

WEST WIND DRIFT Blue Ribbon Fiction by George Barr McCutcheon.

THE STORY—Set helplessly adrift by an explosion of bombs planted by German agents, the great liner *Doraine*, bound from South America for a port in the United States, has been all but wrecked by a storm and then driven by wind and tide into a basin which is the center of an uninhabited island. Here the ship runs aground, and the survivors of the disaster set about planning for a future in which the hope of rescue seems hopelessly remote. The dominant figure among them is Algeron Adonis Percival, an American mining engineer, who started the voyage as a stowaway, his money having been stolen at the port of embarkation. In the general bewilderment over the strange situation Percival's natural qualities of leadership have asserted themselves, bringing him a position of some authority and, incidentally, the interested regard of two women—Ruth Clinton, an American girl, traveling with her aunt, Mrs. Spofford; and Olga Obosky, a Russian dancer. In directing the work of building huts and exploring the island Percival clashes with Abel Landover, a famous capitalist, who refuses to submit to discipline and is worsted in a hand to hand encounter with the young engineer. This proceeding Ruth presents as needlessly brutal, and she begins treating the young engineer with marked coolness, though it is clear that, in spite of herself, she is already in love with him. Mutiny of a more serious nature develops presently among a lawless clement led by Manuel Crust, a Portuguese gang foreman. One night Percival meets a woman who comes toward him, her arms outstretched, and Percival, thinking it is Ruth, kisses her. He has just discovered that it is not Ruth, but Olga Obosky, when two men run past in the dark and the sound of women's voices rises in the distance.

TWELFTH INSTALLMENT.

The Gibbet in the Wheat Field.

PERCIVAL'S blood was still in a tumult as he ran down the line of cabins. From every doorway men were now stumbling, half-dressed, half-asleep. Behind them, in many cabins, alarmed, agitated women appeared. Farther on there were lanterns and a chaotic mass of moving objects. Above the increasing clamor rose the horrible, uncanny wail of a woman. Percival's blood cooled, his brain cleared. Men shouted questions as he passed, and obeyed his command to follow.

The ugly story is soon told. Philippa, the 15 year old daughter of Pedro, the head farmer, had gone out from her father's cabin at dusk to fetch water from the little reservoir that had been constructed alongside Leap Frog river a short distance above the cabins. The pool was a scant two hundred yards from her home. It was a five minutes' walk there and back. Half an hour passed and she had not returned. Her mother became uneasy. Pedro reassured her. He laughed at her fears.

"She could not have fallen into the pool," he said. "You forget the fence we have built around it."

"I am not thinking of the pool, Pedro," she argued. "Go you at once and search for her. She is no laggard. She has not stopped in to see one of the girls."

And Pedro went grumpily forth to search for his daughter. An hour later he came staggering down from the woods above the pool to meet the dozen or more friends and neighbors who had set out some time earlier to look for the two of them, father and daughter.

He bore in his arms the limp, apparently lifeless form of Philippa. He was covered with blood, he was chattering like a madman. Out of his incoherent babble the horrified searchers were able to put together the cruel story. It seems he had heard a faint cry far back in the dense wood—another and yet another. Then utter silence. Even the night birds were still.

Swift, paralyzing fear choked him. He tried to call out as he rushed blindly up from the pool into the forest, but only hoarse, unnatural gasps left his lips. He fell often, he crashed into the trunks of trees, but always he went onward, gasping out his futile cries. He knew not how long he beat through the forest.

He was not even sure that it was Philippa's cry he had heard, but his soul was filled with a great, convincing dread. He knew that his beloved Philippa, the idol of his heart, the sunshine of his life, was up there in the woods. Frequently he stopped to listen. He could hear nothing save the pounding of his own heart, and the wheezing of his breath, thick and labored.

Then, at last, during one of those silences, he heard something moving in the darkness near at hand. Something—some one was

coming toward him through the underbrush. He called out hoarsely: "Philippa!" The sound ceased instantly, and then he heard a whispered execration. Wild rage possessed him. He plunged forward into the brush. Something crashed down upon his head and he felt himself falling forward.

The next he knew he was trying vainly to rise to his feet. Something hot was running into his eyes, hot and sticky. He lifted his hand to his head; it came away wet. He put his fingers into his mouth—and tasted blood! It was enough. His strength came back. He sprang to his feet and rushed onward, shouting, cursing, calling upon God! He had no recollection of finding his girl. Apparently everything was a blank to him until long afterwards he saw lights moving among the trees and voices were calling his name.

Percival and other cool headed men were hard put to check the fury of the mob. Men and women, bent on vengeance, made the night hideous with their curses, howls, and shrieks. In their senseless fury they prepared to kill. They had heard the stories about Manuel Crust and his disciples. Only the determined stand taken by the small group that rallied to Percival's support kept the maddened crowd from seeking out these men and rending them limb from limb.

The sailors from the *Doraine* were the first to listen to the pleas of the level headed—just as they had been the first to demand the lives of Manuel Crust and his gang. Individually they were rough men and lawless, collectively they were the slaves of discipline. It was to their vanity that Percival and the others appealed, only they called it honor instead of vanity. The mob spirit was quelled for the time being at least. No one was so foolish as to believe that it was dead, however. Unless the man guilty of the shocking crime was found and delivered up for punishment, the inevitable would happen.

"We'll get the right man," said the voice of universal fury, "if we have to cut the heart out of every one of Manuel Crust's gang."



Percival looked hard into Manuel Crust's bloodshot eyes. An appalling thought had suddenly flashed into his mind. Sancho Mendez was to be sacrificed!

The women were the worst. They fought like wildcats to reach the cabins occupied by the known followers of Manuel Crust. With knives and axes and burning faggots they tried again and again to force their way through the stubborn wall of men that had been raised against them.

As for Manuel Crust and his little group of radicals, they had vanished. They had mingled with the mob at the outset. There were many who recalled seeing this one and that one, remembered speaking to him, remembered hearing him curse the ravisher. But as their own names began to run from lip to lip, they silently, swiftly disappeared.

Dawn found the camp awake, but grimly silent. No one had gone to bed. With the first streak of day the man hunt began in earnest. All night long the camp had been patrolled. Every cabin had been searched, even those occupied solely by women. This search had been conducted in an orderly, businesslike way under the supervision of men chosen by Percival. The folly of beating the woods during the night was recognized even by the most impatient; there was time enough for that when the blackness of night had lifted.

Throughout the long night the restless crowd, with but one thought in mind, hung about the cabin of Pedro the farmer. The doctors and several of the nurses were in there. Down at the meeting house a bonfire had been started, and here were grouped the men to whom the leaders had entrusted their firearms and other weapons—men of the gun crew, under officers from the *Doraine*, the committee of ten, and others.

It was accepted as a fact that two men were involved in the heinous deed. Percival's account of the mysterious runners seemed definitely to establish this. He called upon Olga Obosky to verify his statement. If she was surprised by his admission that he was in her company when the men rushed past them in the darkness she did not betray the fact.

She indulged in a derisive smile when he went on to explain that it was so dark he had failed to recognize her until she spoke to him. She agreed with him that the two men must have come into the open a very

short distance above them, having sneaked out between the cabins before suddenly breaking into a run. Avoiding the beaten roadway, they had laid their course twenty or thirty feet to the right of it, keeping to the soft, springy turf.

Percival had issued orders for the entire camp to congregate on the green at the first sign of day. The cold gray light of dawn fell upon vague, unreal forms moving across the open spaces from all directions. There was no shouting, no turmoil, scarcely the sound of a voice. The silent, ghostly figures merged into a compact, motionless mass in front of the meeting house. It was not necessary for Percival to call for order when he appeared on the steps and began to speak. The only sounds were the shuffling of feet, the rustling of garments, the deep, restrained breathing of the mass.

He spoke partly in English and partly in Spanish, and he was brief.

"You know what we are here for and what is ahead of us. I don't have to tell you the story of last night. You know it as well as I. You will be glad to hear the latest word from Dr. Cullen. Philippa is conscious. He thinks she will recover. She is having the best of care and attention.

"I will explain why we are all here now. The first thing for us to do is to count noses. We will go about it as rapidly as possible. After that we will get down to business. Mr. Landover and Mr. Malone will check off the name of every man, woman, and child. As your names are called, come forward, answer, and then move over beyond the corner of the building. We've got to find out just who is missing—if any one is missing at all."

He raised his voice. "I want you all to keep cool. Don't forget that we are after the men who committed this crime. We have no right to say that Manuel Crust or any of his crowd did this thing until we have positive proof of the fact. It may not have been any of Manuel's gang; don't forget that, people. We must make no mistakes.

"I am saying this to you now because I see Manuel Crust and some of his friends standing over there at the edge of the clearing. Stop! Don't make a move in their direction. We've all had time to think—we've all