



# FACING DANGER

by John D. Craig

**"Danger is my business!"  
So says John D. Craig,  
who has often been  
face to face  
with peril.**

The bottom of the sea is my workshop, and I like it. Ever since the first day I went down to it, in a rickety diving dress without safety valves or telephone, in fifty feet of water off the coast of Lower California, I have loved it more than any place I have ever been. And before that sunny day in the summer of 1931, I had been in thirty-five countries and had sailed on all of the seven seas and trod on all of the six continents. The bottom of the sea, covering four-fifths of the world, was the continent I finally chose. I was twenty-eight when I found it, and I had looked for many years.

A lot of water has drifted over my head since then, and over the heads of the men who dive with me in my crew. We don't feel that we are taking our lives in our hands every time we dive,

any more than a pedestrian feels that he is risking his neck when he crosses a street filled with moving automobiles.

There is, I suppose, something that has to do with courage in the business of deep-sea diving, but it never occurs to me that the word which means valor on the battlefield and sacrifice in the wars of peace has anything to do with me or my business.

Courage, it seems to me, is simply something that keeps logic from working, and allows a recklessness to operate which ordinarily would be termed irrationality. It has been that way with me. I have done things that were dangerous, and while I was doing them I have known that my mind was shutting out and gagging perfectly logical thoughts that strove to tell me I was being a fool. When the act is completed,

and the logic returns, I do my trembling. But invariably I get in trouble again, and the curious something enters my mind and shuts out reason until it is over.

There is, of course, another kind of courage—and that, I think, is what is meant by the word. It is the courage which goes forward when logic is operating unhampered, and fright is right there, ruling your emotions. To go forward then is to be truly courageous.

There is also the courage that rises from a religious principle instilled into men for two thousand years—the principle of brotherly love. That causes a man to go to the aid of another man in peril. There is no logic in this kind of courage, for frequently it operates when situations are hopeless. We all have that courage.

And there is still another kind of courage, which all men must have who deal with animals. An animal senses, or smells, fear and confidence and bravery. To win an animal's respect, you must show no fear, either of him or of anything else.

I had to give myself that kind of courage the first time real danger confronted me. I was only seventeen, vacationing in the Ventura Mountains near Los Angeles, and blithely by myself I was taking eleven pack horses up a narrow trail from Wheeler's Hot Springs, back of Ventura, to Lathrop's ranch.

It was wild and lovely country. The sagebrush was seventeen feet high, for there hadn't been a fire there in thirty years. The trail was so narrow that I had been told to whistle at turns, to

warn anyone coming in the opposite direction. Except for the sagebrush there was nothing to keep horses and men from slipping off two hundred feet into a ravine below.

I was having a grand time, dreaming to myself, when Princess, my white horse, shied. The pack mule behind her immediately got hysterical and started to buck. When I got to the spot, I saw a rattlesnake in the path, toward the edge that dropped off, between the first two horses. I had no gun. To get to one I would have to pass by either the rattlesnake or the bucking, pitching mule and the horses, which were shying. I couldn't get by them without being kicked and probably thrown off the trail.

They wanted me to kill the snake, I knew, and they expected it. I was scared. They knew this, too. The whole train was gradually getting into a panic. So I engendered courage by cursing my fright and forcing recklessness on myself.

I had a short rope, that was all, and a stick I had cut so that I could amuse myself by flicking the sagebrush. I tied the rope to the stick and flicked it at the rattler. He struck, his teeth caught, and I flipped him over the side of the trail and let go of the stick.

He was gone, but now the horses wouldn't pass the spot where he had been. I was shaking and quivering, but I had to convince them. Gradually I felt the flow of fear in myself quiet down, and another flow begin—one of confidence. I strutted to the horses, patted them, talked to them, and finally half led and half hauled Princess past

the spot where the rattler had been. The first horse, safe beyond it, took up the journey then; the second followed, and the others went trembling by the danger spot, while I shouted and laughed at them. Their lost leader, I was informing them, had been found again. It wasn't a very convincing act, but it worked.

Fear is a destroying thing. We regard it—my men and I—as a form of nervous shock which increases respiration, perspiration, and pulse count. Living with it, we treat it as a problem, a problem which can be overcome by rhythmic breathing and by the application of the logic of comparison. We have known great fears and lesser fears, and by comparison the lesser fears are not important.

But we are not big, brave, fearless men. On the contrary, we often are scared badly. It is only that we have been frightened so often, and can thus grade fear by its intensity and actual threat to our lives, that we endure its constant presence. And we know that fear itself is our greatest danger. Once it succeeds in knocking us down, we aren't apt to get up. We can go back to the farm then and swat flies for excitement.

We find it best not to think about fear at all. Yet think about something a diver must, as he wanders around the sea bottom, or as he drifts slowly upward, his head clearing as he stops now and then to let the nitrogen out of his system. What occurs to me most frequently is an idea—an idea that perhaps life, instead of being a reality, is a fantasy, a dream, from which we will wake when

we die—that no matter what happens, there is still danger ahead. The things we do now may be nothing compared to what we will run into someday. And someday any one of us may step off a curb and go down under an automobile.

That is not a fatalistic philosophy. It is based on knowledge. When a man goes into the jungles of India to photograph tigers, the folks in New York City consider that he is deliberately risking his life. But in those jungles live natives who are exposed to these dangers from birth. They do not think they are deliberately risking their lives every day. They would think that of New Yorkers, though, if they could see them scurrying through traffic, riding in elevators in tall buildings, and tearing through underground tunnels on subway trains.

In the last analysis man manufactures his danger. He flies through the air when he knows he is subject to gravity. He walks on the bottom of the sea when he knows he cannot breathe in water. He is constantly taking chances on annihilation. But if that thought were constantly with him, he would be like a frightened rabbit, hiding still in caves. And he would be in more danger than he is now. He would be the prey of other animals. He would be hunted. In constructing a civilized world he has merely exchanged one danger for another. I say danger is my business, but actually it is every man's business. No matter what he does, death stands at his side. So why worry about it? Death may be, for all we know, a good deal more fun than living.