

Code

He had led Connecticut marksmen in a great day of battle; and he never ceased to tell of it until he met his last Connecticut marksman, there on the lonely field of honor

MAJOR RUTLEDGE, the well-known duelist, was early on the field as he always punctiliously had been. This time, to be sure, he came without his coach-and-four; without his postilions and his liveries, such as he had used in former days of his grandeur. This time he could sport nothing better than a common snatch-cab from the streets of Washington.

Yet he came, with his pistol-box on his knees, his second sitting beside him, and his old black Shadrach alongside the driver, too.

"Much as usual," the major observed, dishousing himself from the cab like a majestic snail. "Ah! How sweet it is to smell the lilacs of Bladensburg once more!" he said, patronizing the dawn-lit hills of Maryland over his bulbous nose. "Thank you, m'lad; thank you, Henry. Come along, my boy!"

His second, who was also his young grand-nephew, stepped out behind him with a rebellious and disapproving grimace at the lordly command.

"You Shad. Damn that rascal! Where's my cloak?" the major demanded.

Shadrach had hopped down from the seat like an elderly blackbird. Hastily he tried to throw a garment of some sort over his master's shoulders. But Major Rutledge caught sight of it.

"Wait. What's that? Eh? That's no cloak of mine. . . . Why, what the devil is it?" He examined the thing

with a shaky hand and eyes like red-rimmed marbles. "Why, demmit; it's nothing but a rug. A rag rug. A demned, ragged rag rug!" he began to roar.

Until Shadrach touched his arm with a deft, accustomed warning; and quick as a trained old war-horse—or an old circus horse, perhaps more like—he took the tip to his dignity.

"Harrumph. Ah—arrumph!" he rumbled. "Well, well; never mind. It's no matter." And though his lips were blue and he shivered with the keen morning air he braced himself in martial style.

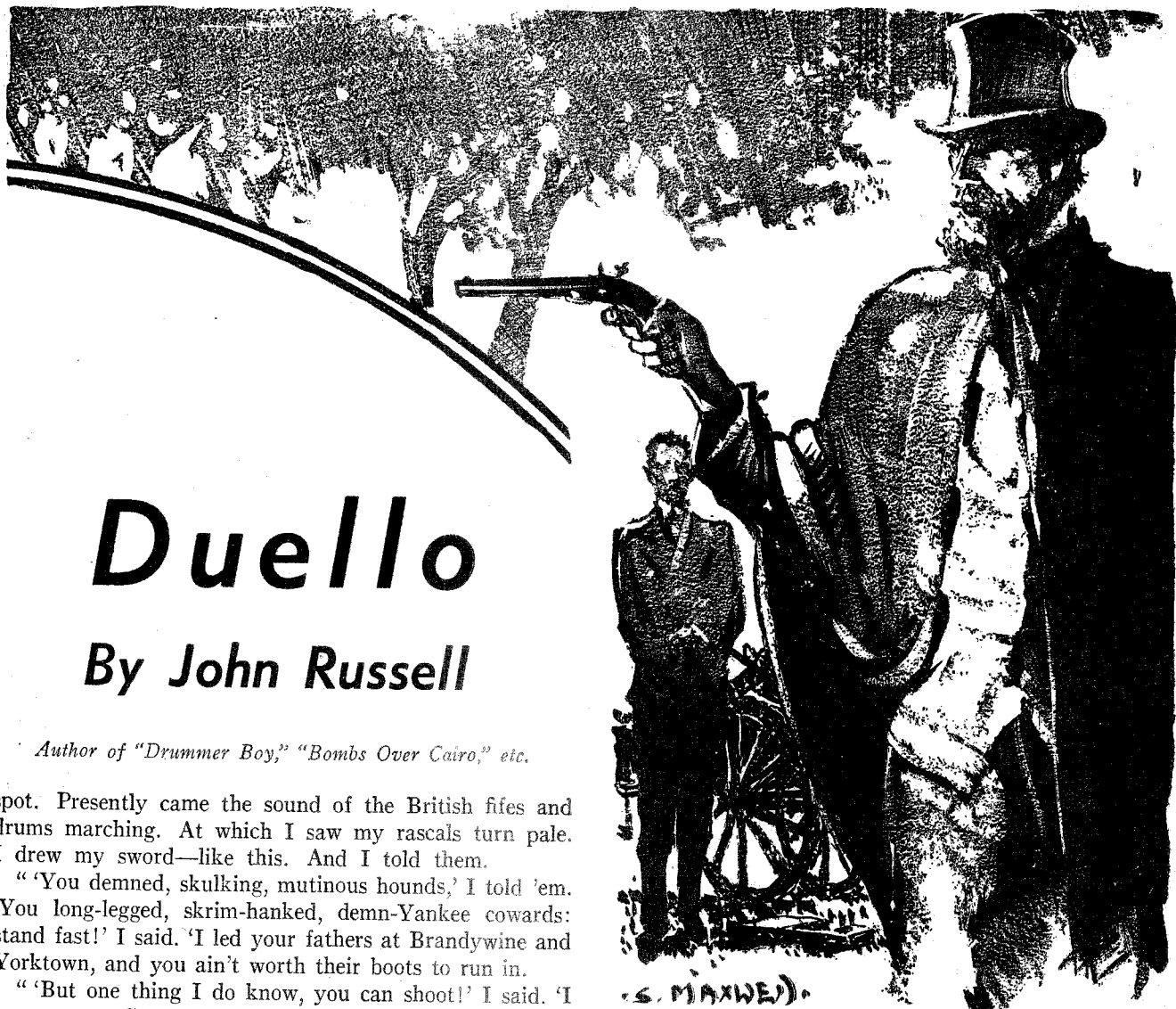
"Ha. No by Ged, seh. What are the chills of Bladensburg to an old campaigner like me? Though by Ged, it was not so chilly but demned hot, seh, on that day of August, eighteen fourteen, when we met the British on this very field.

"I was hereabouts with a batch of demned conscripts. From the No'th, seh. From Connecticut, in fact. I had command of a company of them when the enemy marched up over the hill yonder."

"I know, I know, Uncle Ned," said Henry impatiently. "I've heard it all before."

"Permit me, seh, to demonstrate, if you please." The major now had the needed support of his hickory cane—Shad having quietly slipped it to him, while filching away the pistol-case and the ragged shawl.

"Observe. Harrumph! . . . I was posted near this actual



Duello

By John Russell

Author of "Drummer Boy," "Bombs Over Cairo," etc.

spot. Presently came the sound of the British fifes and drums marching. At which I saw my rascals turn pale. I drew my sword—like this. And I told them.

"'You demned, skulking, mutinous hounds,' I told 'em. 'You long-legged, skrim-hanked, demn-Yankee cowards: stand fast!' I said. 'I led your fathers at Brandywine and Yorktown, and you ain't worth their boots to run in.

"'But one thing I do know, you can shoot!' I said. 'I never saw a Connecticut man who couldn't shoot,' I said. 'Now for Ged's sake, and the American Army; stand fast and give one volley as they come over the rise. After that you can run to Halifax and rest yo' blasted feet—blast you!'"

WARMED by his own eloquence, the major had regained a sparkle; his gaunt frame seemed to fill out and his laugh came throatily. *Wretched old ruffian: blustering boaster;* Henry thought.

But the major had still to round his heroic tale. "Well, seh, d' y' know; that's exactly what they did! When the demned Redcoats under Sir Robert Ross hove in sight, it was my company which gave 'em the only fight, and then covered the whole retreat. Connecticut marksmen, seh; under command of a superannuated, South Carolina, Revolutionary half-pay majah! If you mark what I mean, seh?"

Henry marked him, all right, as he had often enough before, between disgust and a grudging admission that the old reprobate could still carry it off. With all his bombast, with the marks of debauchery and low living so plain upon him, he retained—or Shadrach had somehow retained for him—his ancient uniform of an officer in the Continental Line, buff and blue. With a clean white stock at his neck, he could still show the front of a soldier and a gentleman.

And Henry felt rather a twinge at the blow he was about to deliver—the duty he meant to perform: as a man might feel when preparing to strike some battered idol in the face.

They squared off then according to the doctor's directions, ready to kill by the *code duello*

"That, seh, was the first time that ever I saw the 'bloody swards of Bladensburg,'" the major continued, complacently. "Since then I have been out here—oh, perhaps ten or a dozen times. . . . Shall we follow Shad along to the dueling-ground?"

Henry Rutledge seized the opportunity. "Wait, Uncle Ned! See here. You don't have to go through with this—this combat. This meeting, today. And I'm here to tell you, you are *not* to do it!"

The major halted on his cane. "Ha?" he exclaimed, amazed. "What's that you say, Henry?"

"It's what you need to hear. You don't have to fight this man Jarvey today. You profess to follow the rules of the *code duello*, I believe. There is no rule compelling you to fight a shady adventurer, a common blackleg without the claim to any gentility!"

"Explain yourself, Henry."

"I will. I inquired about this fellow. He calls himself Collector Jarvey, from some place in the far North. The title is meaningless. He is checked by the police as a swindler and a crooked gambler, if no worse."

The major's brow was a thunder-cloud.

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Because I couldn't find you last night, though I hunted you in all the stews and pothouses where you generally

hang out!" Henry retorted bitterly. He was aware that like a zany he had started on too high, too nervous a key. But he reminded himself that he had his own importance as a rising young attorney with social connections to protect. "And I'm telling you now: you will have to cancel this disgraceful business!"

"Seh!" said the major, in a gathering roar, "The dog struck me!"

"You should have had him arrested."

"What? He accused me of cheating at cards!"

"THAT'S what you get for mingling with the sort of riff-raff you do," returned the other, with sheer, youthful brutality. "People regard you as a brawler of the taverns. A bravo. A worn-out old swashbuckler whose day is done!"

"Henry. Henry!"

"Oh, don't try to threaten me! I can't be bluffed like the others. And it's true what they say. You are known to have killed six or seven men."

"Aff—affairs of honor, seh," gasped the major.

"You call them so. But you have given your name—which is also my name, if you please—a most dishonorable notoriety." *Good phrase that*, he commended himself. *Now's the time to settle the old nuisance off-hand*. It was not that he actually enjoyed being cruel; but his self-righteousness might have been diagnosed in later days as somewhat sadistic.

"One more point I must make," he went on. "I have to inform you that your claim for a half-pay pension has been disallowed by the War Department. That makes any further borrowings on any such expectation impossible. . . . Now Uncle Ned, sir, I don't mean to be unkind, and I'll make you a proposition. If you will cancel today's affair—which you easily can do on a plea of ill-health—and if you will henceforth alter your course of life conformably, I will personally see to it that you are cared for in respectable circumstances.

"Otherwise," the virtuous and ruthless young man declared, "otherwise I must tell you that you have run out your string!"

The major's voice, when he spoke, was a mere wheezy echo. "Run out my string. . . ."

"So far as I can see; yes," said Henry, deliberately. "Whom have you left who will trust you, or care a single continental what happens to you? Who gives a fig, sir—at your age—for your pretenses and your hectorings? Which they know to be worthless."

"Worthless," the major repeated, feebly.

"Quite worthless!"

For a moment, the major might have seemed to sway a little. But just then from nowhere apparently—or like a bird from the bush—his old black servant Shadrach popped up at his side once more, just brushing his arm.

The major, whose face had gone the color of a ripe mulberry, slowly loosened the stock under his collar. Lifting his gaze, he casually surveyed the landscape: the trees and the hills, and the long shadows cast by the new-risen sun; took with a long breath the sweet air of the countryside as if he owned it.

"Quite right, seh," he observed, with perfect urbanity. "I thank you for your friendly expressions. Ah—arrumph! . . . And by the way. What was the title you gave to this—ah—this person we are about to meet this morning? If I may ask, and as it were: 'what imports the nomination

of this gentleman?'" He said it with satisfaction.

"He calls himself Collector Jarvey, from Connecticut," Henry answered, blinking.

"Ah, yes. I remember. Harrumph! . . . Well seh; I perceive he has arrived with his party. Shall we join them on the ground?"

And swinging his cane with a flourish magnificent once more, he led the way, with a step assured and familiar.

DOWN below the town-road on a slight slope lay a green hollow screened by rocks and shrubbery. This was the historic "sward of Bladensburg," which so often had been stained by the proudest blood of the nation—and some not to be so very proud about, either.

By rigorous unwritten law of the time almost anybody could challenge almost anybody else to stand up and kill or be killed in proof of a thing called his "private honor." It was a humorless time. Few people could have read the line of Falstaff: "Who has honor? He who died o' Wednesday." Fewer would have smiled at it.

It was a dull time. Historians were going to set it down as The Era of Good Feeling. Perhaps because people fought so much.

People nourished an absolutely passionate obsession for "defending their names;" they studied how to "demand satisfaction" from any enemy real or fancied; to "call him out;" to "invite him the field." Many a criminal covered his crimes with this convention. And many a valued, able citizen paid his life for it; under penalty of "being posted as a poltroon and a coward."

Men fought for a word, for a look, for an argument on Aristotle. For the speed of a horse, for the color of a ribbon, or the flicker of a lady's eye-lash. For any trifle.

Yet there was nothing trifling about the encounter which now took place, this lovely spring morning, between Major Ned Rutledge and Mr. Collector Jarvey. The affair began and proceeded with the precision of a parade—and with entirely deadly intent.

. . . Three men who had tethered their horses nearby were already in waiting. One was the opponent: a thin man almost as tall as the major, and possibly half his age. He wore a tight surtout of rat-brown velvet and a lofty plug hat, which he thumbed stiffly at the major's rigid salute, then tilted forward over his eyes: a formidable and aggressive figure.

His second was a nondescript person in corduroys, something like a racetrack tout.

The third man was old Doctor Foresco, the great expert on gun-shot wounds: a frosty-haired and frosty-faced little specimen. He and Major Rutledge having met before and frequently in these circumstances, they allowed themselves to exchange nods almost as professional as the greetings of an operating room. Whereafter he opened the ceremony in strict accordance with the code.

"I will ask both seconds please to advance and assist in loading the weapons."

WHAT else was there for Henry to do? How could he evade it? Since his futile protest the major had simply ignored him; he had had to trot along as a small-part actor. Now it was too late to refuse the service expected of him.

And besides, there was really not much crusading spirit to Henry; not enough to make a public exhibition. So presently he found himself measuring powder and tapping bul-

lets together with the nondescript person in corduroys.

They loaded the major's pistols; beautiful and fateful objects of an exquisite workmanship. Dr. Foresco supervised everything. This curious character must have taken some recondite pleasure from getting his clients, or patients, killed well and cleanly. He even tested the flints and the primings.

Finally with the skill of a conjuror he whisked both pistols inside a white silk kerchief and offered first choice, sight unseen, to the nondescript fellow. Quite properly, of course, as being the lawful right of the challenged party.

"Gentlemen," he said sharply, "according to the terms agreed upon, there will be an exchange of shots at eight paces. I have already marked the exact distance on the turf. Gentlemen," he said, with the rasp of a bone-saw, "place your principles!"

Mechanically Henry obeyed. He showed the major to his indicated position and handed him a pistol. The nondescript did the same for Mr. Jarvey. The two adversaries took their stance side-to-front, regarding each other over their right shoulders, each with the armed right hand held against the thigh.

Henry felt a throb at his heart. He couldn't help that; and he couldn't help marveling. He *did* marvel at that grand old sinner, his great-uncle. Here was a man he had seen just before as a sort of wind-blown human wreck, bleary and fatuous. Presently shaken with a senile resentment.

Yet here he was—without so much as a drink to fortify him after a drunken night. Here he stood, and seemed to loom gigantic. Stood and stayed like some druidical oak: stern and menacing.

It made young Henry quail; the very look of him. And it made young Henry wonder, confusedly, whether there might not be something after all to this theory of conduct by which the old Bombastes Furioso had lived all these years. Whether there might not be a source of strength, of courage and manhood—even of nobility—in this outworn *code duello*, after all.

"Attention, please," Dr. Foresco was saying. "I shall count 'One—two—three: Fire.' At the word I drop this kerchief. From which instant, but not before, the combatants are permitted to deliver at will. . . . Are you ready, gentlemen? . . . One!" he began

Henry had space only for a belated thought. Eight paces? It was murder! How often had he seen his Uncle Ned snuff the wick of a candle at ten, at twelve, without nicking the wax! *Well*, he thought, with a purely human and partisan thrill, *anyway*, he thought, *I'm sorry for Mr. Jarvey.*

"Two . . . Three . . . Fire!"

THE kerchief dropped: a shot slammed across the meadow. While it still echoed, Major Rutledge took a half-turn, and slid quietly to the grass. At once Shadrach, Henry and the doctor, all three, rushed to support him.

"It's all right, m' boys," he murmured. "Thanks so much. Mighty kind of you, seh," he said to Foresco, who knelt to flip open the buttons of his coat. "Everything quite correct at your hands, seh."

"Not so correct at yours!" the doctor retorted, reproachfully. "Major, I'm surprised at you, getting yourself popped off that way!"

The major smiled a little, with gentle humor.

"Well, seh. And plenty high time, too—don't you think?

And demned lucky. Gives me a chance to say something. I've a paper put away somewhere. But this is much better. I take you to witness, sehs." He smiled at each of them.

"As regarding this demned old rascal of mine Shadrach. I'm giving him his freedom. All I have to give, and always meant to do it. Understand me, sehs? Witnesses. Shad—henceforth—free. . . . Ar-rumph!"

He coughed, quite in his style, and gave his last impersonation. His scarred old face had softened with benevolence and generosity. He made the perfect image of a grand patriarch, munificent and magnificent, taking leave of a grateful humanity. "Ah!" he breathed, serenely. "How sweet it is to pass amid the scented memories of Bladensburg!"

"Say. Hey! Hold on, gents." It was the nasal drawl of Mr. Collector Jarvey, who had drawn near soft-footed and unnoticed. His sharply whittled nose seemed to twitch with rodent-like suspicion. "What's going on yere? Wait a minute!"

Foresco glanced up at him. "I'm afraid you're too late, Mr. Collector," he said, frostily. "Major Rutledge couldn't wait that long."

"Daid?"

Foresco nodded. "You don't care much, do you?"

Jarvey bit himself a chew of tobacco. "Not any. But I care a heap what he was saying jest now. He was aimin' to set free this nigger of his—warn't he?"

"Well?"

"I'm yer to state he can't do it. That nigger is still good to fetch three-four hundred dollars. And your major-man, he owed me considerable more."

"What of it?"

"Wal, if he ain't left nothing else, I reckon I'll jest take the nigger along my own self."

The little doctor stood up. "You can't make a claim like that against a dying man's last word! Mr. Rutledge and I are witnesses. It's the same as a will."

"Not much it ain't. And even if it was, the law don't allow no man to will away his property while he's got legal debts outstanding. I got a fistful of notes this-yer major signed to me last night."

"Gambling debts."

"If they was, t'wouldn't show."

"Suppose neither Mr. Rutledge nor myself will recognize your claim? Suppose the Negro himself refuses to submit to it?"

The collector lifted his lip in a mirthless grin. "Wal, in such a case, I expect I'd jest naturally have to take a body attachment of this yer black body-servant. And I'd call on you two for assistance, capturing a masterless slave runnin' loose. And you'd hev to do it, too. I know my rights!"

DR. FORESCO inspected him with detachment cold as a scalpel. "Sir," he said, "my interest in your rights—or in yourself—is entirely clinical. But to save time I'll tell you something. As a matter of fact, Shadrach is nobody's property. He is a free man, and has been for many years. In his own rights!"

"Hey? . . . Don't try that gammon on me!" Jarvey sneered. "Didn't I hear what the major said?"

"He couldn't help that; and it meant nothing. It was just his gesture. Major Rutledge never could resist a gesture, or a flourish, or a chance to show off in any sort of company, any time. It was his basic weakness, sir, and the tragedy of his life. The means by which he lost every

single thing he ever possessed—his fortune, his loves, his good name and reputation. A fundamental falsity in the man that left him at last as hollow as a drum—as hollow as this *code duello* he pretended to follow. Do you understand me, Mr. Collector?"

"No, I don't," Jarvey snapped. "And what's more I don't believe it!"

The doctor shrugged aside the proffered quarrel. "I'm not here to defend him," he said.

"What I mean, I got a right to doubt your information. I certainly heard the major-man tryin' to give the nigger free. If he already done it, or gambled him, or sold him, it ain't legal. I can replevin."

"You might, if the major parted with anything he owned. What I'm trying to tell you: *he never even owned* the Negro Shadrach!"

"You couldn't prove such a yarn."

"I don't care to prove anything. But I could refer you to the Probate Court of Fairfax County. You'll find that Shadrach was born at Mount Vernon. He was one of the slaves who were freed by the will of *General George Washington!*"

It staggered the collector. "Huh? Who could get to know it for a fact?"

"Well, I know it. Mr. Henry knows it."

"Everybody in the city knew it," Henry put in.

"Only the major didn't know we knew," said Foresco, with a grim twist. "Hence his gesture. Don't you *see*?"

The wrath of a rat flared in Jarvey's thin, feral face. "Wal, I be good Go' damned! I guess I see how I been cheated again, right enough. Why, that damned old thimble-rigger!" he said. "That Go'damned lousy, lyin' old faker and fraud . . . Nothing but a humbug and a hypocrite to the end!"

Worse things, he said, and said them over the poor dead body lying there, defenseless. With the torn-open coat showing its scrawny, pitiful nakedness; with the bullet wound showing on its shrunken ribs like a burnt hole in an empty basket. Unseemly things he said: far beyond hatred. And nobody stopped him, or answered him. Not Doctor Foresco, who did not care; and not Henry, who did not dare.

BUT it was a terrible time for Henry, youthful and helpless. He had a miserable sense of this final humiliation being heaped upon the soul and the memory of his great-uncle. True: he had said the same sort of abusive things himself; or just nearly. And so had Dr. Foresco—or implied them. But it was different to hear the old major actually abused in such terms: to see him actually so spat upon by such an enemy!

He had a fantastic vision of that unhappy wraith of a grand old man, chased out into eternity. Stripped. Bereft of every shred, every remaining tatter, of the respect and the dignity and the honor which once he had so cherished. Without a single living creature left to help him, or to protect him, or defend him.

Until presently Collector Jarvey gave a check and pointed. "Hey! What's that? B'damned if he ain't wearin' a money-belt! Look-a yer!"

Sure enough, there was a piece of strap holding together the poor shrunken form.

"Say: I'm a-going to search it."

Even cold-blooded Foresco had to protest. "Oh, you

couldn't do that! He'd no money. And besides, you couldn't set about to rob a man you've just shot."

"Rob, hell! Ain't I got my rights?"

There can be nothing lower than this; Henry thought. *This is the lowest possible of disgrace and degradation!* he thought. When of a sudden the long gleaming steel barrel of a heavy dueling-pistol was thrust straight before Mr. Jarvey's two eyes.

"Stand back, white man. Doan' you touch Majuh Rutledge, if you please!"

It was Shadrach, the old Negro. Shadrach, born at Mount Vernon, had been trained to the manners of a grand duke. He waved the Collector away. "Step a little further off, suh," he invited politely.

MR. JARVEY did. If there was one detail in which Mr. Jarvey had been well trained himself, it was to see when he stood within two inches of death. A dueling pistol of such caliber was the deadliest small-arm yet devised by man. Mr. Jarvey got away from it.

"Hey! Look out with that popgun, nigger!" he yelled. "It's loaded!"

"Yassuh. It sho' is," Shadrach said. And for proof he deliberately cocked the weapon, and shook up the powder in the priming-pan.

"Don't point it this way. Keep your finger off that trigger, nigger!"

"Doan' be skeered, suh. I know how to handle it all right." And in fact the darky's fist was solid as a rock. "Only keep distance from my ol' master!"

Jarvey literally hopped with rage. He took refuge in sheer chattering insult. "Your old master! A fine kind of a master! Skeered? Well I reckon he was. I thought the smoke was too thin. So that's his pistol. And he never fired at me at all!"

"No, suh. He didn't."

"Skeered. Too scared of me to fire!"

"No, suh. He wasn't scared of you, or anybody. Only when he heerd you come from Connecticut—"

Henry gave a start.

"What's that?" Jarvey snapped.

"When he heard you come from Connecticut, and you would nacherally be a daid shot, like you is—why, then Majuh Rutledge took the nacheral way out, suh."

"As how?"

"Why, as any gentleman should, suh, when a gentleman is tired of fighting. He jest nacherally stood your shot, and never fired in return hisself. It's accordin' to the laws of the *code duello*."

But Collector Jarvey was not satisfied: he couldn't take it: he had to jeer and snarl.

"But you—you!" he insisted. "If Doc Foresco is right, you've been a free man all these years. Not a slave, but a free man. Must be twenty years!"

"More than that, suh."

"And you served this major, without being his slave? I don't believe it!" Jarvey snarled.

While keeping the pistol steadily pointed, Shadrach knelt on one knee. Reverently he drew the ragged rag rug over the poor dead form and face of Major Ned Rutledge. Just when the sun was coming up like a benediction, up over Bladensburg.

"He was my friend, sir!" said Shadrach, the old black Negro, simply.

Warikugi grinned his toothy grin as the crucial slip of paper seemed to leap from his fingers. Earnshaw was helpless



Dead Men Don't Float

By Joel Townsley Rogers

Author of "Pink Diamonds," "Locusts from Asia," etc.

It was only a bottle, bobbing on the water, labelless and sinister, carrying a scrawled, tragic message that was the opening gambit in the one-man war of wits that Rob Earnshaw was waging on the Japanese Navy. . . . Complete Novelet.

I

THE BOTTLE FLOATED in the dark green water, sluggishly rising and falling among the mossy rotted piles of the old tumbledown pier which jutted out from the mangrove swamp shore, a hundred feet away from where the big Japanese destroyer, the *Ashewashi*, lay moored in channel.

It was a squat brown bottle with a cork in it, and the neck was a pale amber, as if inside was something white.

Its label had washed off it. It might have been in the water ten hours or ten years. There was nothing about it to catch the eye, in the seaweedy shadows where it floated back under the end of the old pier, except that glint of amber at its neck. Lieutenant-commander Earnshaw of the U.S.S. *Wanderley*, spruce in tropic whites and with his service ribbons on his breast, observed it idly from his seat in the stern of the *Wanderley's* captain's gig. His lean sun-golden face brightened and his eyes—the

shrewd wrinkled eyes of those who watch the sea the world over—grew purposeful, as the one-lung little launch putted past the *Ashewashi's* quarter and down along the shadow of her long gray steel plates toward her starboard gangway ladder. Earnshaw was making his courtesy call on the skipper of the big Japanese flotilla leader, which he had found lying in at Lava-Lava when the *Wanderley* had come limping in late last evening.

"They do it everywhere," he said to his executive officer, Lieutenant (junior grade) Malone, with a grin.

"What's that, sir?" said Paddy Malone.

Rob Earnshaw nodded. "A bottle with a note in it," he said. "Last message of some shipwrecked sailor."

Paddy Malone looked across with his round eyes, his round, ingenuous face from which the dew of Kansas prairies had not yet dried.

"Yeah," he said alertly and curiously, "I see it. Back in the shadows beneath the pier end. It does have some sort of paper stuck inside it, doesn't it, skipper? Wonder where it ever came from, and what it says."

Rob Earnshaw smiled.

"From the ends of the world," he said. "On the tides of the seven seas. A tragic story of maritime disaster, in English, Malay, *beche mer*, pidgin, or Javanese Dutch. Perhaps a last message from Richard Halliburton, foundering in his Chinese junk in the middle of the typhoon that