will, like Taggart's, could send them scampering off on the two-week task of digging the earth out from under a building. They wouldn't come back until it was done.

As soon as we learned that we were nearly invisible and could get around on our own initiative without being detected, we defied Taggart's laboratory routines. We struck out to find Mr. Bondpopper, and late one night we found him.

The fat, jolly, white-haired, little fellow was in his office working on his will. He was all out of breath from jumping around over the typewriter keys.

"Don't laugh at my typing," he said. "It's better than my usual hunt and

peck; no joking."

HE CRAWLED down over the space bar. The three of us flattened ourselves into something like patches of turban goods and slid under the door. On the way to Taggart's we had a big talk. Mr. Bondpopper had learned a lot since he'd reduced to midget size. He trusted Mae completely and he took me on faith.

"Where do you think all these thousands of Japanese came from?" I asked. "And what are they—bird, beast or fish?"

"Mostly beast," said Bondpopper. "However, the younger generation is flexible. It's their damnable traditions that do the damage. That's why Taggart made Betty keep experimenting on those turban designs."

"She used the younger generation?" Mae asked.

"Exactly," said Mr. Bondpopper. "If the young ones can be segregated from their old militaristic culture—and it's next to impossible for them to pick it up from these dwarfed automatons—then they are like any other young life—responsive, alert, eager. It's no wonder that Taggart's turbans have worked as talent magnifiers. These young specimens remain pressed within the design, but completely alive and self-sufficient. In a turban or a necktie they provide the sympathetic audience so much needed by every artist or musician."

Thus Mae and I caught the distinction between the old, hardened and destructive creatures—some of which had inhabited Constanza's first turban—and the younger generations.

I recalled that Betty Morris had once relied upon the friendship of a few creatures from that turban. And she had sent some along with me as a possible protection. But my scrap of that turban, as events proved, must have contained

the older and more belligerent variety.

These swarms of miniature people had been smuggled over from Japan. Bondpopper had found out about that, too.

"Taggart and some of his agents," said Bondpopper, "are getting set for a new Japanese war against us. They lost their military war. This time they mean to sneak into this country several million strong. They'll undermine our great cities and get hold of the nerve centers of our nation—if Taggart can get away with these preliminary experiments. . . . Here we are at his twenty-second floor office. Let's seep in quietly."

We slipped under the door and moved across to his desk as unobtrusively as colored shadows. Eventually we crawled up the side of the window frame (through which I had once dived) so that we could look down on the real estate map spread out on Taggart's desk.

Taggart was in conference with two of Bondpopper's top men, one a lawyer, the other a secretary. It was hard to say which of the two was more stubborn. Taggart couldn't shake either of them.

"But you can see with your own eyes, gentlemen," he protested, "that every foot of ground along Park Avenue is doomed. We don't know what day or what hour any of these buildings may collapse. So I'm offering to buy it—not for building purposes. That's out. It's no good. Every stone that has been planted on Park Avenue is a mistake."

"So what?" said the lawyer.

"So I'll buy it at a good price and turn it into a park. If Mr. Bondpopper were living he would applaud my generosity. He'd realize that the Hall of Arts and all those other structures are doomed."

"We'll not sell anything," said the

secretary, "until Mr. Bondpopper's will appears." The lawyer backed him up.

That was all we stayed for. Mr. Bondpopper led the way down to the laboratory and we checked all the subterranean channels. There were three excavations that the little Japanese termites had dug—to the Taggart sidewalk cave-in, to the knight on his horse, and to the Walter Montzingo building. There were no others at present. But with a million or so Japanese termites at his command, Taggart's threat could be made good on short notice.

"What good can we do," I protested, "unless we can get back to our normal size? Are we going to be little creatures forever?"

"That's the least of my worries," said Bondpopper. "So far we've played our size to advantage. All we've learned has come from our being able to mix with these Japs. But you're right, there must be a way to convert them back to normal size. They invented the scheme of soaking themselves to a miniature form during the battle of Tokyo. You know it has always been a mystery what became of hundreds of thousands of them."

"What did happen, then?" Mae asked.

"They were evacuated in barrel lots, preserved in miniature in this purple fluid," said Bondpopper. "If you can understand their language you'll catch a comment occasionally. But all their talk now is as automatic as their actions. They've been pickled too long."

Mae and I exchanged anxious glances.

"I know what you're thinking," said Mr. Bondpopper, "and you're right. We've got to do our thinking and acting in a hurry. The fewer hours we while away in the swimming pool the better. It might be weeks or months or only days. But I'm sure, before long, that this same mental lethargy will close

in on us. Once it comes we'll be content to dig tunnels or tear down buildings or be pressed into turbans for Taggart the same as the others.

CHAPTER XVI

Betty's Special Design

WHEN we got down to brass tacks all three of us thought of Betty Morris.

Betty held the keys to the success or failure of our plan. She knew her turban termites. She had sorted them and experimented with them; she'd watched them work after she'd poured them into the dyes and rolled them through the presses and flattened them into living turbans.

Betty had nerve—that's why my pal Joe had fallen for her. The way to Betty was through Joe.

I found Joe singing very mournfully in our old studio. I worked with a pencil twice my size until I'd scribbled a note for him to meet me on a certain practice stage—where I knew there was a vocoder.

I set the keys on the vocoder to lower the pitch of my squeaky little voice to its old normal. When Joe came in I spoke to him and he began talking with me. But he couldn't see me. To him I just wasn't there. He turned pale and grabbed his head and began to weave.

Well, it took me quite a little time to get him straightened out on everything. But finally I got it across that I was no phoney and that we wanted some special co-operation from Betty.

"We're going to explode this racket sky-high, Joe," I said. "We are going to prove that these turbans are hiding places for half-visible little humans; that some of these creatures are murderous; that any of them may become dangerous in a crisis. That Taggart is

deliberately planting them all over the city to be ready to do damage—"

"Not so fast," said Joe, jerking the neckerchief off and holding the thing at arm's length.

"And, finally, that these little turban termites are little Japs who have been commanded to undermine our cities—"

Joe was a man of action. If his neckerchief was this dangerous he wanted no part of it. He promised he'd get Betty to help us; but first of all he was going to take his gay colored neckerchief out on the fire-escape and touch a match to it.

And that's what he was doing when I hurried on my way. . . .

THEY called Taggart to account that very night—Monty and all the other big shots who were puzzling over falling buildings and the real estate turmoil came together in this same room in the Hall of Arts where I had talked with Joe.

That's how it happened that Mr. Bondpopper's voice hurled the charges. He used the vocoder, the same as I had done, and he sprang the whole story of this underground Japanese intrigue.

Taggart turned all colors. Mae whispered to me, "He's caught. He'll have a heart attack or fall through the floor."

But Taggart was surly and defiant. He said he had a packet of brand new turbans with him and he'd be glad to have anyone make a test—any test—of them.

"You make the test," said Bondpopper's mysterious but unmistakable voice.

The pressure of the audience was crowding Taggart a little, but he never hesitated. He put on the first turban out of the package. A television receiver fed his image to a screen, so that the audience got the benefit of an enlarged moving picture of his facial ex-

pressions, as he sat there in sullen silence.

Meanwhile, Bondpopper called Constanza to the stage and she testified that she had suffered little gashes on her forehead from the original turban, though she didn't know what caused them.

Then came the unexpected entrance of a cowboy and a cowgirl—Joe and Betty, dressed up like desperadoes out of the Wild West—and each with a pair of six-shooters.

"We didn't plan this," Mae whispered to me. "What's up?"

"I don't know. Darned nervy of them to steal our show."

"Don't anybody move!" Joe commanded in an unusual voice.

Just then Taggart gave out with a painful "Yeow!"

"And don't anybody speak!" Joe yelled. Knowing him as I do I'd say he meant business. He gave more orders. Monty, as dumbfounded as anyone, executed them.

"That's it," said Joe. "Take one turban from that package—no, *one* will be enough. We've only got four guns on us. . . . Now, touch a match to it."

Monty did. Thinks I, migosh, suppose I was one of the creatures lurking in that turban—

The blaze ran up past Monty's hand, a big puff of smoke blew outward, and there stood eight Japanese—four women and four soldiers.

"There's your proof, Taggart!" Joe growled. "Come on, you eight mavericks. I've got a pen for you."

As he and Betty marched them away, Bondpopper called after him. "Joe, how'd you know?"

"I tried to burn up my own neckerchief this afternoon," Joe yelled back. "I've got thirteen of these critters tied up on the roof—a little idea I borrowed from Taggart."

The next thing you know Taggart was screaming bloody murder, and so was the audience, to see what was happening to him. A batch of those little fellows were running all over his head with axes. I hate to tell you just how that ended, because it was pretty hideous. It was more than anyone of us had counted on.

It seems that Betty had played her own will upon her hand-picked little creatures, and had instructed them that what Taggart was planning would cause them all a lot of grief. So when they got their chance at Taggart, they acted accordingly.

Heptad and some of his men were caught bolting for the door, and they were conducted out with military order. But Taggart, what was left of him, had to be carried out. . . .

WELL, that is just about that. Unfortunately, these moments of recounting our experience find Mae Wing,

Mr. Bondpopper and myself still swimming around in the purple pool. Our system of justice is characteristically fair but often slow. The million or so little creatures are being brought back to life size as rapidly as possible.

Those who are found to be dangerous Japs are being penned up for the nation's safety. Only a few—mostly from the younger generation—are getting more favorable treatment. We're awaiting our turns. I'm surprised that they don't get mad and poison the whole batch of us. But I still have hopes of getting back to help Joe make good for Monty with our music.

Mr. Bondpopper has ceased to work on his will. He hints that he's intending to replace those two bronze knights on horseback with statues of a nightclub singer and a cowboy, but Mae thinks he's kidding.

Meanwhile, I'm teaching Mae to like cowboy music—no kidding.

The End

Vignettes

OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Huxley

He holds a noteworthy place in the front rank of the world's foremost biologists, contributing greatly in basic research

THOMAS HENRY HUXLEY, English biologist, naturalist and anatomist, was born on May 4, 1825, at Ealing, a suburb of London. His parents were well-to-do and he received an excellent education in the sciences, graduating at the age of twenty from the Charing Cross medical school with the degree of A.B., and as a medalist at the University of London. In 1846 he was appointed assistant surgeon on the *Rattlesnake* of the Royal Navy, commanded by Capt.

Owen Stanley, which was ordered to Australia to survey and study the great barrier reef on the eastern coast of that continent. This survey service lasted four years, during which he devoted the most of his time to the study of the marine life of that interesting region.

His most important research, *On the Anatomy and the Affinities of the Family of Medusae*, was published during his absence by the Royal Society. This monograph placed him at once in the front

rank of living biologists. He demonstrated that the body of the medusa (jelly fish) is essentially built up of an inner and outer membrane, which he asserted were the homologues of the two primary germinal layers in the vertebrate embryo. This discovery stands at the basis of modern philosophical zoology and of a true conception of the affinity of animals.

In 1851, on his return to England, Huxley began a hard struggle against adversity and discouragement. Disappointed in the hope that the Admiralty would provide for the publication of his notes and drawings, he published the more important in the *Philosophical Transactions*, and in the same year was elected a fellow of the Royal Society, which gave him its medal in 1852. In 1854 he was appointed to the chair of natural history and paleontology at the Royal School of Mines. This was in line of direct advancement for his great ability as an educator and administrator. Here his unusual charm as a lecturer attracted attention and quickly brought him distinction and honor. In 1855 he was given the chair of comparative anatomy at the Royal Institution; in 1863 the Hunterian professorship at the Royal College of Surgeons; in 1868 the presidency of the Ethnological Society; in 1869 that of the Geological Society, and in 1870 of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. He was elected rector of the University of Aberdeen in 1872, the professor of biology at the College of the Sciences in 1881, the president of the Royal Society in 1883, and in 1892 a Privy Councillor of the Realm.

He served on no fewer than 10 royal commissions, of which the most important were that of Inquiry into the Sea Fisheries and that on Scientific Instruction and the Advancement of Science.

Huxley's gifts of exposition were as remarkable as his powers of research and this exceptional ability, coupled with the clarity and incisiveness of the language he used in his lectures and writings, has never been surpassed among his countrymen. Perhaps the most remarkable example of these qualities was displayed in his lecture in 1858 on the "Origin of the Vertebrate Skull," in which he

disposed forever of the hypothesis that the skull is, homologically, an expanded section of the vertebral column. But he is chiefly remembered at the present day as among the first of those who accepted whole-heartedly the theory of evolution as outlined in Darwin's "Origin of Species." Convinced by its arguments, Huxley threw himself heart and soul into their support. He undertook a veritable crusade in disseminating knowledge of its details and implications among the masses by lectures, and among the intelligentsia by his writings. This was the basis of his powerful book, "Man's Place in Nature," which is rightly regarded as his greatest literary production.

It may fairly be said that science as contained in the doctrines of organic evolution, and especially in the views of Darwin, is almost as much indebted to the lucid exposition and bold championship by Huxley as to the originators of the theories. Nevertheless, while Huxley tentatively shared Darwin's view of the cause of evolution, that is, Natural Selection, and the Survival of the Fittest, as most probably the correct one, he held that clear and undoubted proof of it had not yet been produced, and urged that the question be regarded as open and unsettled until further evidences were discovered. On the other hand, he dissented absolutely from the explanation advocated by Lamarck, that of "use inheritance."

Huxley came to America in 1876 and delivered in New York three lectures on Evolution, taking as his texts the series of fossil horses. During that visit he delivered the opening address at Johns Hopkins University. Huxley's contributions to science were of the widest range and embraced every department of biology. His exposition of the relations of protoplasm as the physical basis of life is particularly masterful. He was not only a man of science, but a publicist. His services were always at command for the promotion of political, social and moral reform, first and chiefly for the cause of national education. His devotion to labors thus entailed, added to professional toil, did much to undermine his health, which for some years towards the end of his life was very poor. He died at Eastbourne, June 29, 1895.

REFUGEE TREES

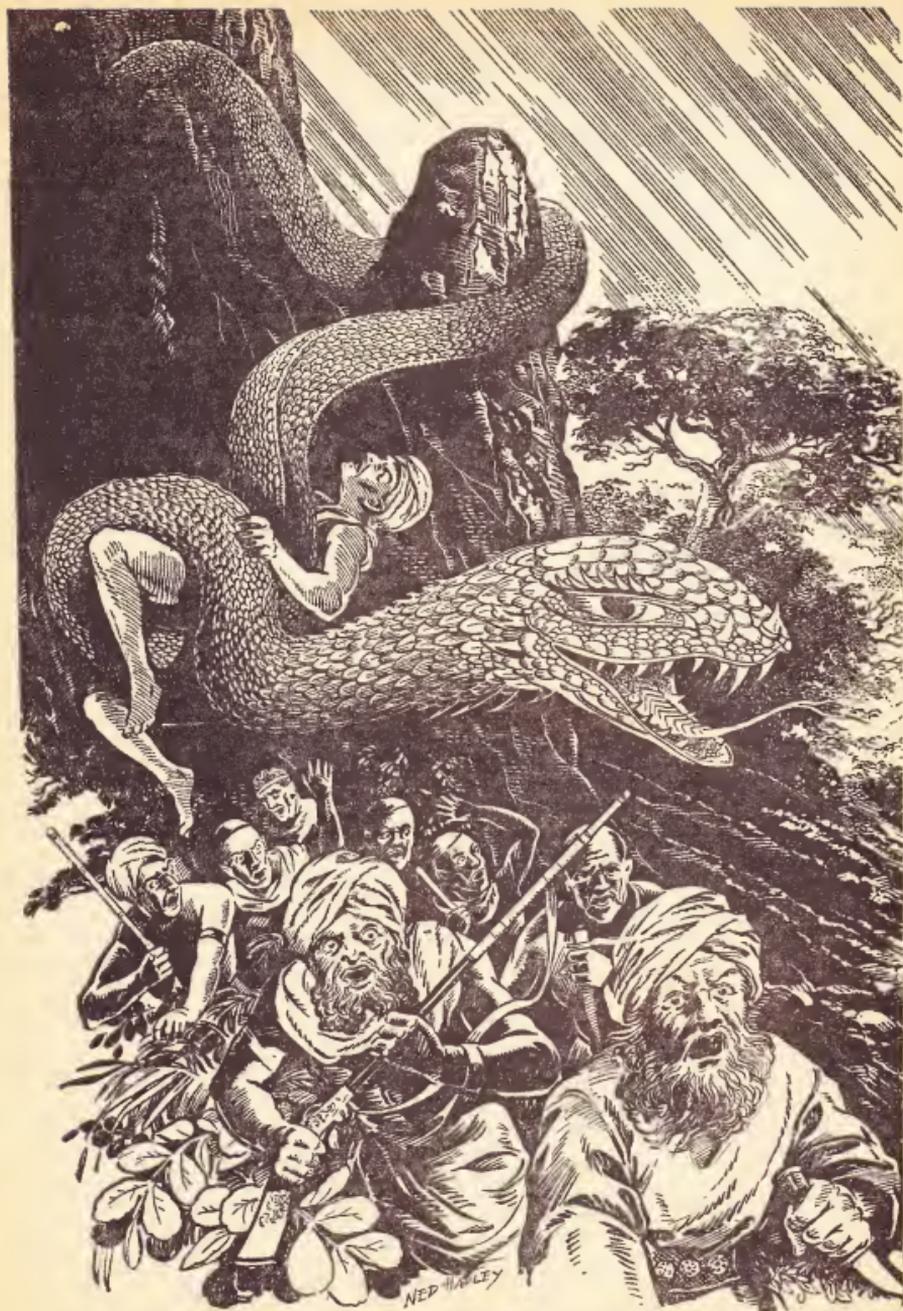
RUSSIA, Great Britain and the United States stand shoulder to shoulder in this war against Germany and Japan. Not only is it important that we win a military victory, but we must also preserve the knowledge gained through years of research that war can destroy.

Russia and Britain have stored many of their prized possessions in huge vaults dug deep into the earth to protect them from bombings, but there are other possessions that cannot be so protected.

Sir John Russell of the Rothamsted Experimental Station in England felt that the excellent grain

and fruit tree varieties perfected by the Russians were in extreme danger and it was through his efforts that the U. S. Department of Agriculture offered to receive and plant these grain varieties in regions of the United States that most closely represent the conditions under which they grew in Russia. The fruit trees would be transplanted by the British and cared for by British scientists.

After the war is won, or even after the enemy is driven out of certain localities, the seeds and young plants could be rushed back to Russia by plane and soon would be producing again to feed the people.—*J. Nelson.*



The natives fled in utter terror from the incredible horror that slithered on them

The MIRACLE of DR. BEAUJEAN

By CURTIS PECHTEL

FOR a moment the drab, sun-baked temple of Kali lay outwardly peaceful in its tree-surrounded clearing. There was not even a bird gliding through the hot sky to indicate any life in the neighborhood.

Then a black-haired girl burst forth from the temple, raced down the clay-grey steps, headed for the protection of the trees.

Almost instantly a horde of men clad only in loin-cloths were after her with

***This great python had eyes within eyes
and the inner eyes were human!***



wild shouts. The fugitive put on a burst of speed remarkable for a slight, underdeveloped Hindu girl. She was rapidly gaining distance on her pursuers. As she disappeared among the protective trees, they were far behind. The older and more feeble of the men dropped from the race.

The girl pushed her way, panting, straight through the underbrush, finally came to a touring car, backed off the narrow, rutty road.

The ignition key was in her hand as she threw herself into the seat, her feet immediately reaching for clutch and starter. She frantically jerked on the gas lever as the motor sputtered and died.

After what seemed an eternity of the starter grinding the motor roared into action. The girl raced it to keep it from killing. Then with an expertness possessed by no Hindu maid, she swung the ancient jalopy into the road.

The half-naked men reached the edge of the road and stopped, throwing curses after the car.

After fifteen endless minutes, the girl brought the car to a halt in front of the low, dirt-colored building which served as headquarters for Colonel Daniel Clerk of the U. S. Army.

She burst in, interrupting Colonel Clerk at his breakfast. He came to his feet when he saw her native costume, her stained-brown face, and the long, straight black hair that certainly wasn't her own.

"Viv!" he shouted, "what the devil have you been up to!"

"Get Captain Thomas and some men, Dad. There's no time to explain now. They've got Ahmed."

The Colonel shook his daughter violently by the shoulders. "Tell me what happened, girl. What's the idea of this get-up?"

"Ahmed sneaked me into the Temple

so I could watch their rites . . . and . . . and they caught us. I got away, but poor Ahmed fell. There wasn't anything I could do to help him, so . . . I ran. I was so scared. Give Captain Thomas some men, and he'll get Ahmed back."

"Vivian! At a time like this. This is probably the spark that'll set things off."

"Just last night you told me there wasn't any danger, Dad."

"I said that so you wouldn't worry. The truth is things have been hanging by a thread. The Jap agents have been working overtime to start something on the frontier, and I'm afraid they've almost succeeded. Their religion is our weak-spot. These local Kali worshipers can get awfully fanatical. We don't dare do anything. All we can do is sit and hope the top doesn't blow off. The worst thing you could have done was to go into one of their damned sacred, restricted temples!"

Her voice was low. "I didn't know, Dad. The British have never kept any troops here, so I thought . . ."

"Yes. So did we. But there wasn't any war then. They could get up to this godforsaken spot in a hurry. We were just sent up here so there wouldn't be too many troops around Calcutta. We're just staying here till the monsoons are over and we can push into Burma. We spend a lot of money with the natives and ask nothing of them. But still these lousy—er—Japs can make trouble."

"I see. But please hurry and get Captain Thomas. . . ."

"He's not here. Our wires with Crophu have been cut. I sent the Captain with some dispatches and a verbal message that has to get through before an outbreak starts. This is just trouble with these Kali worshipers, and if we keep it quiet, we'll defeat the Jap's aim.

If we don't, goodness knows how far it might spread."

"But Dad, we've got to do something for Ahmed. It's all my falt. Captain Thomas is the only one who can do anything—except you. They'll listen to you, Dad!"

"I can't leave here, daughter. And I can't send any men out. I'll call Ali Rhukjak though and see if he can help. You'd better clean up now."

VIVIAN went to her room, inwardly chafing, pulled off her coarse cotton garments, revealing her slender, lithe figure. It took minutes of hard scrubbing to remove the brown stain from her skin. She kicked sandals off her feet, pulled off the hot wig, shook out her curly brown hair.

She glanced through the crack left between the window curtains while slipping into a cloud-white riding habit. A foaming horse was being pulled to a stop by its dusty rider. Vivian pulled on socks and boots hurriedly so she could learn what news the man brought. Then she hurried out of the room.

The rider, exhausted, was panting his story to Colonel Clerk who was pacing up and down in front of him.

It had come. A growing band of Kali worshipers had gathered and was going from mud village to mud village throughout the hundred-mile valley. They were already out of hand, and it was only a matter of time till there'd be an explosion.

"Dammit," the Colonel mumbled. "Thomas is riding right into them. If there was only some way to warn him. Just one Piper Cub even. I don't dare send another of my men out there. We've got to hold out here, without violence if possible, till the British take control."

The tired Indian brightened up. "Sahib!" His voice was pleading.

Colonel Clerk cursed. "You're too damned tired to make it, man. Besides you can't drive a car and that's the only thing that'll catch Thomas."

Vivian, who had been standing unseen in the door-way, stepped forward. "Dad."

The Colonel whirled, puzzled for a moment before he caught his daughter's intentions. "No, Viv, not you! That's no place for an American girl out there now. You'd never make it. Besides, Thomas should be practically to the pass by now. He knows how to take care of himself. You'd better go back into the stockade."

Vivian Clerk hadn't traveled with her father since she was six without acquiring some of his stubbornness.

"They can't possibly catch me as long as I'm in the car. Please don't worry, Dad."

Before the Colonel could say a word, she was out the door.

SHE pulled the car into dusty ruts which served as a road. Her father raced toward her, shouting. His efforts were rewarded only with a jaunty wave of the hand as she sped away.

Dear old Dad! He couldn't realize that if anything happened to Dick, she wanted it to happen to her too. He hadn't known, either, that those "long" walks she took every night weren't alone.

But she would have to hurry if she were to catch Dick before he reached Rysdal pass twenty miles away. Vivian knew a good horseman like the Captain would take it easy so his horse would last in the dry heat. Even if he had started at dawn, she'd still make it.

Some time later the motor developed a steady knock which couldn't have been caused by the bumpy ruts. Vivian looked anxiously at the oil pressure gauge. Twenty-five instead of the nor-

mal forty. The car would still go. No time to worry about that now.

The territory through which the car was climbing was almost in the center of the country between the sacred river Ganges and the Brahmaputra. This territory was foot-hills which would have been high enough in their own right if they hadn't been dwarfed by the lofty Himalayas not too many miles to the north.

The few natives that lived north-east of the end of the valley where the American troops were quartered were mainly down in the small green valleys sheltered from the winds. So none of the inhabitants saw the American car although some must have heard it straining toward the pass.

Crophur, a village of some twenty thousand, to which the severed telegraph cable had led, was some hundred miles to the south. By going up through the pass and down fifteen miles of hairpin curves Thomas had to go only thirty-five miles to a telegraph connection with Calcutta.

When the car screeched around one of these sharp curves, almost losing fender paint on a tree, Vivian reluctantly cut down her suicidal speed. Ahead though was a straight stretch where she'd make up for lost time.

The car took this stretch at a tremendous rate, nearly falling to pieces over the bumpy excuse for a road! Vivian's anxiety deepened as the road bent more sharply upward toward the foot-hills. Could Thomas have made the pass ahead of her? The next five miles would tell.

On the upgrade the motor began knocking loudly as the machine gave of its utmost up the steady climb.

Viv fretted as it lost power and she was forced to use second gear.

One mile . . . two miles . . . three miles . . . four miles . . . she almost

gave up hope. The country had grown barren as the car ascended, the luxuriant trees being replaced with scrub growth.

Ahead was a last large growth of trees through which the road curved to the west end of the pass.

The touring car picked up speed again, raced through the grove. Then Vivian's worst fears were realized.

A quarter mile ahead was a picket of horses. Fifty feet further were a dozen men—and they had Dick Thomas. Somehow they had learned about the Captain's trip and set a successful trap for him.

VIVIAN didn't stop to think. Dick needed her — immediately. She pressed down harder on the gas pedal although the clanking motor was already doing its utmost.

Her plan was simple. The pearl-handled automatic in her pocket wouldn't be of any avail even against the ancient rifles of the Kali-men. But she had a six cylinder battering ram under her.

A scattering of shots were sent at her. The untrained Hindus had fired too soon and the bullets hit no vital part of the car.

Ducking low, Vivian headed right into the group, then swerved around in a sharp turn, plowed back into their middle. That was enough.

Her crude surprise served its purpose better than the audacious American girl had even hoped. The dozen men took to their heels, scampering to the nearest cover. She threw the car in reverse, clashing the gears, backed to the figure she had just missed.

Vivian had the door open even before she slammed down on the brake. In a second she was at Thomas' side, struggling to get him to the car. A knife would have arranged matters in

a hurry. She didn't have one. The strength gained through an outdoor, athletic life served her in good stead. It took half a dozen starts; but she was able to carry the heavy burden to the machine.

It did take two precious minutes. Just as she got Thomas onto the seat, she caught sight of a bound figure huddled beside a rock.

"Ahmed!"

"Memsahib! Go quick." This as Vivian started toward him. "Go. There is no time. See, even now they are coming."

Vivian's mind raced. The fanatics, overcoming their fear when they saw it was caused by a mere girl, were cautiously approaching. The native was right. She'd never get him to the car before the Kali-men would be on them. They were already close enough to shoot. But could she leave her faithful guide to his fate?

Had she been alone, she would have used the car as a fort. There was Dick to think of though.

She jumped behind the wheel. Maybe this trouble would be over in time to save the faithful Ahmed. The car edged forward, started to circle back to the road.

Had the machine been facing downhill instead of at an angle against the grade, all might have been well. Even had the motor failed then, gravity would have carried them five miles at a good speed.

But the car started forward, the clanking motor straining. More power was needed than the motor was furnishing. It killed. Almost instantly the Kali-men were there, dragging out their victims. . . .

THE blinding sun was burning hot. The air was dry, dusty. Vivian's tongue was swollen with unreasonable

thirst. The leather straps with which she was bound to the post bit into her flesh.

"Keep your chin up, kid," Dick Thomas said. His voice was hoarse from want of water. "Your father will find some way to get us out of this. These fellows have plenty of respect for white people."

"Dick! What are they going to do?"

Three of the Kali-men were busy digging a hole in the ground. Two others held the unfortunate Ahmed by the arms.

The hole deep enough, they dragged the struggling guide forward, and thrust him into it feet first. Then the diggers filled the hole, pounded the earth down around the Hindu till his entire body was buried up to the arm-pits.

Two others had come forward, holding their long rifles by the barrels. Vivian winced in horror as each man raised his weapon, smashed it down on the wretch's outstretched arms. His arms broken, they left him helpless.

HOURS passed by, the shadows began to lengthen. Vivian wondered how her mind had stayed clear through the blistering temperatures of mid-day and contemplation of the agony of the half-buried Ahmed not to be spared her even when she turned her head or closed her eyes, because of his groans.

The worshipers of Kali mounted their horses, grouped together a short distance off. They had mallets in their hands, with handles long enough to reach the ground when they bent over a little. One of the men produced a small leather ball, tossed it onto the ground.

Then a game, an Indian polo, was started. It had more purpose than to serve as a sport; the further torment of their helpless victim. Back and forth over his head the horsemen gal-

loped. The aim seemed to be to see how close to the quaking man they could strike the ball.

Riders would charge straight at him and when only a foot or two away pull their mounts to one side. Others would keep straight on, leaving it to the horse to avoid the head and arms almost under its feet.

Because of a horse's reluctance to step on a human, Ahmed was saved many times to suffer the longer.

But finally the inevitable happened. One of the charging horses was jarred by another coming up from the side. Its hoof landed squarely on the wretch's head, squashing it like a melon.

Everything went black for Vivian.

SHE had no idea how long she had been unconscious. When she was again aware of her surroundings, she saw piles of brushwood piled in an oval around both her and Thomas.

Her breath came in a sharp gasp as she realized what that piled wood was for.

Dick said, "Hold on, Viv."

She couldn't answer because of the terror in her heart.

The light from the setting sun disappeared rapidly. In a few minutes it was dark. In those few minutes Vivian lived over her life; lived the future she had always planned; had thoughts for Dick—and still had too much time to think of their situation.

The Kali worshipers lost no time. Torches appeared, their flickening light making weird, terrifying shadows dance in the brush-enclosed circle.

Then the half-naked men rushed forward throwing the blazing torches into the brush-wood. The dry fuel flared up.

Vivian pressed back against the post as if to escape the fury of the flames. Waves of heat came pouring in, making the air like a hot oven. They were be-

ing ever so slowly roasted.

The flames on the outside portion of the filed brush, greedily ate their way closer.

Brighter . . . hotter . . . hotter . . . hotter. Vivian's head was pounding as if it would burst. Several times the whole scene revolved around in crazy spirals. Her leather boots which first had kept the heat from her legs, were now burning hot.

Vaguely she heard a voice coming from her right.

"Viv, I love you."

CHAPTER II

DOCTOR ALEXANDER KRATOVICH'S hacking cough had grown steadily worse. For the third day he was spitting up blood. For two weeks he had not struggled off his rickety cot.

Dr. Beaujean had done everything in his power, but the end was already in sight. Kratovich had too long refused to do the one thing needed: leave his work. The Russian scarcely knew what was going on now. Still he must have sensed his fate was sealed.

Franz Beaujean made his decision. He brought out all his instruments, sterilized them, placed them in perfect order in his laboratory. Then, after bathing everything in ether and alcohol, he wheeled the prostrate figure of Kratovich to his operating table.

He made last preparations. Everything had to be instantly ready. It took the Doctor much longer than usual to scrub and make himself absolutely sterile. Violet rays were on over the operating area.

Thoughts struggled through his mind in a last debate as he waited impatiently for the drugs injected into his colleague's spine to take effect.

He thought again that it would have been better to have brought up his ex-

periment when the man had still been in a rational mind.

No use in going over it all again. He wouldn't be taking a life; Kratovich didn't have enough life left to take, what with his lungs half eaten away. His brilliant scientific mind was still intact. If that could be kept alive, nourished . . . that truly would be a new era in science.

Bright fluorescent lights bore down on the dying Russian's body. Lights that had been carried into the hills on the backs of mules, as had been the generator that ran them. And all the equipment which made up what the Doctor boasted of as the best equipped laboratory in Burma.

Beaujean worked swiftly, everything he needed where he could get it without looking up. For work like this he couldn't use an assistant, even if one had been available.

Half an hour he worked intensely, sweat pouring from his face, breathing hard. The whole of the Russian's head lay open. Delicate tubes connecting vital arteries with a series of glass tubes and jars. So far the device was working.

Kratovich himself had thought it out, and both doctors had worked hard on it. Oxygen was renewed not in the man's lungs but in those glass jars which pumped it back into his veins. Infection could not strike it down. Bacilli, virus, bacteria were foiled by those same jars.

At last Beaujean was ready. He pulled a cellophane tent over the patient. Then he hurried to the next room.

Dr. Beaujean rammed his hypo needle home in half a dozen spots on the reptile's back.

The huge body writhed, then went limp, just as previous experiments had shown it would. Minutes later the huge body lay along side that of Kratovich.

If Beaujean's personal theory was right, now would come the proof. Everything depended on speed. Life had to be kept in that huge body long enough to splice together the nerve ends of Kratovich's brain with those of the creature beside him.

Beaujean's mind was a maelstrom of thought as he plied razor-edge scalpels, tweezers, cotton, alcohol. The body of a snake was hardly the ideal choice—but what other body would retain life sufficiently long to carry through the operation. The operation could not be perfect; but it should be adequate to prove that the theory was right.

For two years Beaujean had studied, vivisected. Every blood-vessel, every nerve he knew. Everything was ready for the brain. Keen scalpels severed nerves. Cut blood-vessels were allowed to bleed so long as they didn't obscure vision. Kratovich's body was to be Death's possession anyway.

Then the brain, protruding optic nerve stalks, eyes, and all which couldn't be separated if they were to function again, was transplanted to the new cavity.

An hour later, all was done. Beaujean, not even with enough energy left to wash the blood from him, staggered to a couch in the next room. By the next morning he might know.

FOR once the natives had followed instructions. There it was—forty-two feet of monster snake, its foot-thick body struggling helplessly against iron bonds.

ALEX KRATOVICH had had no clear thoughts for more than a week. He had a vague but persistent feeling that he was desperately ill, that he wanted to be somewhere else than

wherever he was. Then everything faded away. He was nothing floating in endless nothingness.

At last his mind became clear once again. His eyes took in the bright laboratory. He saw with a clarity he had never experienced before. He blinked several times to make certain it was neither dream nor imagination—and learned another fantastic fact. When he closed his eyes, he could still see!

He felt anything but normal. As if he had no body, was suspended in mid-air. He tried to bring a hand up to wipe his eyes. There was no reaction, no feeling. He tried to turn his head; the head remained stationary. There was a slight feeling somewhere far behind him. Hardly a part of him, but still he could sense it.

The body lay quiet for long hours as the tired brain issued no more commands. The brain was clear; but it felt so much better not to think.

At length the outlines of the room faded, everything went black again.

WHEN the brain returned to activity, Dr. Beaujean was standing there.

"Kratovich, can you hear me?"

Kratovich's brain received the words, tried to answer. He couldn't. His tongue wouldn't move. Indeed it seemed as if it weren't there.

He could also sense the intense anxiety of his colleague. Felt it through no sense he had ever had before. Slowly a panic was stealing over him. What terrible thing had happened to him? He closed his eyes again. The Doctor was still there.

He felt sick again, seemed to ache all over. Ached furiously. Ached somewhere where his body could not possibly be.

Dr. Beaujean had disappeared from view now. He was still there; Krato-

vich could hear him. Then he was back holding his head. But the fingers were . . . in front of the eyes! There could be no head to hold there. Kratovich was confused.

"You can hear me, can't you. Your new body, Alex Kratovich, lives!" Beaujean was shouting in his triumph. "You haven't learned to control your body yet . . . but you will . . . you will . . . Maybe we will even be able to teach you how to talk."

Kratovich was stricken with terror. Realization came like a flood of boiling cold water. He recalled Beaujean's constant research on the subject of transplanting a human brain. He had intended to use the brain of a dying native . . .

. . . and the body of a snake!

The mind of Kratovich went blank with shock.

WEEKS passed by. Day by day the mind of Kratovich learned better how to control his new body. Beaujean had made a myriad mistakes in connecting nerve ends—inevitable under the circumstances—but the brilliant mind was able to compensate for these mistakes.

He had new senses. New sensations. New vision. He had his original eyes plus the eyes of the serpent.

The two doctors had devised a system of signals, a simple matter to intelligent minds, so that Kratovich could converse with the man on whom he was so completely dependent.

For these weeks the true horror of the situation did not become obvious. It was only to be expected that things would be unreal and difficult. But in time this would be overcome. Kratovich did not realize that it was this unreality that made the situation temporarily acceptable.

Everything of the new life had to be

learned. The tremendous store of knowledge which had been the fruit of fifty years of study and research was useless in the body of a snake.

Kratovich had tremendous power in his new body. Of what use was this new power though? What could he do with it when he had no arms or legs, hands and fingers?

He roamed the jungle, floated for hours in a swift stream. Then he'd lay for hours in front of a heat-radiating fire. The warmth was a pleasant sensation to his serpent body.

Beaujean spared him as much time as he could from his endless research. This time was devoted, however, to endless questions by the eager doctor, who wrote pages after each of these sessions.

The body of a serpent proved no fit sanctum for the active, intelligent human mind. Life first became boring, then something positively hateful. Kratovich wanted to flee from the jungle, the stream; to flee from wherever he was.

The snake body had become a prison. A prison from which he could never escape. Beaujean had outraged nature herself. He, Kratovich, was paying the penalty.

He wanted to eat normal human food, to talk, to read, to just walk again. He wanted life to have a purpose, to have some reason for being.

It never would again. There was no use going on, torturing himself.

He begged Beaujean to try returning his brain to a human body, any human body. The Doctor told him it would be sheer insanity to attempt the impossible.

Dr. Beaujean laughed at his desire to be killed.

"You are becoming emotional," he said. "You are much better off than if you were dead. In a week you will

feel ridiculous for having asked. We will devise a method which allows you to read. That will help the time pass."

Read! Of what use was it for a snake to read!

For another week Kratovich endured it. Then he again brought the matter to Beaujean. The man had created a monster; now he had to destroy it before the mind snapped.

Beaujean laughed again. He would not destroy this wonderful, living experiment. Kratovich grew insistent, angry.

It was no avail. This monster was going to let him suffer.

The muscled tail struck out, coiled around the doctor's body. Beaujean's cries stopped. He gasped and coughed for breath as the coils tightened around his body. The scissors which he jabbed time after time into the serpent's back fell noisily to the tile floor.

Then the tail lifted in the air, hurled the body into the roaring fire.

CHAPTER III

VIVIAN CLERK revived. The fires had died down somewhat . . . the longer to keep them suffering, she thought.

Her skin was parched, stinging hot. She had thought that under the scorching afternoon sun she had been as thirsty as a person ever could be. Her thirst had been almost unbearable. Now it was agonizing. If it would only rain.

Captain Richard Thomas was bearing up very well under the circumstances though he had put in a hard half day before his capture. His wrists were raw from trying to pull them from the biting thongs which bound him to the post. He had gained slack, but still the hand would not slip through.

The Kali-men were throwing fresh

brush on the fire. The thoughts ran through the minds of both captives that their scorched bodies could never stand a fresh blast of heat.

Even as the flames flared up, the sharp sound of a shot commanded all attention. Two heads jerked up with overwhelming expectancy. The Kali-worshippers grabbed their rifles, melted into the darkness toward the pass.

"It's Father! He's coming for us," Vivian gasped.

"Not from that direction. Whoever it is, they're welcome. They'd better hurry." Thomas spoke with difficulty.

There was action near the pass. Screams of horror filled the air. Sporadic shots rang out. The din of combat was coming closer. The roasting fire was forgotten in the excitement of battle.

Two shadows flitted past in the dancing light cast by the fire. Then came a hissing noise, a sound of something being dragged across the ground.

Vivian got the impression of black, monstrous eyes staring at her for a minute.

Something shot out, swept like a giant's arm through the fire, scattering the burning brush on all sides.

Even as relief from heat surged through mind and body, Vivian wondered what new horror this might be. In her despair, she did not hope for anything good. At least the tormenting heat was gone. Anything else was better.

Still she cringed as the forty-foot serpent slithered around the oval where the fire had so recently been. Slowly the tail wrapped around Thomas and the post. Vivian clamped her eyes shut to blot out the monster.

Sixty seconds passed into eternity before she felt compelled to look. Post and soldier were laying on the ground unharmed, a hole in the ground mark-

ing where the post had been uprooted.

Then the serpent's tail went around her. Firmly, but with no crushing pressure. She could see muscles contracting under the cold-damp skin as the tail pushed upward, jerked the post out of the clay soil.

The next passing of time was only the memory of a nightmare to Vivian. She knew the leather thongs binding her to the post had somehow slipped loose, leaving her, after a struggle, free except for thongs still around and hanging from her wrists. These defied her efforts.

She suspected that the tail had again seized her before she could go to Thomas' aid, and swung her around to where the creature's neck broadened out. And that she had tried futilely to escape several times. And that she had ridden on that neck, holding onto a flap of skin in a paralyzed grip. How far?

A mile. Maybe a hundred miles. Her mind had been flooded with the single thought of escape. Her limbs had been frozen by an overwhelming idea that it was useless to even try.

AT LENGTH the serpent crawled up the crude steps of a jungle-enclosed house. Inside the terrified girl found herself standing on legs which she feared would collapse beneath her.

The snake head darted forward, pushing open a door. Inside the room were cabinets full of instruments. Vivian had only to reach out her hand to grasp a surgical knife. She fumbled with the knife in her anxiety to completely free herself. When the straps fell loose, she felt stabbing pain in her wrists where the circulation had been so long cut off.

The snake nudged her with its head. Vivian was too exhausted, physically

and nervously to draw away. Then the serpent slid its head around toward a metal container.

Vivian's eyes looked where the head pointed. Water!

Surely this snake was capable of thought!

She drank greedily; never reached her fill; stopped only when almost overcome by vertigo.

The snake nudged her again. Its head was pointed toward an open door. Vivian's fear of the broad, sinister head was disappearing. She went to the door.

Inside the room was a cot, neatly made. The layer of dust on everything gave ample evidence that the room hadn't been used in days.

Vivian took a last look at the snake which was staring at her—or was it imagination?—out of two sets of eyes, one set of which was absolutely human! Then she slammed the door and was sleeping as soon as her body hit the cot.

When she woke would be time enough to wonder about what came next.

THE sun rays were coming directly and intensely through the window when Vivian Clerk stirred. Her stomach was growling with hunger from its involuntary fast of more than twenty-four hours.

She jerked to a sitting position, confused by the strange surroundings. Slowly realization came back to her clouded memory.

Her misadventure in the temple. Her attempt to catch Thomas. Their capture and torment by the Kali-worshippers. Their rescue by the snake—or could that have been?—or *was* it their rescue? What had happened to Dick? She had that to find out.

Surely there would be some human around. Someone had to control that snake. Else how could the reptile ex-

ercise human intelligence? They'd help her find Dick, help her to get back to her father. If they had evil intentions, certainly they wouldn't have allowed her freedom this long.

Her knees wobbled as she slid off the bed. Vivian, woman-like, snatched a cloth from the dresser, wiped the film from the tall mirror perched on this only other furnishing of the room beside the cot and one chair.

Her brown hair was disheveled, had lost much of its curl, and was brittle. Her skin which had always been baby-soft was rough, parched by the heat of the fire.

She put her hair in such order as was possible, smoothing the wrinkles from her breeches and no longer white blouse.

The white-tiled room in which the snake had deposited her the night before was empty so far as living beings were concerned. The water container was still there. The water was warm and brackish, but the girl drank eagerly.

From the rear of the hall a stairway descended to the basement. Maybe someone was down there. The door was open.

The cellar was damp, had a dank animal smell in the air. For a minute Vivian hesitated. Then she passed through a doorway.

She stood petrified. In one swift instant a world of horror and revulsion of serpents overwhelmed her.

Over against the opposite wall cringed a native girl, an attractive specimen for her race. The upper portion of the mammoth serpent was wrapped around her, its head near hers, the tongue darting in and out touching her cheek.

Vivian again noted the two sets of eyes and the human quality of the upper pair. Her muddled mind wasn't

able to solve the problem of the un-snake-like action of this monster. Her nervous system was paralyzed. She was breathing in light, short gasps. The rest of her body was rigid.

After long minutes passed, the serpent caught a glimpse of the comely white girl. It uncoiled its body, turned in her direction, its flat head waving back and forth in the air.

When it slithered forward, Vivian regained sudden use of her limbs. Inch by inch she backed as the serpent inched forward. Back up the stairs. She could not help marveling in spite of her terror as the creature brought its body through the doorway, catching and slamming the door shut with its muscular tail. . . .

THE mind of Dr. Alex Krato-
vich realized what a horrible thing it had allowed its body to do. Beaujean had had only the highest scientific intentions. Intentions the Russian fully agreed with not too long a time before. He could not have realized what a horrible hell the body of a serpent was for a brilliant brain—far worse than any imprisonment of a human body.

Even after he had mastered the nervous system of the reptile, his mind still issued a stream of impulses which had no nerve outlets. He was frustrated in everything he wanted to do. He could not stop that mind from functioning as it always had.

He realized now how important Beaujean had been to him. He had provided food. His company, limited and restricted as it was, had kept him going.

Now he had to forage for himself, eating the wild animals of the country. He could not adjust himself to swallowing pigs or rats alive, feeling them struggle inside before death came.

On one of these foraging trips, the body was gliding toward the river. An-

other of the species glided across the path directly in front of him. Krato-
vich had stopped, mixed emotions temporarily halting his ability to think. The other reptile somehow sensed that he was not one of them, swung around and made off at top speed.

Gradually Krato-
vich had learned to do a variety of things with his foot-thick torso. There seemed no limit to his tremendous strength. Cuts and scratches were stingingly painful, but caused no ill effect.

That splendid mind, however, could not endure complete isolation. It yearned for the presence of humans. Since one of Beaujean's servants had seen the Frenchman's charred corpse in the fireplace, he had not had contact with one human being.

After a week he had made raids on near-by villages, carrying off several villagers, particularly young women. The mind gave way completely to uncontrolled emotions. He made every attempt to make love to these unfortunate girls as best he could with so foreign a body. Vivian had interrupted him in one of these orgies.

At times the mind gained control again. With stark horror, Krato-
vich realized the terror and grief he was causing. For hours this realization would gnaw at him till his mind was in a whirl of torment and despair. The mind would snap again, the serpent body racing at tremendous speed across the countryside in an orgy of disorder and destruction.

It was while in one of these moods that he had stormed through the pass sending the two guarding Kali worshippers into their next reincarnation with one smash of the tail.

The sight of the two white people temporarily roused the mind from its confusion. He drove away the Hindu, whom he had always despised,

their stinging bullets not hitting the vital brain and only serving to further infuriate him.

He did not realize that this attack of an avenging snake which the men of Kali were certain was the wrath of one of their gods visited on them for some misdeed was to frighten the rioting hordes into inactivity and restore the valley to order.

The intelligent mind had found no trouble in extricating the two despairing humans from their near-fatal predicament.

A white girl . . . an attractive white girl. She would be his. She would share his terrible imprisonment. It would be a pleasure to teach her everything he knew as soon as a means of communication was established.

He would take her farther into the mountains where she couldn't escape, where she would be dependent on his great strength for protection. She could never learn to love that body. But she could learn to tolerate it. And she could learn to love his brilliant mind.

For the first time since his fatal illness, Kratovich felt a degree of satisfaction as he slowly slithered the mammoth body after the ashen-faced Vivian Clerk.

REALIZATION of all this would have been of small satisfaction to the girl. Realizing she was dealing with a human mind, her terror would have been all the stronger.

Surely this snake was something supernatural. It was certainly something with which a human should have nothing to do.

Could it be these blind followers of the heathen Goddess-wife of Siva were really right? Could it be this was some punishment being meted out to her by the Gods themselves after the human avengers had failed? She had been

warned against the consequences of sneaking into the temple of the true worshippers.

These thoughts surged through her mind as she backed step by step. She had only one thought, one purpose—escape from this beast. The thought of how to accomplish this never entered her head.

Suddenly there was an anxious voice behind her.

"Viv, run!"

The startled girl's head whirled, she gazed blankly at Captain Richard Thomas who had struggled three hours along the fairly well-marked route of the serpent.

Vivian stood motionless. Fortunately for her the snake's attention was diverted to the new arrival. She was in the hall right next the open door of the lab. This diversion gave her time to recover her thoughts and dart into the large laboratory.

To the serpent this added presence could only mean menace. The huge tail swerved around, rose to smash this man who had the insolence to interfere with this shred of happiness.

The air hissed, the tail struck—the wall. The agile Captain dodged, followed Vivian into the lab. But it was not to be that he could long escape that lengthy, lightning doom. He could dodge; he could not escape.

The serpent realized this. Leisurely it barricaded the room with the powerful tail. The head slowly followed the man till it should have him cornered.

The contest was prolonged when the tensely alert Captain fainted at the snake; then sailed through the air past the repile, and retreated to the other side of the room.

The blurred mind of Kratovich was infuriated by the temporary escape of his prey. He whirled, fury in his human eyes.

At last the gravity of the situation pressed home to Vivian's numbed senses. She remembered the small, pearl-handled automatic nestled in the pocket of her riding breeches.

She emptied the eight bullets at ten foot range. The huge body seemed not to even notice these messengers of death.

Vivian was alert now, desperate. The life of the man she loved was about to be snuffed out.

As she edged along the wall, her eyes alert for some weapon, her head struck a case.

Here were some of Beaujean's surgical instruments. Sharp knives, slender scissors. Nothing large enough to deal destruction to the Captain's would-be destroyer.

But what was this? A huge hypodermic needle, longer than any Vivian had ever seen. A needle loaded, ready for use. One sniff of the contents was enough. Beaujean had obviously placed

this loaded hypodermic here for just such an emergency.

Vivian grasped it with trembling hand, tip-toed up behind the reptile. The latter thought Vivian had done her utmost in the use of her automatic, and was intent on Thomas, planning to deal with the girl at its leisure.

It took Vivian only a fraction of a second to push the hypodermic home, inject the liquid into the back of the creature's head—the vital spot where was the all-sensitive brain.

Infuriated by this stab in the back, the serpent whirled to dart at Vivian.

The lethal drug on which Beaujean had worked so hard had its effect first. The poised head dropped, the snake rolled over—lifeless.

Vivian stood as if in a trance. It took her a full minute to realize that marvelously pleasant sensation was Captain Richard Thomas pressing his lips against hers.

The End

UNEARTHING POLAR SECRETS

By CECIL CARTER

PEOPL**E** are funnier than anybody! A shrewd observation made by a most observant wag proves more true than ever when we take a quick look at some of our ideas about science. Scientists, as a matter of fact, have probably taken a heavier shellacking from second-guessers and know-it-alls than any other group. The old adage about he who laughs last, however, has been just as regular.

The days when "get a horse" was the deriding jibe of the streets is not too far back in our history. Bell's "talking box," the Wrights' "folly" have all been subjected, at one time or another, to criticism and laughter simply because men refused to open their minds to the possibilities of science. This same criticism was levied at the efforts of the brave pioneers who sought to explore the Polar areas. The method used was the same. "It can't be done," they said. And when it was done, they asked deridingly, "Of what possible use is it?"

It is becoming more evident each day that the Polar investigation is of vital importance to us. The efforts of Amundsen, Ellsworth, Scot, Will-

kins and Byrd, who to most of us seemed only foolhardy adventurers, are coming into their own now. The fearlessness with which they plunged into the Polar wastes was more than an indication of just restless men seeking the unknown. It was the drive to find the secrets which scientists feel can be unearthed there, and which they feel can answer many questions that perplex mankind.

It was not so long ago that across the Southern Polar areas on the maps used by laymen and scholars alike was found the label "Icy Ocean." Men believed that Greenland formed the southern tip of a continent which filled what we now know to be the north polar basin. The voyage of Frobisher, Davis, and Baffin, through the dangerous passages west of Greenland, and Bering's exploration of the seas and straits which now bear his name suggested to men's minds the innumerable fields of investigation which lay in that region.

Most of us are not aware that in the Polar regions are brewed the magnetic storms that affect transcontinental and transoceanic communication. Radio vagaries are explained there. The

routes we can use to fly to Europe, the kind of weather that we can expect in the Northern Hemisphere, and thus the chance for good crops is decided by the activity of the air above the Polar wastes. Moreover, there are scientists who propose that in the contrasting Antarctic plateaus and the North Pole depression lies an indication of the birth of this earth when it, as a gaseous globe, was shot from the parent sun. The relation of the immense ice flows to the past geological history of the earth and its affect on future changes of the earth's surface are questions which can be answered only by the thorough investigation of men of science.

The masses of ice which cover the Antarctic have a total area greater than that of the United States and continental Canada combined; the thickness is estimated to be from two to ten thousand feet. Moreover, the volume of drift ice that is discharged from the polar regions into the warmer oceans every year is so great that if it were evenly distributed over the land areas of the earth it would make a complete blanket one foot in thickness. These discharges of ice which were previously examined only as interesting phenomena are now known to be directly related to climatic changes in the Southern Hemisphere. Especially in Australia has this influence been noted. Meteorologists have traced several killing droughts in India to this same occurrence.

In recent days, with the heavy increase in long range communication by telephone and wireless, we have been increasingly affected by radio activity within the polar areas. Messages vital to the efforts of our armies spread throughout the world, new reports eagerly awaited here from areas across the seas, information of every type and nature has felt the influence of sudden black-outs in the communication system. With violent force that overcomes all man-made machines designed to circumvent radio interference, the severe magnetic storms literally choke the electric lines that bind the world, and man can do nothing to relieve this stranglehold until the storms subside. To understand the nature of such storms, to study their character and influence, and perhaps to learn how to predict their occurrence is a goal for which new investigations must strive.

To the meteorologist the information to be gained is even more important. He already knows the effect of polar outbreaks on weather. Almost every four days an air mass leaves the pole, having absorbed from the icy surface characteristics of temperature and moisture. In the winter it begins its long trek across the land, Alaska, Canada, and the heart of the United States. As it moves it not only carries with it the characteristics which it absorbed from its polar source region but, depending on its pattern of movement, absorbs new moisture and may lose more heat. A train of clouds precedes it, and frontal areas may be characterized by precipitation and thunderstorms. Perhaps, depending on the general air mass situation into which it moves, it unites with

another air mass. The overrunning of warm moist air from the south above such polar air masses can bring precipitation, etc.

This entire system moves across this country, the North Atlantic, Britain, and then Northern Europe. By following its path from its "hirth place," across the Northern Hemisphere and determining the effect of local conditions on its peculiar character, meteorologists have been able to predict with ever-increasing accuracy the weather that is to be expected.

This polar source region, therefore, is of vital importance to meteorology. The war with its increasing use of this science as a guidepost to all types of military operations has been a tremendous impetus to the investigation of this area. The army has established throughout the North an ever-growing number of weather stations. There, fearless young soldiers, fully trained by the Army Air Corps Weather Service to observe and record scientific data, maintain their lonely vigil day in and day out. Hundreds of miles from civilization, they are supplied by air and are constantly in danger from the severe storms that rage interminably. The information which they obtain is transmitted regularly for immediate use by the army. It is also collected and recorded for future use in establishing patterns that can be used to predict the occurrence of such outbreaks. The future of meteorological knowledge depends a great deal on these investigations.

In the field of glaciation the Antarctic presents the opportunity for study of inestimable interest. Since the geographical characteristics of most of North America originated in the immense ice sheets that covered a good part of this continent in the Ice Age, study of the Antarctic Continent which is still virtually in the Ice Age can reveal, by inference, the conditions that once were part of our country. The hunt for fossils there will probably produce outstanding results since the conditions, for the maintenance of flora and fauna for long periods of time has been found to be perfect.

Study of the polar area in all these fields is going forward by leaps and bounds. Recently Commander W. S. Marr and a party of fourteen British scientists and research experts established a base in the Antarctic. Their purpose is to study polar meteorology, radio conditions, and mineral resources. They established this base in February of this year at Hope Bay, Grahamland, the nearest land mass to the South Pole, and their intention is to remain there for two years. This is really a return visit for Commander Marr since, in 1922, as a Boy Scout at the tender age of eighteen, he accompanied Sir Ernest Shackleton to the Antarctic.

The efforts of this expedition and other groups that will undoubtedly follow is growing evidence of the intensification of the hunt for increased knowledge of the hitherto forbidden areas of the earth. Man is no longer satisfied to let the secrets of the Arctic and Antarctic lie hidden.

ROMANCE of the ELEMENTS



EARLIEST GLASS?

ANTIQUITY BELIEVED THAT THE WORLD'S FIRST GLASS WAS ACCIDENTALLY FORMED WHEN BEACH BONFIRES, LIGHTED BY PHOENICIAN SAILORS, FUSED THE SAND. . . INDEED, OLDTIME CRAFTSMEN LONG IMPORTED GLASS-MAKING SAND FROM THE VERY SPOT WHERE THE PHOENICIANS HAD CAMPED. LATER ARCHAEOLOGISTS DUG UP EGYPTIAN GLASSWARE MADE CENTURIES EARLIER

SAND

IS BASICALLY SILICA. SO ARE ROCK CRYSTALS, ONYX, OPAL AGATE, AND AMETHYST. "AMETHYST" IS GREEK, MEANING "NOT INTOXICATING!" FOOLISH OLD-TIME GREEK TIPPLERS THOUGHT SPIRITS QUAFFED FROM AMETHYST GOBLETS WOULD NOT MAKE THEM DRUNK!



"BIG SHOT" ARTISANS OF EARLY ROME WERE CLEVER GLASS MAKERS WHO CUNNINGLY IMITATED GEMS IN GLASS. PATRICIANS GLADLY PAID KINGS' RANSOMS FOR THEIR LOVELY VASES. . . BUT THEY TURNED OUT CLOUDY WINDOW PANES THAT WERE BARELY TRANSPARENT.



HOW MODERN IS SAND CASTING?
2500 YEARS AGO EGYPTIAN METAL WORKERS CAST TEMPLE DOORS IN WET SAND MOLDS.

SILICON—By ROD RUTH and G. A. McLEAN



THEY'RE

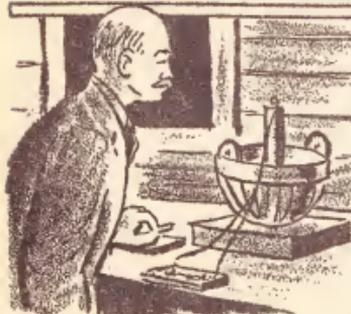
DOING WONDERS NOW-DAYS WITH OPTICAL GLASS.

SILICON STEEL IS AN INTERESTING MODERN DEVELOPMENT. SILICON IS USED IN ALUMINUM CASTING ALLOYS TO "UP" CASTABILITY, AND FOR BETTER DIE CASTING.

THE FEATHERS

OF SOME BIRDS, WHEN REDUCED TO ASHES, YIELD NEARLY 40% SILICA. THERE'S MORE SILICON IN A YOUTH'S TISSUES THAN THERE IS IN AN ADULT'S.

ON THE EARTH'S CRUST, ONLY OXYGEN EXCEEDS SILICON IN ABUNDANCE. TEAMED TOGETHER AS SILICA, THESE TWO ACCOUNT FOR SOME SIX-TENTHS OF THE EARTH.



WHEN

IN 1891, DR. ACHESON PASSED AN ELECTRIC CURRENT THROUGH A CHARGE OF CLAY AND COKE IN A TINY HOME-MADE ARC FURNACE, HE GOT CARBORUNDUM OR SILICON-CARBIDE, SECOND ONLY TO THE DIAMOND FOR HARDNESS. NOW CARBORUNDUM IS THE "MUST" ABRASIVE OF INDUSTRY.

SILICON is a non-metallic chemical element. The symbol is Si, the atomic number is 14, the atomic weight is 28.06, and exists in two forms: amorphous and crystalline. The crystalline solid has specific gravity about 2.4, the amorphous about 2.35; the melting points of both are around 1,450 degrees C. It is found as quartz, flint, sand, chalcedony, tridymite, opal, etc., but occurs chiefly in the form of silicates of aluminum, magnesium, and the alkaline-earth metals.

NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Silver

READER'S PAGE

S. O. S.

Sirs:

I have just finished the February, 1944 issue of F. A. and it's one of the best issues I have ever read.

Congratulations on "Letter to the Editor"—it was original, perfect, and gives the reader something to think about.

All the stories were good except "What's In A Name," which wasn't so hot. It seemed more corny than fantastic to me.

I like the "Discussion" and "Fantastic Facts" Pages. Speaking of Fantastic Facts here's an extra fact for you: Two of your writers can't add. Here is the proof:

1. In "the Musketeers in Paris," McGivern writes on Page 174: D'Artagnan steps from the car.—Porthos, Aramis, and Athos clambered from the car—Phillip had slipped quietly from the car. By simple addition you get *five* men in the road. Yet McGivern writes:—and the *four* men watched, etc.

2. In the Lefty Feep story, Bloch writes on Page 183: *Eight* snakes are coiled in the basket. But then on Page 192 he writes that by rolling into halls or stretching out full length they spelled out S.O.S. in Morse Code. Now, that's impossible because as anybody can tell you S.O.S. in Code is . . . - - - . . . , that is three dots, three dashes, and again three dots. Now 3+3+3 is *nine*; so how in heaven's name can *eight* snakes spell it out?

Please, please, please, when you read over the scripts check on your writer's mathematics, or else supply 'em with adding machines. These little mistakes annoy plenty of other readers I'm sure.

But on the whole you've still got a beautiful hunk of magazine.

L. Dorzback
1176 Walton Ave.
New York 52, N. Y.

We will agree that McGivern never could add. Especially when estimating the words his manuscripts contained! As for Bloch, are we publishing a fact magazine? The answer is very simple; one of the snakes doubles in brass. But all humor aside, we hope you'll permit us a little laxity now and then, if it's only in the number of snakes required to do a "save me, my hero" in double talk. Thanks much for that "beautiful hunk." We'll try to keep the magazine that way every issue!—Ed.

AN ESCAPEE RECAPTURED!

Sirs:

This is a letter I have been wanting to write for a long time, and have finally begun.

Before me I have a just completed issue of the February '44 FANTASTIC. For many months I had stopped reading *Amazing* and FANTASTIC, because I felt that to be frank they were beginning to deteriorate and I went looking for better things. Well I ran across the February issue of FANTASTIC and I am hack to stay. This issue was one of the best.

The cover was good but may I ask what bearing it had on the story? There was no description of a woman on horseback in the story, if I remember right. Here is my idea of the perfect cover, the illustration not hidden by the lettering. I realize that it is important to catch the reader's eye with a "flashy" cover, but how about a cover with smaller lettering and better illustration?

"Outlaw of Venus"—excellent but a little too short.

"What's In A Name"—another one of those swell shorts, but it reminded me too much of "Lefty Feep."

"Letter To The Editor"—these stories always make the mag. much more interesting, but really now it does say in front of the mag. that all stories are fictitious.

How about putting the date of the publishing of the next issue on the table of contents?

The remainder of the stories in this issue were all of superior quality.

Would it be possible to put the remainder of the Finlay drawings on a page which is blank on the other side and suitable for framing?

The drawings on both front and back cover are a swell addition to the mag.

Here are some ideas for a swell post-war mag:

1. The size of the "pocket books" and about three-hundred pages to come out each month possibly a combination of both FANTASTIC and *Amazing* to have only the best along the lines of "The Pocket Book of Science Fiction."

2. To have a certain amount of reprints in each issue from the famous old authors such as Merritt, Lovecraft and so on.

3. Photographs instead of drawings whenever possible. Well, enough said for once.

Calving Jack Witt
458 N. Ogdan Drive
Los Angeles 36, Calif.

If you will recall, the old bartender tells of the

legend of the "girl on horseback" on Venus. Not the scene you might expect us to select, but you must admit you liked this cover very much—and that was our idea in having it painted. As for fiction, yes and no. Sometimes we find ourselves publishing semi-factual stories as fiction because they are too incredible to present in their true guise. For instance, see the next issue of our companion magazine Amazing Stories. It contains a story called "I Remember Lemuria" which is the TRUE racial memory of its author. However, we cannot present the story itself as anything but fiction, no matter how much faith we place in the author's statement that it is an embellished story of an actual memory of 12,000 years ago. Psychologists do not refute, but support this possibility, and in fact, Freud says racial memory is a reality. Your editors believe it for other reasons—because the author has presented scientific theories which are being checked by scientists, with incredible results which will be made public when completed. So, although "Letter To The Editor" eventually turned out to be a gag which came all too true, played on your editor. It was a fantastic coincidence, and in that respect, was true. We will give some thought to that date business. Trouble is we are presently teetering on the verge of returning to monthly schedule, depending on events abroad and at home. So, we might announce a date, and then appear a month ahead of it! You'd be a little peeved if you missed the issue on that account, wouldn't you? Your suggestions are all well received here, and who knows how many will become realities? The readers' will has always prevailed in our policy formulations.—Ed.

A LIST OF CLASSICS

Sirs:

Your novel, "Return of Jongor," was the best in all Fantasy Magazines for that month. Much better than "The Greatest Adventure" by Taine in Famous Fantastic Mysteries, also better than Vogt's novelette, the "Changeling."

Here is my listing of the best novel length works of Fantasy (old and new) I would like to see you publish a new fantasy book every two months (bi-monthly), with good size print, good paper, etc.

- No. 1. Dwellers in the Mirage—Abraham Merritt.
- No. 2. Face in Abyss and Snake Mother—A. Merritt.
- No. 3. The Moon Pool—A. Merritt
- No. 4. She, Ayesha, Wisdom's Daughter (Trilogy) also She and Allan—H. R. Haggard.
- No. 5. Elixir of Hate, Darkness and Dawn Trilogy—G. A. England.
- No. 6. A Strange Story—Bulwer Lyton.
- No. 7. Mars book series—Edgar R. Burroughs.
- No. 8. Witch of Prague—F. Marion Crawford.
- No. 9. Dracula—Bram Stoker.
- No. 10. Frankenstein—Shelly.
- No. 11. A thousand years in the future—T. P.



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No. 12. King in Yellow, Maker of Moons—R. W. Chambers, omitting all but fantasy.

No. 13. Melmoth the Wanderer, by Maturin and sequel Melmoth Reconciled by Balzac or Weiland or the Transformation—C. Brockden Brown.

No. 14. Ship of Ishtar—Merritt—or Shadows over Insmouth—Lovecraft.

No. 15. Fire Tongue—Sax Roh or Brood of the Witch Queen—Robmer.

I wonder how many other readers will agree with my opinion?

Guyon L. Kendter

R. D. No. 1, Oxford Valley Road
Bristol, Penn.

Here's one list of classics. Who agrees?—Ed.

MORE ABOUT WELL OF DREAMS

Sirs:

Bought the April F. A. yesterday. Let's get down to business. St. John did a swell cover—best you've ever had. His picture on page 13 was okay, too. But the best was Finlay's and the one on pages 156-157.

The best story was, naturally, Williams' near-classic "Return of Jongor." More of Jongor! Second place: "Time On Your Hands"; Third: "Lefty Feep Does Time." Incidentally, there are 600—not 500 years between 1944 and 2544; Fourth: "Homer and the Herring"; Fifth: a tie between "Freddie Funk's Forgetful Elephant" and "A Horse on Thorndyke." Last place: "The Curse of El Dorado." Where's the fantasy? It's just straight adventure, if you ask me. Anyway peeeeyouuu! Quick, Watson! The oxygen tent!

Dear, Dear Editor Palmer! You've hit on something, and I do mean hit! That "Dream Well" theory of yours. To my mind it explains a lot of things. But as to dreaming about being an animal, I never have, but several times I've had dreams of being chased by dinosaurs, lions, sharks, etc., and one night I had a dream that I got in a fight with three Jovians, and all I know is that they were so odd looking that it is impossible to describe them.

Miskey really brought up something good about a World State. I think politicians should be totally excluded from the peace conference. Instead, scientists and science-fictionists should get together and figure out a World Federation.

Oesterreicher's suggestions concerning "Warriors of Other Worlds" and similar back-cover features is very, very good.

Tehus' found the same fishy statement in "Letter to the Editor" that I did. Is he the only fan that used his head (besides me) to see if the statements would hold water?

Baskin's got something in his book-club idea. I'm all for it. Chad Oliver's idle remark gave me an idea. Why not "Pets of Other Worlds" showing the domestic animals of the Martians, etc.?

Pierston's got another good idea. Why not offer cover and interior originals and reproductions? That's another idea that would catch on.

Now that I've almost emptied my fountain pen writing this letter, I'd better save a little ink to sign my name. Keep A.S. and F.A. coming.

Emile E. Greenleaf, Jr.
1303 Mystery St.
New Orleans 19, La.

For an even more amazing thing than the dream well, see the March 1945 issue of *Amazing Stories*, on sale December 8. "I Remember Lemuria" is a true story from the well of racial memory. It will explain many other things to you.—Ed.

JONGOR ANOTHER HIT!

Sirs:

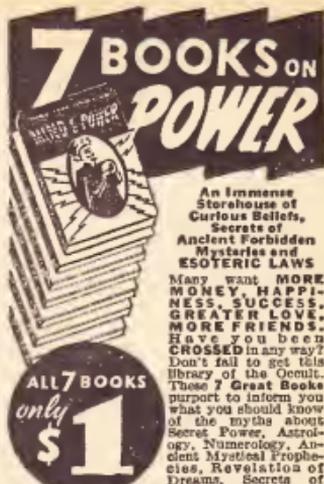
I've been reading your magazine for about three years, but I have just gotten around to writing to tell you how much I enjoy it. I can't honestly say that I think that it is the best in the fantasy field, but it is among the best and as long as I have read it I have yet to find a story that I couldn't enjoy to a certain extent; of course you have published some stories that weren't up to your usual standard, but all of the stories I have read in *FANTASTIC* and in your companion mag. *Amazing Stories* had some worth and not a one of them was totally bad. Unfortunately I seemed to have missed the issues that contained the best stories and I would like very much to get a hold of some of the back issues. Do you have many in stock, if so how much do you charge for back issues?

Now for the April issue. I hope I won't disappoint you too much when I tell you that I have practically nothing but bouquets for you on this issue. . . Here's my ratings:

1. The Return of Jongor—Excellent
2. Homer and the Herring—Very Good
3. A Horse On Thorndyke—Good
4. Time On Your Hands—Good
5. Freddy Funk's Forgetful Elephant—Fair
6. Lefty Feep Does Time—Fair
7. The Curse of El Dorado—Very Poor

Your front cover was excellent but then how could it be otherwise with St. John doing it; your interior illustrations were very good, the Finlay of course was the best one in the mag, but McCauley ran a close second with his illustration for "Time on Your Hands." The back cover was exceptionally bad for *FANTASTIC*. The Editor's Notebook was very good as usual as was "Vignettes of Famous Scientists," the rest of the features do not appeal to me so I will give them no rating. . .

The Reader's Page was fine as per usual, incidentally Manfred Baskin's letter is the answer to my prayer, I for one would certainly like to join a science-fiction book club, such as he suggests and I think that you will find that there are a lot of other fans who will also be interested in joining such a club, and in rereading the letter I find that you have already answered my question re: back issues so just ignore it.



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Well that just about winds up this rather dull letter. (Do I hear a sigh of relief, or have you gotten this far?)

George I. Wheeler
221 North Durhin St.
Casper, Wyoming

We have no back issues in stock at all. You are not the only one who wants them, and it is our greatest regret that we cannot supply them. Yes, Williams' second Jongor story was as great a hit as the first one. And while we are on the subject of Williams, he has become the proud papa of a baby girl, and as a consequence has become the army's temporarily most useless soldier! In fact, he checked in a B-29 the other day and saw nothing unusual in the fact that it came in up-sidedown! Great news, Bob! Keep up the good work . . . ! As for reading letters in full, we always do. You ought to see us scramble for the morning mail when it is brought in, breathlessly exclaiming as we do so—"any fun mail!"
—Ed.

O'BRIEN'S HUMOR

Sirs:

I have just finished reading the June issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. This issue is the second one I've read.

To begin with, it's a swell magazine—in fact, it's the best scientific, supernatural magazine I've ever had the pleasure of reading. I am glad to see that some people have an eye for the future and also a brilliant imagination.

I have no reason to believe that the authors of your enchanting stories are any different than people like myself, but I sure would like to meet them. As far as being odd—if I were to let loose some of the dreams I have on the public, people would think me a hit insane.

In general, most of the stories in this issue were very interesting. The only one that didn't strike me as being very interesting was "Hitler's Right Eye" by Lee Francis.

The two stories I liked most were "The Strange Mission of Arthur Pendran" and "The Man Who Lost His Shadow." I, for one, have a great liking for the mixture of Past and Present which has been woven into so many of your excellent stories. This mixing of past and present would have a tendency to attract the person who, formerly, had not brought himself to indulge in the reading of literature of this kind.

The other issue that I have read is the February issue. The one story which fascinated me most was "The Place Is Familiar"—the humor in that story had me howling with laughter—MORE!!

With reference to the article about "Bellerophon and the Chimera", (special reference to the back cover painting); in the study of Greek mythology in elementary school, I was under the impression that the so-called Chimera that Bellerophon slew had three heads; each head that of a different animal—how many different interpretations of that myth is there? In the painting, the Chimera has

but one head; that of a goat. The front cover painting by Robert G. Jones, in my opinion, is an excellent painting.

The story that seemed rather odd to me was "Man from the Magic River"—so much detail, it seemed that the author was trying to fill space instead of presenting an interesting plot!

Although I find this issue very interesting, it doesn't hold a high rating in my must-read list like the February issue does.

Well—here's hoping for more stories like D. W. O'Brien's "The Place Is Familiar"—and also many more pleasant reading hours—for me! Wishing you many more new readers.

James L. Cribelar
1140 N. Alton Ave.
Indianapolis 8, Indiana

We are pleased to know that you feel we are hitting the field of fantasy and imagination so squarely. We believe fantasy is the highest type of literature yet devised by man; being the highest expression of the mysterious quality that makes him more than a mere animal. As for O'Brien, we feel that in "The Place Is Familiar" he has done something unique—he has created a delightful fantasy, and yet his people are so real and down to earth that we cannot possibly question their reality. Combine this with the unequalled sense of humor he displays in the uproarious situations in the plot, and you have a masterpiece. In that last word we sum up the composite opinion of our readers as they have expressed it to us in numerous letters. Speaking of Mr. O'Brien, he phoned us from Rapid City, South Dakota this very day (September 13) and informed us that he had finished his last training mission and was on his way overseas to join his buddy, Bill McGivern, who is already in the fray. Bill is on the ground and Dave in the air—which is the first time they have ever been parted. Dave also informed us that he had finished his swan-song manuscript for the duration, a detective mystery called "See Naples and Die!" Which might be a hint to you to begin reading our sister magazine, Mammoth Detective, if you like O'Brien's work! As for the Chimera, there are many different versions. The one presented on our back cover is the most widely accepted. However, you would be perfectly right in ascribing your description to it. You will not be challenged by any authority who will not in his turn be challenged by another. We have asked Don Wilcox, author of "Man From Magic River" to come down from his high literary perch and give us more of his famous stories of the past. He has responded with some manuscripts you'll be seeing before very long! Speaking of mixing Present and Past, we have several excellent stories scheduled for publication which do exactly that—and in a very unusual manner. We have found stories of this type lend themselves to absorbingly interesting hypothetical situations. Also, our writers enjoy writing them.—ED.

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"FAIR EXCHANGE" LIKED

Sirs:

Am writing you concerning that story called "Fair Exchange". It was the most entertaining short story I have read in many months. Had a dramatic side to it as well as a delightfully humorous content. I got a great kick out of the story. I like that type of humor. I'd like to read other stories of this kind.

MARIE M. CALLETTA,
219 North Sec. St.,
Hammonton, N. J.

Stories of this kind do not come along very often—but we'll present them when they do.—Ed.

REPORT FROM THE FAMILY

Sirs:

The family is delighted with Don Wilcox's tale (tail?) of the cats . . .

Eight-year-old thanks the "man" very much for writing a story for children in a "real grown up magazine"—and "please, was the king a wizard?" . . .

Seven-year-old asks if there will be more fairy stories, and to "please make some of the people children in the next one, like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz," and "would like some more about the funny cats, but can't there be some other magic animals too?"

Personally, I'm not sure Don Wilcox will appreciate the comments of less-than-teen-age children—but the story was quite a hit. Usually we don't have stories for "young-uns" in *Fantastic*.

Are they going to continue? We "old-uns" would be interested to know. If so, by all means have Don write 'em.

Oh yes, seven-year-old asks for more "pitchers" in the children's stories, since "Mommie" and "Dad" don't have time to make too many extra illustrations, full page size . . .

Incidentally, Mom and Dad have read *Amazing* since the "Skylark" stories were printed, and *Fantastic* since its inception. We had so many back numbers they loaded tables, desks and chairs, so finally had to sell them . . .

Do we need to say we like them?

E. KNOX,
No address.

Your editors have always had a sneaking hunch that there is no such thing as "grewed-up" people. Your letter seems to prove it. A good "children's" story is enjoyed by old and young. And we agree this was a good one.—Ed.

99-YEAR-OLD READER!

Sirs:

About a year ago I saw one of your magazines in my neighborhood drug store and because anything fantastic, supernatural or unexplainable gets me, I bought one. To say I was crazy about your stories is putting it mildly, so haven't missed an issue of either of your magazines since. Lucky

me, I don't have to get into a brawl to obtain one.

I HATE people who are always complaining about some of your stories. Heck, if I don't like one story I just go on to the next and have yet to find two together that I don't like. I'm not up on my science so I don't take exception to any mistakes the authors may make, I just let my own mind ramble on and pretend.

After I had read that first copy, I offered it to my grandfather, who is ninety-nine now, and will be one hundred in November. I knew he didn't have much to do and he likes to read, but still I didn't know how he would accept such fantasy. He read one story and got a kick out of it, so he read more. Now he is always asking me if I have a magazine he hasn't read. He enjoyed the first magazine so much that my mother became interested and now she reads all I get.

Keep up the good work and as long as I like every other story, I promise you won't hear any squawks from me. I read the Reader's Page first, even though I don't agree with ones who think every story should be to their liking. Lots of them like stories that I don't care for when I read them, and I'm simply nuts over Lefty Feep, but I read a lot of criticism of him. After all, you can't please all the people all the time.

MARJORIE BRUNO,
101 East Avenue 38,
Los Angeles, Cal.

You can tell your grandfather for us, that his interest in our magazine is flattery such as we have not thus far received! We'll try to keep on pleasing all of you. Seems this "family" business is catching! And maybe we ought to have a new slogan—"the fantasy magazine for all the family!"
—Ed.

ONLY ONE GRIPE?

Sirs:

I have but one gripe: I don't like long novels told in the first person. Especially like Wilcox's "Cats Of Kadenza," where the narrator is first a man, then a girl. I half expected the cats to tell part of the story.

I've been reading FA for only five months, but I have read at least 40 issues, thanks to second hand stores. I've read plenty, but I can't choose just one story out of all. My favorites are: "The Liquid Man," "Doorway To Hell" (the second part), "Return Of Circe," "Citadel Of Hate," "Miracle Of Kicker McGuire," and all the Lefty Feeps.

Looking through FA I see a lot of future interplanetary tales. I don't think they belong there. AS should have all interplanetary, time machines, and gadget stories. Also future war stories. FA should have only pure fantasies, such as vampires, mind readers, invisible men, etc. Martians and Saturnians don't belong on FA back covers, either. Myths, or illustrations of stories are okay. Anyway, you should cut a little square in the corner

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and show a close-up of those weapons they use. On some issues they are a little hard to make out.

If anyone has back copies of FA or AS printed before 1940, please send me list and prices. As a gentle hint, I don't wish to start inflation or buy from a black market, if you get what I mean.

G. DALLAS,
Cleveland, Ohio.

First, your letter didn't carry an address, and the envelope is missing, so you might repeat your request, and we'll act meanwhile as your agent if you'll send your address, in case anyone has those copies you want. As for the cat story, your editor is inclined to agree with you. No story should switch viewpoint in the middle, but we let Wilcox get away with it this time because we thought the story was pretty unusual anyway.

We try to segregate the stories as you mention, but sometimes we find that one or two are very hard to classify exactly. In such cases, we decide in favor of variety. After all, you must remember these are strange times, and appearing only quarterly, we try to make each magazine pleasing to everyone.—Ed.

NIGHTMARES—BUT SHE LIKES 'EM!

Sirs:

I am a new reader of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, having read only three of them. As I have to buy books and magazines for men, I rarely read, or buy, a woman's magazine. After reading F.A. I wonder if we are crazy to read it, or are the authors crazy? They must have wonderful nightmares, or perhaps it is the effect of "the morning after the night before." However it may be, I will buy the next edition, just to see if their imagination is keeping up with them. You see, a cat is curious and so am I. No kidding though, F.A. is interesting and a change from too many war stories.

PEARL L. MOON,
852 Washington Ave.,
Ft. Myers, Fla.

We have a hunch you'll get over that idea of our magazine being a "nightmare". Really, we publish a pretty good brand of literature, and when you consider that many famous writers made their name in the fantasy field, you'll realize this is nothing new, and certainly something good. Edgar Allen Poe, Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, etc., are only three of many hundreds of examples: you could go on with such names as Bram Stoker, Victor Rousseau . . . —Ed.

BOOK CLUB IDEA GOOD

Sirs:

Seems most of the stories in the April issue were more of the comical type. "Homer and the Herring" for instance.

I've been reading F.A. and *Amazing Stories* for years and always pass them on to my brother. Between us we always manage to get each issue of both magazines.

Here's hoping we can have bigger and better FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and *Amazing Stories* magazines after the war.

MRS. ELSIE PEARCE,
Clearwater,
California.

You can bet on it! We've got our plans all laid for the biggest and best you've ever seen.—Eo.

LEFTY FEEP IS STILL ON TAP!

Sirs:

I have just finished your May issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. In my opinion it is better than some I have read but not up to par with the majority. In the year and few months I have kept up with your two s-f magazines, I believe the first issues I read were the best so far. I have not yet read a science fiction story that equals Nelson S. Bond's "When Freeman Shall Stand." The next best stories I've read were "The Ice Queen," "Man With Five Lives." The sorriest, of course, was "Craig's Book." Another story I thought exceptional was "Appointment With The Past," by Lee Francis.

By the way, what happened to Lefty Feep in your June Issue. Also, Don Wilcox is usually good. The type of issue I like is the one that has one long novel and two or more novelettes.

I think time travel and the interplanetary junk is running down your magazines, although some of them are good. I enjoyed "Letter to the Editor." The only thing that I know of that is wrong with your magazines is that some of them are all around good ones and the next one is all around putrid. I like almost all of the "suspended animation" and "sleeping-a-million-years"; however even those can be overdone.

I am in favor of the sciencefiction book club. It will be a great addition to your magazines.

NORMAN DAVIS,
310 Oxford Street,
Martin, Tenn.

Lefty Feep has had several more adventures, and they are in our files awaiting publication.—Eo.

A FANTASTIC CONFESSION!

Sirs:

One day back in '42 I picked up a copy of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES because I wanted to know what a science-fiction mag was like. Everybody had told me that they were trash, but I wanted to see for myself. I did.

Ever since then, I have read every issue of FA I could get my grubby little hands on. I liked the stuff. I read other sf magazines, but I, have always come back to FA, because it's so much more varied. In most others you get hyper-technical engineering treatises which just bore the reader. Some people like that kind of stuff, I don't.

FA has a little bit of the technical brannish, but so much more is either plain, understandable science-fiction or it is non-scientific fantasy, such as

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the "Ice Queen", "Shayla's Garden", "A Horse On Thorndyke," and good old Lefty Feep. And the art work is so much better than the others. Finlay, for example, is the best artist in the magazine illustrating field bar none. So far as his black-and-white work is concerned. And all I can say for Magarian is "Ba-waaarrang!"

The time travel arguments have always amused me, and so, here is a little story I found in a hottle:

"I, being of sound mind and body, wish to inform my fellow Americans of a bit of their real history. You will see in the history books that John Wilkes Booth appeared from nowhere into a peaceful Pennsylvania village, created quite a stir by his mysterious ways, and then vanished. Weeks later he shot President Lincoln and again disappeared. To this day no one knows whether John Wilkes Booth was really captured or not.

"President Lincoln's duties were taken over by Vice-President Andrew Johnson. Johnson did his best to carry out Lincoln's plans for reconstruction of the South, but Congress was out for blood. They would not accept the lenient treatment of the South proposed by Lincoln and then by Johnson. And then, after Johnson, came the military governments of General Grant. The South was forever alienated from the North. Even today, as I lie dying, the South and the North are not a unified whole.

"That was the way it was in the history books. But let me tell you the way it was before I changed it.

"Lincoln was never assassinated. He was the one who bore the brunt of Congress' hate. He it was who suffered the hate and spite of the American people.

"I was a history student in the year 1936. I decided to myself that Abraham Lincoln was a great man, not a hateful tyrant, as he was pictured. So I decided that the greatest service I could do his memory was to use my brother's time machine to go back into the time of Lincoln and assassinate him just when he was at the peak of his glory, before he had a chance to earn America's hate.

"This required preparation. I decided the medium I would use would be my great-grandfather. I crept into the machine, set it for a month later, (the return switch) and March, 1865 (the time switch). Soon I found myself in New York, at the required time.

"I waited until my great-grandfather, John Wilkes Booth, had finished his run on Broadway, and then slew him and threw him in the Hudson river. It was then that John Wilkes Booth make his appearance in the Pennsylvania town and acted mysterious—for I had disguised myself as my great-grandfather.

"My plans were in order. I secreted myself in Ford's theatre that fateful April night, soon after the end of the war, while Lincoln was in the flush of victory over the Confederacy. In the intermission I rushed out into the president's box,

clapped a pistol to his head, fired and leaped to the stage, breaking a leg in the descent.

"The details of that horrible trip to Dr. Mudd, through the marshes to the old abandoned farmhouse are too tiresome for me to go into here. When I was finally surrounded, I was too weary to surrender, or indeed, move at all.

"They had just begun to fire the place when the return lever of the time machine worked, bringing me back to 1936. That is why they never found a body which could be identified as belonging to John Wilkes Booth.

"When my brother found what I'd done, he destroyed the time machine. He died soon after of shock. I will soon follow him to the grave. But I felt it necessary to confess my true part in American history.—John Wilkes Booth IV.

Which ought to put the quikets on time travel stories for all time.

SAM SACKETT,
Route 2, Box 24,
Redlands, Calif.

Your little story amuses us too, and we think our readers will get a kick out of it. Thanks much for your kind words about us—and for the little story found in a bottle. By the way, good Scotch is hard to find around here—how do you get it—Ed.

A SOLDIER CORRECTS US

Sirs:

On page 183 of June FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, your little item on "Exit Malaria—With Atabrine" is very misleading; that is from one who knows.

1.) Neither atabrine nor quinine will cure malaria or prevent a person from catching it. All these drugs do is to keep the disease inactive in your blood as long as you take them. A man in the tropics taking atabrine may have been bitten any number of times by infected mosquitoes, and he may have any number of cases of malaria in his body, but the disease will not break out until (as on his return to this country) he stops taking the drug. Then—zingo!

2.) Likewise, a man suffering from malaria will apparently recover when given quinine or atabrine. This is because the drug suspends the action of the disease. As soon as the man stops taking his pills he'll be as sick as ever. Atabrine is not a cure!

3.) Many soldiers previously neglected taking these drugs because they have various temporary effects upon the body. Quinine causes buzzing in the ears. Atabrine causes a browning or darkening of the skin, and a body odor. Both quinine and atabrine have an unpleasant taste.

4.) Malaria is treated as a very serious problem by our army, and every man in the Air Forces who passes through this station receives sufficient instruction on the subject to make him infinitely better informed than was the person who prepared your article.

5.) The big job atabrine does is to keep men



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in malarious regions on their feet and able to fight even if they have contracted malaria. A man taking atabrine will not know whether or not he has malaria, until he discontinues dosing.

... This is the first time I have written to you, but I've been reading your two s-f magazines for many years. I became acquainted with F.A. while awaiting an operation a long time back in civilian life. I wanted something to take my mind off the coming ordeal. I've been reading Science Fiction and Fantasy magazines ever since.

Pvt. **WILLIAM LIGHT**,
U. S. Army Air Forces,
Military Secret,
U. S. A.

Thanks much for your extremely enlightening letter. We pass it on to our readers with our apologies for our mistakes.—Ed.

MORE ABOUT EARTH'S AGE

Sirs:

So . . . "The Earth Must be a Woman!"—an amusing and interesting article. However, it is not carried to a logical conclusion. I mean that a woman powders her face and by the time she gets through with the camouflage . . . well, as I was saying, why not carry your analogy on out and realize that Mother Earth powders her face, too.

They have found rocks, specifically uranium ore, that can be reasonably calculated to be a billion, four hundred and sixty million years old. All of which proves this:

Suppose we take that 1,460,000,000 years time interval as a basis of speculation. Consider the continual deposit of cosmic dust, meteorites, etc.—think of a snow storm and what it will deposit in one short hour. The deposit of cosmic debris in a thousand years should be appreciable and in a million years it should be quite substantial . . . and in 1,460,000,000 years . . . well, Mother Earth sure must have gotten her face well coated!

But again consider that our sun and its family of planets rush through space in some sort of a vast orbit. That cosmic drift seems to be toward the constellation Hercules as far as present observation can reveal. Now, in 1,460,000,000 years . . . what condition of space have our sun and planets passed through? And what cosmic debris has Mother Earth picked up? It leaves the matter of age of the earth even more deeply confused!

And now we come to consider it . . . how do we know that millions of years ago Mother Earth did not pick up that uranium ore on her journey?

For that matter, the Nebular Hypothesis has been kicked into a cocked hat. It was founded partly on the idea that people give birth to little people, cows give birth to little cows, rabbits have little rabbits, etc., so naturally the sun must have given birth to planets. And was even carried

on to a concept in which Mother Earth gave birth to the moon . . . leaving a big hole for an ocean to live in!

What I am getting at, is just WHY did earth ever have to have a beginning? I mean, aside from the matter of theological concepts which conceive of a personal Creator in the image of man . . . who made the whole works as a personal gift to Man . . . what necessity is there to think the earth ever had to have a beginning?

Consider the analogy between atoms and solar systems. Planets become the larger counterparts of electrons. Couldn't it be that far beneath the material of this earth some sort of bubble of pure force spins and moves in an orbit about the sun, quite like an electron about the nucleus of an atom? And the solid matter we know would be but an accretion of cosmic debris on its surface!

In short, is the idea of a beginning for earth any more justified than Ptolmey's concept of a geocentric universe in which sun and stars moved in orbits about the earth? Isn't the very idea of a "beginning" merely another egocentric viewpoint of the phenomenon of reality? People give birth to little people . . . so the sun must have given birth to the planets! I had a beginning, so naturally the earth and even the universe just had to have a beginning also! Is that sensible? I ask again, why must we insist that Earth ever had a beginning?

GEORGE A. FOSTER,
Stoughton, Mass.

Your letter is more interesting than our original article—for which we thank you profusely! It delights us to have our readers come back so heroically with a response, or refutation, or substantiation, whatever the case may be, of our little filler articles. It is amazing the interest these little fillers carry, and the comment they receive.

Speaking of why Earth had to have a beginning, we personally agree that maybe you are right, and she didn't. It seems to us that the alpha and the omega of things consists only of a continual process of things going from less to more and from more to less, depending on just where you are in the scheme of material things. That is, why can't we say that the universe exists, that all we have to do is go out on a dark night and look at it? There we have our beginning. Now, to go from there, all those stars are suns, disintegrating to beat the very devil. They would, eventually, if no new suns were formed, burn away altogether and no universe would be left. However, we know that all fires and disintegration is a fire, leave ashes. Let us assume those ashes are matter in its most finely divided state. Okay, just as salt precipitates itself out of a solution, this ash precipitates itself again into planets and suns, and the whole thing happens all over again, or more truly, happens all the time, at the same time, or constantly.

—Ed.

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KITE SHIP OF THE MOON

By MORRIS J. STEELE

Once the moon was a living world like our own, with atmosphere, continents and oceans. Did ships like these sail those oceans?

(See Back Cover)

PERHAPS a million years ago (there may be different scientific opinions on that, just as many varied ages are ascribed to the earth according to the scientific basis used) the moon was a smaller counterpart of the earth, possessing an atmosphere, oceans, continents, mountain ranges, fertile valleys and plains. Today it has none of these except the mountain ranges and plains, certainly not fertile.

If, in that long gone age, there was life on the moon (and we have much reason to say that there was) it must have mushroomed to a high state of civilization by Earth terms because of its small size, and its metabolism rate (if we may misuse a term).

The Chinese have a legend that their people came from the moon, in ships with tails of fire. Modern rockets tend to throw a quietus on scoffers at this legend, since it is apparent that the legend refers to a thing which is entirely possible, the space-traveling rocket ship.

If this legend can be believed, then we find a basis for a more or less concrete conception of what life on that ancient world must have been. However, we are treating here with only one special phase of that civilization, the ship that once sailed the oceans that are now but dead sea bottoms of slate and sand and bitter cold and blazing heat ranging from almost absolute zero to a temperature enough to melt rock.

The oceans of the moon were not small, some of their bottoms now measuring as much as a thousand miles long and half as wide. Thus the oceans were no less a barrier to travel than our own. The ocean traveler of the moon must have devised ships of respectable size and various means of propulsion.

Assuming that the development of civilization followed the same trend as on earth, and as logic seems to indicate it must, the first ships of the moon were propelled by paddles, and later by the wind. It is these wind-driven ships we will try to picture.

Artist James B. Settles has painted a ship in which he bears in mind the fact that the Chinese legend exists. Thus, we see that he has given the painting a distinctly oriental and Chinese touch by having his ships pulled by giant kites on which typical Chinese designs and embellishments have been painted. He has even given the ships an oriental look, with their round, conical upper decks and roofs.

These ships are constructed of a wood that we

might compare to Earth's balsa wood, a very light wood such as is used in some portions of airplanes, and especially in model airplanes. Because these ships are to be pulled by kites, they must be very light and buoyant. They ride very high in the water, and are constructed a great deal like an elongated saucer, or a barge with rounded corners. They have a minimum of rudder and keel, so as to eliminate water drag, and just enough to allow for steering and for "tacking" into the wind!

Because the nights and days on the moon are fourteen of our days long, respectively, we do not find the variable winds that exist on earth. Instead we have permanent winds which travel over the planet on set routes, never deviating because of the deliberate progression of the sun's heat, which becomes rather intense in the daytime. Our moon's air currents must have been something to depend on, providing literal highways of the sea which could be utilized to travel on a very dependable schedule simply by selecting your route to follow the prevailing winds, which cross and recross the oceans in definite patterns.

Thus, we have no need for anything but a minimum of steering, so as to hit a certain section of the opposite coastline, or to maneuver into another wind belt traveling in another direction.

However, we are not entirely at the mercy of the wind as far as direction is concerned, as we would be if we utilized a sail affixed to the ship as on Earth. Instead, because we use giant kites, we are able to let them out to greater heights to bring them into upper stratas of air motion, perhaps in exactly the opposite direction to the lower strata, or at cross angles. So, when we want to change our course, we lower or raise our kites. If we want to go faster, we raise kites in tandem, to provide more pulling surface. Because our ships are much like saucers, they move equally well in any direction, even with a sudden change in that direction.

These ships might have been as much as eighty feet in the beam and one-hundred-thirty feet along the keel. Two circular decks were built on the ship, circular so as to offer no difference in surface wind resistance no matter what the course, or what particular wind current altitude was being utilized.

They would have been used both for cargo carriers and for passenger carriers, one deck housing being for freight, the other for human occupancy.

Construction throughout would have been by wood, fastened entirely by dowels.



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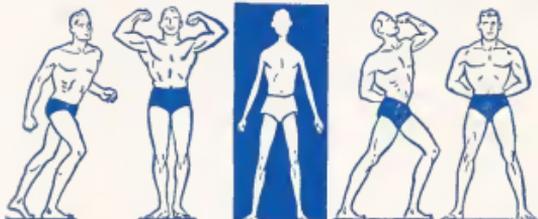
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KITE SHIP OF THE MOON A million years ago, when the moon was still a livable world, ships such as these may have sailed her now, as ancient legends, deemed fairy tales now, tell us of them. For complete story, see page