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EDITOR

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A Story of the

GENERAL Aristide Lemoine tapped the map with a blunt forefinger.

"Zaheur," he muttered in his mustache. "Who is holding Zaheur?"

Captain Marmontel skimmed through the bundle of documents stacked on his desk.

"Lieutenant Verron and half a squadron of Spahis," he drawled. "They have been in position since yesterday morning."

Lemoine tugged at his mustache. He was a short stocky man with a bullet head and a brick-red face.

"That's not enough," he grumbled. "Confound it, didn't I tell you to send reenforcements to Zaheur? Of course I did. I'm sure I did."

"You did not, *mon Général*," Marmontel said acidly. "The last time the subject was mentioned—several days ago—we agreed that Verron's Spahis were quite capable of handling any stragglers who may break through our cordon."

The general's steely blue eyes flashed fire.

"*We* agreed," he repeated, bearing down indignantly upon the pronoun. "*We* agreed! That is a new development, I must say. My very dear Marmontel, I happen to be in command of this brigade; I happen to be giving orders and I expect those orders to be carried out. I remember telling you distinctly that I consider the Zaheur garrison too weak to cope with an emergency."

He was hot, sticky and tired, and his temper, at the end of a day's hard work, was not at its best.

Foreign Legion

The Wall

By

J. D. NEWSOM

His outburst, however, made no impression on Marmontel, whose long, thin face wore a look of ill concealed exasperation.

"May I point out," he retorted, "that I have no memorandum and no recollection of such a conversation? Furthermore," he went on after the fashion of a schoolmaster addressing a backward child, "furthermore, *mon Général,* the oasis of Zaheur is twenty kilometers east of Bled el Klouf where Mulay abd el Hamid has massed his forces."

"Bah!" exploded Lemoine. "Bah, monsieur! Is it that you imagine I can not read a map without your damned help?"

Marmontel ignored the question. Without haste he breathed upon his monocle, polished it and screwed the glass into his right eye before he condescended to offer further remarks.

"When Mulay leaves Bled el Klouf he is not going to bother about Zaheur. We have good reason to believe—" he shrugged one shoulder—"indeed, we know as a positive fact that he intends to attack us here at Souk Gabrit. This is his goal."

Lemoine was heaving and rumbling like a volcano, but Marmontel appeared wholly unaware of the impending eruption.

"We shall pin him down and smash him," he explained before the general could open his mouth. "The outcome of the encounter is a foregone conclusion. If any of his men escape and drift back toward Zaheur, young Verron will have no trouble rounding them up. Consequently, *mon Général,* I can see no logical argument in favor of chang-

ing our plans at this late hour. To reenforce Zaheur we should have to deplete our tactical reserves which have a very definite part to play tomorrow."

"*Mon dieu!*" cried Lemoine, raising his hands toward the ceiling. "This is what I have to put up with. I might as well resign. I am useless!" He turned wrathfully upon Marmontel. "And who the devil do you think you are, telling me what I may and may not do? Answer me that."

"I am your chief of staff." Marmontel smiled. "'It is the duty of a chief of staff to assist his commanding officer—'"

"Assist!" rasped Lemoine. "Quite so —assist. But the word means nothing to you at all. Less than nothing. There are times, Marmontel, when you act as though I were incapable of reaching a decision or of knowing my own mind. There are times when I am sorely tempted to have you recalled."

"I do not doubt it," Marmontel agreed suavely, "and yet there are other moments, *mon Général,* when you find me rather useful."

"Dammit, I do. You're insolent, you're arrogant, you're so filthily conceited you are not fit to live with—but you're a good staff officer and that's why I keep you." His temper died down as swiftly as it had flared up, and he added grudgingly, "You have brains, which is more than can be said of some of the men I have to work with."

Marmontel, pressing his fingertips over his heart, bowed his acknowledgment.

"Your words are balm, *mon Général.* However, if I may be permitted to refer to Zaheur—"

Lemoine cut him short.

"I was sent to this godforsaken district to round up Mulay and pacify the Ouled M'Tazzi. I have been here two years, and not a month has gone by without headquarters pestering me with advice. I have been accused of every crime on the calendar—from incompetence to cowardice—because I have refused to employ the same tactics as my predecessors who, without exception, failed to achieve their purpose. I have played the game my own way. I've got Mulay where I want him—out in the open. Tomorrow I'll teach him a lesson he will never forget. But I do not intend to run any risks."

He talked on, going over his plans for the hundredth time, not so much for Marmontel's benefit as for his own satisfaction.

FOR many years the Ouled M'Tazzi had stubbornly refused to have anything to do with the French—except shoot them down—and the French, unfortunately, could not do anything with them. They lived in rough, broken country south of the Djebel Waffila hills, where water holes were few and far between, and every hillock was a natural fortress which half a dozen determined goatherds, armed with modern weapons, could hold indefinitely against almost any odds.

And although they were half starved and in rags, they were never short of guns or bullets or courage. Well equipped punitive columns came back so badly mauled that the district was a graveyard not only for the bones of anonymous soldiers but for the reputations of commanding officers.

Lemoine, however, had refused to follow the example of other brigadier generals. Instead of sending his troops to the assault of impregnable positions, he sent spies and agitators into enemy country. Some escaped detection and survived. A few reached Mulay abd el Hamid in his red walled village on the brink of a precipice above a blue chasm. And they whispered in his ear that the French were weak and corrupt; they swore a great warrior like Mulay could drive the Infidels into the sea; they spoke of the treasures of Fez and Marakech, of Rabat and Tangiers. They hinted at the dangers of delay—other tribes were growing restless. Any day the French might be swept away; who-

ever struck the first blow would reap the richest reward.

While Lemoine argued with his chiefs —armchair strategists with a marked preference for direct action—in the *ksars* of the Djebel Waffila mad *marabouts*, on the French payroll, fanned the religious fanaticism of the Ouled M'Tazzi to a white heat. Mulay came down from his lair and raided a blockhouse. But the white soldiers had decamped! They were abandoning their outposts! Then a foraging party stumbled upon a detachment of Spahis which promptly turned tail and fled without firing a shot. Other French troops behaved in the same disgraceful manner. They could not get away fast enough from Mulay's terrible men.

By nature he was cautious and wary. Months went by before he could be made to believe that Morocco was his for the taking; but the incessant bombardment of lies, rumors and flattery to which he was subjected finally destroyed his judgment. Fifteen thousand strong, the Ouled M'Tazzi answered his call to the holy war. With this huge, unwieldly force at his heels he had been allowed to capture the oasis of Bled el Klouf.

And the next day, at noon, as he continued his triumphant march toward the city of Souk-Gabrit, the jaws of a great steel trap would close in upon him and smash him to smithereens.

"You don't attach much importance to Zaheur," concluded Lemoine. "That's your privilege. You're young; you've a long, long way to go. I haven't. I'm almost through. This is my last *baroud*.* Next year I'll be retired on half pay unless I can convince the war ministry that I'm worth another star."

"I am glad to hear you haven't lost all ambition," commented Marmontel, holding up one hand and gazing thoughtfully at his beautifully polished fingernails. "Personally, I think you are admirably suited for the colonial strategy chair at the war college."

Lemoine eyed him suspiciously.

"I'll be ready for a straitjacket in a lunatic asylum if I have to put up with you much longer," he growled. "The war college, hm? Yes—I've thought of it. It would be better than twiddling my thumbs in some nasty little villa in some nasty little residential suburb—baby carriages and rosebushes and all that sort of thing. Growing old is a damned unpleasant business, Marmontel, my boy."

"But inevitable," the captain pointed out. "Quite inevitable. Meanwhile the Zaheur matter is still in abeyance, *mon Général.*"

"Zaheur—yes. It's of secondary importance; but suppose for an instant that a couple of thousand Ouled M'Tazzi should break away and make a dash for the oasis. Verron would be swamped. We might lose Mulay and, by the Lord, Mulay is not going to get away. I'm going to dish him up on a silver platter for headquarters to admire. I'll cram Mulay down their throats."

"A pleasant prospect," admitted Marmontel, smothering a yawn.

"Certainly it is; and whether you like it or not one infantry company goes to Zaheur tonight, even if you have to rewrite a few orders, even if you have to stay here another half hour. That's final."

"You have some particular unit you wish to dispatch to this post of honor?"

"I'd like to dispatch you to the infernal regions. Whom have we got?"

"Half a battalion of Senegalese Tirailleurs, three companies of Colonial Infantry, Pernot's Chasseurs, the 4th Company of the 2nd Battalion of the Foreign Legion, a machine gun section, signalers, cooks, orderlies, clerks, cyclists—"

"Some day you'll go too far," threatened Lemoine, his red face growing redder than ever. "If I have you cashiered, don't say I didn't warn you. Who is in command of the Legion outfit?"

Marmontel shook his head.

"Somebody called Grellon. Never heard of him. The company came in

*Battle.

quite late this afternoon."

"*C'est bon,*" snapped Lemoine. "Send the Legionnaires to Zaheur. Let them have a few hours' sleep. If they leave at two o'clock they'll reach the oasis before daybreak." He glanced at his watch. "*Tiens!* Almost seven. Bring the orders over to me after dinner. There's no desperate rush. Have a talk with this fellow Grellon and make sure he understands what is expected of him. I don't want Mulay to suspect anything until he's in the trap and the 75's open fire."

He gave one last look at the papers on his desk, picked up his képi and hurried toward the door. On the threshold he paused, staring irresolutely over his shoulder. Abruptly he swung around.

"Marmontel!" he barked.

"Yes, *mon Général?*"

Marmontel stood with one hand on the back of his chair.

"By the—er—way—" Lemoine cleared his throat. "Your uncle is still connected with the ministry, isn't he?"

"I have heard nothing to the contrary."

"When you write to him it might not do any harm if you dropped a gentle hint. Tell him I wouldn't mind if my name were mentioned for an appointment at the war college."

A slow smile hovered about the corners of Marmontel's mouth.

"I rather think your name has already been mentioned, *mon Général.* Moreover, at this time tomorrow night I'm sure the minister will have forgotten all the harsh things that have been said about us."

"I hope so—for your sake as well as mine, my boy. You're worse than a toothache—but you've been loyal and you're not afraid of speaking your own mind. I shan't forget it. When my report goes in I intend to recommend you for another stripe. You've been a captain long enough."

"I am highly honored—" began Marmontel.

Lemoine yanked the door open. The sentry in the corridor sprang to attention as the general strode out.

"Don't forget to bring me that order," snapped Lemoine. "After dinner. I'll be expecting you."

WHEREVER Frenchmen foregather, the aperitif hour is a cherished and inviolable custom. In times of stress Americans have been known to forego their cocktails; the English, when the necessity rises, can struggle along without their whisky and soda, but nothing short of a major catastrophe will induce the average Frenchman to do without his aperitif. It marks the end of the day's work; it means rest and relaxation, gossip and sociability.

Forty kilometers south of Souk Gabrit, on the far side of a flat and stony plain, Mulay abd el Hamid and the pick of the Ouled M'Tazzi fighting clans were about to launch one of the most spectacular attacks ever made against the French in southern Morocco. But no echo of the impending battle seemed to have reached the officers' club when, shortly before seven-thirty, Captain Remy Marmontel walked leisurely out on to the patio. Officers sat about in groups, talking and laughing, sipping their aperitifs with the same unconcern they would have displayed at the Cercle Militaire in Paris.

A small fountain playing in a green tiled basin created a false sensation of coolness. White jacketed orderlies, their faces glistening with perspiration, scurried about bearing siphons and bottles of all shapes and sizes. In the anteroom a phonograph, manipulated by the mess sergeant in person, blared Gounod's "Ave Maria". Mulay abd el Hamid might have been four thousand kilometers away instead of forty.

Threading his way among the tables—chairs were hastily dragged aside to make way for him—Marmontel joined a party of four very swagger and immaculate staff officers, who jumped to their feet as soon as he came within hailing distance. They constituted his private

retinue; promising, well connected young men with whom he could afford to associate without losing caste.

Of course they were not his equals, for the good reason that he acknowledged no equals. He was a Marmontel; a very old, very noble, very illustrious family. It was not one of those decaying families which spend their time bemoaning the passing of the old order. The government services were honeycombed with Marmontels; others controlled the destinies of great industrial enterprises; still others, and not the least, dictated the policies of newspapers with colossal circulations.

But Captain Remy Marmontel had not been compelled to use any backstairs influence to succeed in the army. Alone, unaided, he had secured his first appointment as A.D.C. to a governor-general (who happened to have a part interest in the Marmontel Bank); unaided, he had graduated from the staff college (where a Marmontel was head of the examining board); unaided, he had been appointed chief of staff to General Lemoine, commanding the 1st Mixed Brigade at Souk Gabrit. (The minister who forced the appointment through was endeavoring to keep the details of his private life out of the public press.)

The young men bowed; Marmontel bowed.

"Monsieur!"

"Messieurs!"

He sat down, waving them to their seats.

Breathlessly they waited for him to speak.

"I think," he said slowly, "I shall have an *export-cassis.*"

"The captain will have an *export-cassis,*" four voices hissed at the hovering mess orderly. "*Vite-vite-vite!* Quick! Hurry! And ice, plenty of ice, you comprehend?"

At the adjoining tables awed subalterns spoke in whispers while Marmontel screwed his monocle into his eye. He took a cigaret from a gold case; instantly his right hand neighbor struck a match and held it to the cigaret as if he were performing some sacred rite.

Then the waiter returned with the drink. One of the young men dropped a lump of ice into the glass, another added charged water from the siphon.

"Enough, *mon Capitaine?*"

"Just right." The pasha smiled. "Perfect."

He raised the glass toward his lips. Simultaneously four other hands raised four other glasses. Four pairs of lips were parted, ready to acknowledge his toast, if any.

"Let us drink," he began, "to our success—"

And there he stopped, holding the glass midway to his mouth.

At an adjoining table sat a huge, uncouth creature—a hulking great brute of a man, dressed in a threadbare khaki uniform with three tarnished gold stripes on his sleeve. Barrel chested, bull necked, lantern jawed, he was the most amazingly ugly and repellent individual Marmontel had ever beheld. He had little pig eyes set deep under bushy black brows, high cheek bones, and a mouth as thin and hard as a rat trap. A ragged scar slanted across his nose, and as a final touch the top of his right ear was broken and deformed. Everything about him—his looks, his clothes, the way he sprawled in his chair—rubbed Marmontel's fastidious sensibilities the wrong way. And as a final touch he was sucking at a cherrywood pipe which gave forth clouds of poisonous smoke.

Marmontel's nostrils quivered. He knew that smell. It was produced by the cheapest, vilest of canteen tobaccos. No officer of his acquaintance had ever dared to smoke the foul stuff in a mess.

He put down his glass and fanned himself with his képi to drive away the noisome smell. But the creature refused to heed this signal, although Marmontel felt sure that the little pig eyes glittering under the wiry black brows were not missing a single move.

"All right," thought Marmontel, "you

may have a thick hide, *mon bonhomme,* but I'll make you squirm. You're not going to make an ass out of me, not if I can help it."

HE PRETENDED to catch sight of the man for the first time as he exclaimed:

"Good Lord! What's that? Where did it come from?"

A polite snicker greeted his words.

"I have it on good authority," whispered one of his henchmen, "that it is Captain Grellon, commanding the 4th Company, 2nd Battalion of the Foreign Legion. I interviewed him this afternoon. He's rather quaint."

"Amazing!" Marmontel commented, gazing fixedly at the officer. "Simply amazing! What is it—a ranker?"

He spoke loud enough to be heard several feet away; but the man sat motionless, squinting at the dregs in the bottom of his glass.

"Of course he's a ranker," chuckled Marmontel's informant. "Overwhelmingly so."

"He fascinates me," swore Marmontel. "He puts me in mind of the Neanderthal man. No, that's too high up in the scale. It's dear old Pithecanthropus erectus come to life! Pithecanthropus commanding a company of 20th Century soldiers! It's a chronological anachronism, and I am stating the case very mildly."

The man hitched himself around in his chair. For a split second he looked straight into Marmontel's eyes, then he glanced away, snapping his fingers at a waiter.

"Bring me another Picon," he ordered. "On the double!"

He had a harsh, metallic voice which set Marmontel's teeth on edge.

"I do believe it's going to get drunk," he murmured. "Pithecanthropus drunk must be a unique spectacle, but will you kindly tell me—" he appealed to his twittering subordinates—"will somebody please tell me how such freaks contrive to obtain commission in a civilized army?" He sniffed disdainfully.

"The Legion," one young man volunteered, "is a very peculiar regiment."

"Very," agreed Marmontel. "So peculiar that it ought to be disbanded. It's the happy hunting ground of all the derelicts and ruffians of Europe. When I meet a Legionnaire on the street, I am never quite sure whether he intends to salute me or stick a knife into my back."

He spoke venomously, for the look in Grellon's eyes had made him acutely uncomfortable—as though he were a nasty little worm wriggling on the point of a pin.

"Yes," he went on, "the Legion is bad enough. I don't like mercenary troops; they are out of place in a national army. I'll admit that they have their uses when they are commanded by intelligent, well educated men whom they can respect and admire. But—" he waved his cigaret about with airy nonchalance —"I am more than a little dubious as to their efficiency when they are led by some dismal nonentity who has to depend upon brute strength to enforce discipline. That sort of man is worse than useless; he's a positive danger!"

"I'm afraid he can hear you," cautioned a lieutenant, hoping against hope Marmontel would not lower his voice. "I can see his toes wriggling inside his boots."

"Let 'em wriggle." Marmontel laughed. "We are in an officers' mess among, I hope, gentlemen."

Thereupon the man called Grellon took his pipe out of his mouth and emitted a stream of smoke. Marmontel found himself enveloped in a stinking cloud which caught at his throat and made him gag. He coughed heartrendingly.

"What an odor!" he spluttered. "What a stench! This place becomes a pigsty." He leaned across the table and spoke earnestly to a subaltern sitting within arm's reach of Grellon. "Chabot, will you be good enough to present my compliments to that officer—the compliments of General Lemoine's chief of staff

—and request him as a special favor to put out his pipe?"

But Grellon forestalled the lieutenant. Heaving himself out of his chair, in two strides he stood at Marmontel's elbow.

"I've been listening to you for the past ten minutes," he rasped. "You wanted me to hear what you had to say. I haven't missed a word."

Marmontel leaped to his feet. His fellow officers followed suit. A glass overturned and crashed on to the tiled floor.

"I do not pretend to know what you are talking about," snapped Marmontel. "I resent your intrusion, monsieur! The smell of your pipe, if that is what you are referring to, is, I confess, disagreeable, distressing and, in fine, disgusting. I asked you politely to put it out—"

"In mess I take no orders from you," Grellon retorted. "You've had your say. Now I'll have mine."

"And then what?" Marmontel's voice was shrill with anger. "By what right do you pretend to thrust your company upon me. You do not interest me, monsieur. This is not a canteen, monsieur; this is a club! If you do not know how to behave—"

Grellon cut him short.

"You insulted me and you insulted my regiment. You went out of your way to let me know what you thought of the Legion and of rankers. I am a ranker, and I'm not ashamed of it."

Marmontel laughed derisively.

"My dear good man, I am not at all anxious to hear the details of your life history. I'm sure you are very much in earnest and very brave. Nevertheless your manners are atrocious. We have nothing in common, and I shall be infinitely obliged if you will go away, and sit down and finish your drink."

"Manners be damned!" thundered Grellon. "You've called my men ruffians and scoundrels and brutes. They're untrustworthy, are they? Think back, Marmontel. You haven't forgotten Bac-Nahm, have you?"

Bac-Nahm! The name bit like acid into Marmontel's brain. Suddenly he understood why the very first glimpse he had had of Grellon's unlovely countenance had filled him with such bitter detestation. Behind his detestation there was fear.

The past rose up before his eyes. He saw the spit of land by the banks of the Song-Kai River where his escort of twenty Marsouins had been ambushed by De Tham's pirates. There had been a struggle in the knee-deep mud by the water's edge. He remembered the freezing horror which had overwhelmed him when the Colonial Infantry lieutenant came lurching out of the scuffle, his stomach slashed open from hip to hip, trailing his intestines in the grass.

The lieutenant had said—

"Get in there, you fool, and do something." Then he crumpled up and fell over on to his face.

But Marmontel had been incapable of taking charge of anybody or anything. Without transition he found himself splashing through the swift running water which swirled about his waist. Then he was clambering up the opposite bank, racing down a crooked jungle trail, vomiting as he ran. And as he swerved around a bend in the trail he had collided with the muzzle of a rifle, driven into his chest by a mountain of a man, a sergeant-major of the Legion—Grellon. In those days Grellon had worn a beard so thick and bushy that it looked like a lion's mane.

Marmontel was hazy and uncertain as to subsequent events. Many things had happened. He had a dim recollection of being caught by the throat and shaken until his teeth rattled. The toe of a boot had been driven against the nether end of his spine. He had fallen down. A great hairy paw had yanked him to his feet. His face had been smacked until his nose bled.

"Lead the way, *mon Lieutenant*," the sergeant-major had shouted at him. "And don't stumble, whatever you do. We're going to fix bayonet, and I don't want to drive mine into your kidneys.

Forward! Double march!"

Spurred on by the Legionnaires' bayonets, Marmontel had recrossed the stream to the spit of land where the remains of his escort still held on, and had covered himself with glory in a headlong charge through the thickets which had sent the pirates scuttling into the deep jungle.

The affair had not ended badly for Marmontel. He had lied with great skill and his report had been unquestionably accepted, for no one thought of consulting the sergeant-major. Indeed, the resident general had been so impressed by the martial spirit of his A.D.C that he had awarded him the Legion of Honor "for having set an example of courage and fortitude when attacked by overwhelming odds."

The incident had faded out of Marmontel's mind. In retrospect it had no more reality than a bad dream.

And now Grellon stood before him, Grellon minus his bushy black beard, shouting "Bac-Nahm" in a raucous voice which carried to the farthest corner of the mess.

All the officers gathered on the patio were on their feet, gaping at him, wondering, doubtless, what scandalous meaning lay hidden behind that word. Bac-Nahm . . .

"Were they cowards at Bac-Nahm?" Grellon was braying. "Were they running away?"

"Swine!" cried Marmontel, livid with rage. "*Butor!* Crapulous scoundrel!"

He lashed out blindly, striking Grellon's mouth with the open palm of his hand. The sound of the blow rang like a pistol shot. Then, before Grellon could move, he caught up a glass and hurled its contents into his face.

THE mess was in an uproar. Chairs crashed, tables overturned. The phonograph, unattended, ground out a popular love song. Marmontel's young men had dashed into the fray without regard for their personal safety. They clung like limpets to Grellon's arms, pushing him this way and that, adjuring him for the honor of the army to stand still and to act like a gentleman.

Meanwhile an overheated, popeyed gunner officer pranced about in front of Marmontel, patting him on the shoulder, wringing his hand, assuring him over and over that:

"You did the right thing, *mon cher Capitaine.* I approve—I admire your gesture! Splendid! You were provoked beyond endurance. But you must compose yourself. We must observe the proper procedure."

In the background fifty officers milled about and clamored:

"What happens? It is a disgrace! Can one have no tranquillity in one's own club?" And several onlookers added with a touch of envy, "It's Marmontel up to his old tricks. He's never happy unless he can pick a quarrel. He'll make a pin cushion out of that elephant of a Legionnaire, that's certain."

Dueling is forbidden in the French army, but dueling is resorted to nonetheless by gentlemen whose honor has been outraged, and the authorities wink both eyes. A grudge which might drag on for months and poison the lives of an entire garrison can be settled in fifteen minutes when the adversaries are allowed to cross swords. Moreover, few such encounters have a fatal ending. Somebody is scratched; blood flows; honor with a capital H is satisfied; everybody kisses in the best French manner and life goes on.

There are definite and well established rules of conduct which govern such affairs from the moment the first blow is struck until the doctor says:

"It's nothing. I'll make a new man of you in a week."

According to the rules of the game Grellon should have cried—

"Monsieur, I demand satisfaction!"

To which Marmontel would have replied with haughty disdain—

"Monsieur, I hold myself at the disposal of your seconds!"

Then they ought to have turned back

to back and retired to their private quarters until such time as their seconds could decide upon a day and an hour for the meeting.

That is what should have ensued; but Grellon was not a gentleman. Grellon was a ranker, with twenty years' service behind him. He had had neither leisure nor ambition to acquire the mannerisms of his fellow officers. He didn't give a curse what they thought of him. They might despise him—and they did—but they could not alter the fact that he could handle a crew of hard bitten, semi-mutinous Legionnaires as easily as a nursemaid handles little children.

Blinded by the *export-cassis,* several moments elapsed before he was ready for action. But as soon as he managed to wipe the gummy liquid out of his eyes, instead of demanding satisfaction he plunged through the crowd straight at Marmontel. Several men endeavored to stop him. They might as well have tried to stop a steam roller.

Alarmed by this unexpected development, Marmontel lost his head. He picked up a chair and hurled it at Grellon. But Grellon parried the blow with his forearm, and the chair smashed to pieces. His fist shot out. It struck Marmontel on the cheek—struck him so hard that he went down as though he had been poleaxed. And as he fell a perfectly good bicuspid and an equally good molar were ejected from his wide open mouth.

"Now then," inquired Grellon, standing flatfooted above his victim, "are there any others of you gentlemen who would like to pick a fight with me? Is there anybody here who would like to slap my face?'

There were no takers, but the sympathies of the crowd were with Marmontel. He was not especially popular, but his standards were their standards, and Grellon's behavior scandalized them beyond measure.

"*Voyou!*" they yelled. "Gutter snipe! The dirty thug! This is an officers' club, not a den of apaches. It's unheard of! Unpardonable! Stop him! Throw him out! He's gone mad!"

Then an officer with four stripes on his cuff elbowed his way out of the noisy throng.

"This," he declared emphatically, "is intolerable. Simply intolerable. I don't know how the dispute started. I care less." He held up one hand. "No! Not a word! Allow *me.* I am Commandant Darbois of the Signal Service. I appear to be the senior officer in mess at the present moment, and I must ask you to go at once to your quarters and stay there until further notice."

Propped against a lieutenant's knee, Marmontel was showing signs of returning consciousness. Grellon's knuckles had played havoc with his handsome features. The left eye was ringed with purple, the aquiline nose was red and swollen, and the left side of the mouth looked as raw and pulpy as an overripe tomato. He groaned dismally, rolling his head from side to side.

"Off with you!" ordered the commandant, waving Grellon away. "And I warn you I shall make it my business to see that this affair does not stop here. A court of inquiry will have to hear the evidence and decide upon a course of action. Meanwhile, monsieur, I order you to leave at once!"

In silence the onlookers parted to make way for Grellon; but as soon as his broad back disappeared around the corner the tumult broke out afresh.

"He'll be cashiered," asserted one of Marmontel's young men. "A court of inquiry can have but one sequel—a court-martial."

Again Marmontel groaned dismally. He was still weak and shaken, but the thought that he might have to face a court of inquiry drove the cobwebs out of his brain. Grellon, to save his hide, would be sure to tell all he knew about the Bac-Nahm incident. His story might not receive official credence. But once started, Marmontel knew he could not live it down. It would poison his life, ruin him.

SOMEBODY was mopping blood off his face with a dripping wet towel. He stirred uneasily as the water ran coldly down his neck.

"He's coming to," said a voice. "Fetch a drop of cognac, quick!"

"Feeling better?" the voice went on, close to his ear. "Don't you worry—you'll be all right in a little while. No harm done."

But Marmontel was worried sick.

"Oh, God," he thought, keeping his eyes tight shut. "What shall I do? I must find a way of getting rid of the swine. Money? No, that won't do. He'd give a year's pay for the privilege of throwing mud on me. But there must be something I can do!"

The edge of a glass cut into his puffy lip. The pungent taste of brandy filled his mouth. He choked, and even while he coughed and spluttered an idea sprang full formed into his mind.

For a moment he lay perfectly still. Then a wan smile lighted his battered face.

"Thanks," he gasped. "It goes much better. Help me up."

They propped him in a chair. Another glass of brandy was thrust into his hand. He gulped it down while his admirers assured him that he was a fine fellow and that he would make cat's meat of Grellon.

But he shook his head. No, he declared, he did not want the affair to go any further. If Commandant Darbois wanted to summon a court of inquiry, that was his private concern. He, Marmontel, would have nothing to do with it. He did not intend to lodge a complaint against Grellon; he did not intend to challenge Grellon. The Legionnaire had placed himself outside the pale. He was not fit to be touched with tongs.

"True," agreed the gunner officer. "But, my dear fellow, he ought to be disciplined. He must be taught a lesson."

Marmontel did his best to look like an early Christian martyr.

"You forget one thing," he pointed out, speaking with extreme difficulty because his tongue kept slipping into the hole where his teeth had been. "You forget that we are going into action tomorrow, and that our private concerns are of small moment. I will take no steps whatsoever which might keep Captain Grellon from being at his battle post when the hour strikes."

Loud applause greeted this little homily. He was a Bayard, without fear or blame, ready and willing to sacrifice his honor for the sake of duty.

"I have wasted too much time as it is," he concluded. "I must go back to work. Dinner? That will have to wait."

Half an hour later a startled private ushered him into General Lemoine's study.

The sight of his chief of staff's tumefied face fascinated the brigadier.

"Very handsome," he commented. "Very fetching. Somebody, I perceive, has objected to your particular brand of humor. It was bound to happen sooner or later. Who is the hero?"

Marmontel did not attempt to lie. At least he did not lie any more than he had to: He had indulged in a little light banter; Grellon had seen fit to believe that he was being laughed at. There had been an exchange of blows.

"Hm," grunted Lemoine. "Did you say an *exchange* of blows? Anyway, that doesn't matter. What's going to happen now?"

"Nothing," asserted Marmontel. "Absolutely nothing, *mon Général.* With your kind permission I shall let the matter drop. Faults were committed on both sides."

"Wonders," swore Lemoine, "will never cease. You're a different man, Marmontel. A couple more hidings and you'll be quite human. I'll let you have my dentist's address, if you want it. He does excellent bridge work."

"You are more than thoughtful," Marmontel assured him. "In the meantime, *mon Général,* if you will be good enough to sign the marching orders of the 4th Company of the Legion, I may be able

to snatch a few hours' sleep."

The typewritten order read:

From Officer Commanding 1st Mixed Brigade, Souk-Gabrit, to Captain Louis Grellon, 4/2 Battalion, 1st Foreign Regiment.

Immediately upon receipt of this order you are instructed to proceed to Zaheur, where you will join forces with Lieutenant Verron of the 11th Spahis.

While on the line of march the utmost caution must be observed to conceal your movements from the enemy which is massing in force at Bled el Klouf.

At Zaheur you will occupy a position of observation and hold the position until further notice.

"I thought I said they were to leave at two in the morning?" remarked Lemoine, scratching his name at the bottom of the order. "You must be in a hurry to bundle Captain Grellon off the premises."

"Captain Grellon does not interest me in the least," Marmontel asserted. "I am interested in the physical well being of his men. An all-night march is exhausting. If they reach Zaheur before dawn they will have a chance to rest, whereas if they do not leave until two o'clock—"

"As usual." Lemoine shrugged. "Always right. Have it your own way."

ANOTHER half hour went by, and Grellon stood on the mat in front of the chief of staff's desk.

"You are leaving at once," snapped the chief of staff, holding a handkerchief to his aching mouth. "There are your marching orders."

The document read:

From Officer Commanding 1st Mixed Brigade, Souk-Gabrit, to Captain Louis Grellon, 4/2 Battalion, 1st Foreign Regiment.

Immediately upon receipt of this order you will proceed to Bled el Klouf, which you will hold until further notice. If any enemy contingents are sighted by you in the neighborhood of Bled el Klouf they are to be engaged at once and driven eastward toward Zaheur where, according to my plans, the major engagement will take place.

It was signed, "A. Lemoine, Gen. 1MB."

Grellon's eyes became narrow slits as he read the order, and the muscles of his jaw bulged ominously.

"There's no mistake about this?" he inquired.

"Mistake?" lisped Marmontel. "What exactly do you mean?"

"You want me to take my men to Bled el Klouf?"

The question appeared to nonplus Marmontel.

"Why," he said slowly, "yes, of course Bled el Klouf. It's there in black and white. Perhaps you have some objection to offer?"

"None, except that when I left the battalion and reported here for duty with the reserve forces, I was under the impression that the Ouled M'Tazzi were massing at Bled el Klouf. I'm surprised, that's all."

"Really?" Marmontel's tone was elaborately sarcastic. "Evidently it has not occurred to you that plans have to be modified sometimes at the last minute. I am sorry to say that, without consulting us, the Ouled M'Tazzi have occupied Zaheur instead of Bled el Klouf. It was very inconsiderate of them, I admit, but we are compelled to allow them a certain amount of initiative for the present."

"In that case," Grellon began, "I—"

"Allow me to assure you," Marmontel broke in, "that it is most unusual for a company commander to question the orders of his superior officer. Or—" he stood up, glowering out of his one sound eye at the Legionnaire—"do you mean to suggest that I have allowed my private feelings to interfere with the performance of my official duties?"

Grellon snapped up to attention. For twenty years he had been obeying orders; the habit was bred in his bones. A hot wave of shame swept over him at the thought that, for a moment, he had allowed himself to doubt the motives of a brigade staff captain.

"I'm sorry, *mon Capitaine*," he blurt-

ed out. "I'll march away just as soon as my men are ready."

Marmontel gave his shoulders an impatient twitch.

"That's a slight improvement," he admitted. "And, before you go, there is something else I want to say—about our—er—misunderstanding in the mess this evening. I had no intention of wounding your feelings. I have the highest regard for your regiment. I'm afraid I was not very tactful."

"I was a bit hasty myself," confessed Grellon. "I ought to have kept my mouth shut about Bac-Nahm. The best of us break down occasionally."

"We'll forget all about it," Marmontel said quickly. "So far as I am concerned the incident is closed."

Grellon thawed out completely. He grinned from ear to ear as he clicked his heels together and carried his hand to the brim of his képi.

"*Au revoir, mon Capitaine,*" he boomed. "The best of luck to you. And I hope that eye doesn't give you too much trouble tomorrow."

"Goodby, goodby!" Marmontel called out. "Look me up when you come back. Glad to see you any time." But as he closed the door on Grellon he added to himself, "I'll be glad to see you in hell, pig that you are!"

Going to his desk, he took a clean handkerchief from a drawer and carefully wiped his right hand which still tingled from the pressure of Grellon's fingers.

ON THE rim of the horizon the sky was streaked with silver and the stars were turning pale as the men of the 4th Company trudged up the long, easy slope toward the crest of the ridge.

Beyond, in the hollow, lay Bled el Klouf.

During the night they had covered thirty kilometers, stumbling and tripping over loose stones, plowing ankle-deep through the sand. From head to foot they were caked with dust—fine, impalpable desert dust which had inflamed their eyelids and set their throats on fire. Their water bottles were empty; their lips were black and swollen, but they marched as only the Legion can march, slogging along at their mile devouring pace, heads down, round shouldered beneath the weight of their topheavy packs.

Out in front the point man plodded along, képi over one eye, rifle under his arm; behind him a squad at cover-point; then the bulk of the outfit, strung out in apparent disorder, each man picking his own way up the slope; in the rear came the pack mules with machine gun parts and ammunition boxes strapped to their flanks.

"Not so bad," said Grellon, trudging along beside the lieutenant of the first section. "We'll be in before sunup if—"

"Targui!"

The shout echoed down the slope.

"Targui!"

The point man had stopped dead in his tracks. Ahead, on the crest of the ridge, the figure of a man on a knock-kneed camel had appeared. Black against the luminous gray sky, he sat as still as a graven image. The dust kicked up by the dawn wind swirled about the camel's spindle legs and made the Arab's burnous fill out like a sail.

For an eternity—two seconds perhaps—he watched the Legionnaires toiling up the slope; then, before the point man could sling his rifle to his shoulder, he wheeled about and dropped out of sight.

A whistle shrilled once, twice and again.

"*Alerte!* Close up! Close up!"

No. 4 Company broke into a shuffling run.

"If!" repeated Grellon, scowling at the empty skyline. "Form 'em up, Bourgade," he went on, turning to the lieutenant. "Keep back from the top of the hill—about five hundred meters. That'll give us a good field of fire if we need it. I'm going up ahead to reconnoiter."

"Fall in!" the noncoms were shouting.

"This way, No. 1 Platoon!"

Squad by squad, rank upon rank, the Legionnaires formed up without fuss or commotion.

"By your right—dress!" sang the platoon sergeants. "Up in the center—steady! Steady on the left! *Fixe!*"

The sergeants marched to their posts, three paces front and center. Lieutenant Bourgade placed himself on the right of the line. The last tremor died away. Looking straight to its front, No. 4 Company waited stolidly while Grellon lumbered up to the top of the slope.

And as he neared the crest a dull rumble like the sound of far thunder beat against his ears. He covered the last few yards on hands and knees, keeping down behind the boulders until the earth fell away and he could look down into the plain of Bled el Klouf.

He spat out a curse. The foreground was alive with men, some on horseback, some on camels, and behind this screen, pouring across the plain like a torrent, the Ouled M'Tazzi, fifteen thousand strong, were on the move. A pillar of dust, shot with gold by the rays of the rising sun, towered above them, so that Grellon could see nothing clearly save a moving forest of banners waving above a dark, swarming mass stretching back and back toward the oasis of Bled el Klouf.

Grellon slipped his binoculars back into their case. He glanced over his shoulder at his fistful of men—at their lean jawed, hard bitten faces half hidden beneath the broken brims of their caps. A tough gang, tough as hell—the scourings of Hamburg and Fiume, Kiev and Warsaw, outcasts, drunks, bigamists, eternal square pegs in round holes who had drifted into the Legion, because in the Legion a man's past is his own concern and, while he lives, he is moderately sure of at least one square meal a day.

But the Legion's drill sergeants had sweated the booze and the dope out of their systems; Legion discipline had gripped them in an iron hand compelling them to be clean and smart and obedient; and Grellon had finished the job. He had welded them together into a single unit, a murderously efficient fighting machine, but a machine with a soul, a thing of flesh and blood and brawn which would fight to the last ditch and die without a whimper. There was not a man in the outfit who did not trust him implicitly. He was their father confessor and their friend. They could go to him with their private troubles and be sure of a hearing; they could be sure, too, that whenever they kicked over the traces he would punish them without mercy.

And Grellon, peering through the clear dawn light, gnawed at his lower lip till it bled, for he knew that No. 4 Company had come to the end of the road, that it had been thrown away and sacrificed that one man's reputation might be preserved unsullied. Retreat was out of the question. He could not hope to outstrip Mulay's mounted men. There was only one thing to be done—fight; one hundred and fifty against fifteen thousand.

"Why the hell didn't I wring his neck?" he exclaimed. "The lousy dog. I shook hands with him. Judas!"

HE CRAWLED away from the skyline and raced down the slope, shouting orders as he ran. No. 4 Company sprang to life, the sections wheeling right and left until they formed a hollow square as compact and close knit as a clenched fist. Inside the square the machine gunners worked at top speed bolting their weapons to the tripods.

"How many boxes of ammunition do you think we'll need?" inquired Bourgade.

"Open 'em all," answered Grellon. "And turn the mules loose. They'll be in our way."

A startled look crept into the lieutenant's eyes.

"But afterward," he began, "how shall we—"

"We're not going to need 'em again!" rasped Grellon. "Turn 'em loose!"

It was the nearest approach he made to a last minute speech. The mules were turned loose. Smelling water, they trotted away and dropped out of sight behind the ridge.

"Anyway," commented Bourgade, drawing a deep breath, "we're in a good defensive position. That's something to be thankful for."

Grellon smacked him on the shoulder. "Stick it out! That's the idea. Slap three of the machine guns facing the top of the rise. Keep the other one in reserve. They'll be all around us in a little while."

Each second the thunder of hoofs was growing louder. Suddenly, over the brow of the hill, half a mile away, shot a long file of horsemen, riding at a full gallop. They sped past the Legionnaires, swinging around in a wide circle, scouring the plain for signs of a possible ambush.

Then the splintering crash of a rifle shot rang clear above the endless rumble, and a bullet sped by overhead with a long drawn *phweeeee!* More followed. A trooper in the front line collapsed, pitching forward on to his face. He was dragged aside. The line closed up.

"Wait for the order!" barked the sergeants. "Wait!"

"All set?" inquired Grellon, stopping beside a machine gun crew, and he had to yell to make himself heard above the tumult.

"Set!" answered the gunner. "At three hundred meters we ought to—"

A roar covered the sound of his voice. The green standards of Mulay abd el Hamid were mounting above the skyline. And all at once the low ridge was black with men, and yet more men riding knee to knee. For an instant they checked their pace, pausing to stare at the Legionnaires, but the pressure of the oncoming horse drove them forward. They broke as a dam breaks, spilling down the slope in one headlong rush straight at the waiting bayonets.

A single shout burst from a thousand throats.

And still Grellon waited—waited until he could see the foam on the horses' bits, till the earth trembled beneath the impact of the flying hoofs, then he bellowed—

"Prepare for salvo fire! . . ."

The troopers facing the roaring mob swung their rifles to their shoulders.

"Take aim—fire!"

As one man they let drive—a single shattering report like the sound of some great hammer on a copper cauldron.

"Again—fire!"

The front of the onrushing mass lurched and staggered. Men, horses and camels crashed to the ground and were lost underfoot as the avalanche rolled on.

"Now!" ordered Grellon, turning to the gun crews. "Let 'em have it!"

The guns sputtered, coughed, sputtered again, and settled down to a staccato clatter, grinding out the bullets six hundred to the minute.

The Ouled M'Tazzi went down in squirming, kicking heaps as though they had been struck by a titanic fist. Great gaps appeared in their midst. They had boundless courage, but courage alone could not carry them through the sleet of bullets that mowed them down in swathes. The gaps widened. The charging ranks swerved away from the blazing guns and went streaming past the outer faces of the square which poured volley after volley into them.

The attack fizzled out, leaving the earth in its wake carpeted with broken, trampled things that a few minutes before had been living creatures, clean limbed and strong. In the center of the shambles, like a rock after the passage of a tidal wave, No. 4 Company stood unshaken and intact.

The sun was over the horizon now, and as it climbed into the sky a burning hot wind swept across the desert.

"We may need those mules after all," croaked Bourgade, wiping the dust off his lips. "We're holding 'em."

Grellon nodded.

"That was the advance guard. The real fight hasn't started yet."

Beyond the ridge the standards were on the move again. All along the skyline there was a crackle of musketry. The bullets whistled by in coveys.

"Down," ordered Grellon.

The troopers flattened out on the ground, taking shelter behind their knapsacks. The slugs came faster, kicking up spurts of dust as they hailed about the Legionnaires. In quick succession a dozen men were hit. Grimy faces, fine drawn with exhaustion, were turned toward Grellon walking slowly down the line.

"It's all right," he assured them. "Steady! Our time's coming."

Crash! A machine gun lay on its side with a jagged hole in its water jacket.

"Shove in the other one," began Grellon, turning toward Bourgade; but the lieutenant lay on his back.

AN INARTICULATE grunt was the only sign of emotion Grellon could afford, for Mulay abd el Hamid's warriors were closing in again. Spread out in a great crescent, they rolled down the slope, and as they advanced the horns of the crescent stretched swiftly outward and around until the 4th Company was surrounded by a living, moving wall.

"Up!" barked Grellon. "Up the 4th!"

The rows of bayonets faced outward once more, and the machine gunners crouched behind their blunt nosed weapons, waiting for the order to strike.

For a moment the day stood still and a hush settled over the sunlit slope, while ten thousand pairs of eyes stared in wonderment at this handful of men that was holding up a nation.

Then with a yell a fragment of the wall tore loose, another followed and another, hurtling down upon the Legionnaires, threatening to engulf them at the first impact.

A lick of flame played around the sides of the square; the machine guns hammered out their dispassionate death song, and again the Ouled M'Tazzi were ripped to bloody tatters and blown away, until their straining horses stumbled hock-deep among the dead.

But there was no stopping them. They came on, crowding in ever closer to the Legionnaires, the front ranks acting as a shield for those who came behind.

Rifles grew too hot to hold as the blear eyed troopers groped about in the corners of their cartridge pouches for the last remaining bullets. The sun beat down upon them and the air they breathed stank of powder and blood and sweat.

Then a machine gun jammed, and the Ouled M'Tazzi struck the square like a battering ram. No. 4 Company staggered beneath the blow. The lines bent and sagged, but they held. Bayonets plunged hilt deep into lathered chests; gun butts crashed down on turbaned heads. Grellon, his tunic in rags about his waist, a twisted rifle barrel swinging above his head, seemed to be everywhere at once. Time after time he rallied his worn out men, roaring at them:

"Hold on! Hold on!"

But the square was shrinking in upon itself. Corporals commanded platoons; the platoons dwindled to the size of squads. Only one machine gun remained in action. At point-blank range it drenched the tribesmen with lead until a lance struck the gunner between the shoulder blades and he died, falling forward onto the scorching hot casing of his weapon which roasted the flesh off his cheek.

And then, when one last thrust would have swept the Legionnaires into oblivion, instead of pressing their advantage the Ouled M'Tazzi gave way.

Only the warriors in the forefront of the battle had been able to witness the flagging strength of the French soldiers. The others, the thousand others crowding in behind saw nothing but the charnelhouse of their own dead. They had been promised swift victory over a demoralized foe; their minds were on

fire with great dreams of conquest—and on the very threshold of their triumphant march they were being held in check and butchered by an enemy so puny and insignificant that they had expected to crush him at the first onslaught.

By degrees their courage and their faith oozed out of them. They wavered unsteadily, crying aloud that they were not fighting mortal men but fiends, and that for every one they slew two sprang out of the earth. The fear spread. Brave men, sick with nameless dread, slashed at each other's throats to escape from the heart of the turmoil where, in a swirl of dust, fifty blood smeared, powder blackened scarecrows fought with broken bayonets and splintered gun butts, with their nails and their teeth and their feet.

Fifty? Not quite. Forty-seven, not one of them unwounded, not one of them wholly sane. Drunk from too much killing, they stood huddled close together, unable to move, unable to think, while the Ouled M'Tazzi rolled back across the plain.

"*Alors quoi?*" muttered a goggle eyed trooper. "What's the idea? My God, I don't think they're going to stop this side of Timbuktu!"

"Don't you worry about that," grunted an old-timer, whose beard had been singed off one side of his face. "Give 'em time to find out how many of us are left and they'll be right back on our necks. Look at 'em now."

The stampede was over. A mile away the Ouled M'Tazzi were reforming beneath their standards, spreading out long tentacles across the plain, immuring the Legionnaires within the walls of a living rampart which loomed more massive and stouter than ever.

The uproar died away and an uneasy stillness weighed down upon the desert.

"You know what's going to happen to us, don't you?" the bearded old-timer inquired. "No flowers by request—"

Grellon's rasping voice, issuing a hasty order, cut him short—

"No. 4 Company—on two ranks—fall in!"

For a second or so they gaped at him stupidly, then with the slow deliberation of sleep walkers they formed up facing him.

The words came like bullets from his lips:

"You have held off fifteen thousand men—held them off twice. But they're coming again. I know, and you know, that nothing can save us. We are going to die. Will you stand here and wait like sheep to be cut down—or will you follow me?"

They answered him with a nod and a grunt.

"Right!" he went on. "We'll go out in style. They are not going to attack us, *mes gars*. We'll attack them! 'Tention, the 4th! As you were! Snap out of it now! 'Tention!" They obeyed the order as smartly as a guard of honor, and Grellon grinned at them through the blood on his face as he barked, "Company will advance. By the left—march!"

In line and in step they swung across the plain, heading toward the wall where the standards were thickest. Out in front marched Grellon, the broken stump of a sword dangling at the end of his arm.

They left the dead behind and as they tramped across the open the Ouled M'Tazzi muttered and stirred uneasily. The wall seemed to quiver.

The distance lessened. Three hundred meters to go. Two hundred . . . The hobnailed boots pounded the gritty dust. And still the Ouled M'Tazzi made no move.

One hundred meters. A sea of brown faces confronted Grellon; a thousand rifles pointed at his chest.

He turned to his men and his mouth opened wide—

"Charge!"

Shoulder to shoulder, heads down, yelling, they drove straight at the wall.

And the wall crumbled away. A

broad lane opened before Grellon and as he stumbled into the breech Mulay abd el Hamid came forward on foot to meet him.

SEATED on a camp stool beneath the awning of his tent, General Lemoine watched the enormous dust cloud enshrouding the Ouled M'Tazzi creep at a snail's pace across the desert.

It was close on one o'clock; it was appallingly hot, but the general was at peace with the world.

Nothing could possibly go wrong. To an unobservant eye the Arabs might have seemed to be moving across desolate wilderness. But two thousand men were concealed under the bank of a dry watercourse on the Ouled M'Tazzi's right flank; on the left more troops lay behind a low fold in the ground. Farther away a stony ridge sheltered the cavalry squadrons which were to cut off Mulay's line of retreat. A battery of 75's and the tactical reserves were in position behind the knoll where Lemoine's tent had been pitched.

In another ten minutes Mulay's advance guard would come abreast of an outcrop of red rock jutting sharply above the floor of the desert, then the 75's would open fire upon the head of the column, the jaws of the trap would snap shut, and two years of endless strain and worry would receive their just reward.

"Of course," grumbled Lemoine, doing his best to conceal his elation, "they're two hours late. They ought to have been here by eleven o'clock. Why they should be two hours late is a mystery to me."

"Our cavalry patrols said they heard the sound of rifle fire early this morning," volunteered a Spahis officer.

"The cavalry patrols," countered Captain Marmontel, "were not within ten kilometers of Bled el Klouf. I wish our scouts could be taught to stick to facts. They have too much imagination."

The Spahi, who was young and impressionable, wilted before the lash of Marmontel's tongue. He hastened to explain that he was not suggesting that the noises heard by the scouts had any particular significance. Arabs, he admitted, often fired blank charges to arouse their fighting spirit.

"In that case," snapped Marmontel, "why the devil do you keep harping on the subject? I have been listening to the same rumor all morning. It's a damn nuisance."

Lemoine tugged at his mustache to hide a smile.

"You're very testy today, my boy," he commented. "Must be that eye. It's turning green, you know."

"My eye," Marmontel said stiffly, "is quite all right, thank you, *mon Général.*"

"Then it must be your jaw. I suppose it *is* rather unpleasant to have two teeth knocked out. Do you know," he went on before Marmontel could open his mouth, "I have never seen Arabs move so slowly. If they left Bled el Klouf at dawn they haven't covered two kilometers an hour. But it won't be long now. In five minutes they'll be within range."

Marmontel lighted a cigaret, took two puffs and threw it away. He began to fuss with a dispatch case full of papers.

"I do wish you'd sit down," observed Lemoine. "You make me nervous. Your work is done. Now give the others a chance."

"Just as you wish, *mon Général,*" agreed Marmontel. "I am on edge, I confess. I didn't sleep well last night."

The old man leaned over and tapped him on the knee.

"Just as soon as this is over," he declared, "I'm bundling you home. It's been a long grind."

An A.D.C. broke in upon this affecting tête-à-tête.

"Pardon me, *mon Général,* but the Ouled M'Tazzi seem to have stopped."

"Stopped?" echoed Lemoine. "What do you mean—stopped?"

He snatched up a pair of field glasses and scowled at the billows of dun colored

dust hanging in the air.

"*Formidable!*" he cried indignantly. "That is exactly what they have done. Stopped! What the devil's got into them, I'd like to know? First they're late, then they halt without rhyme or reason in the middle of the desert!"

At the base of the cloud, dimly visible through the shimmering heat haze, ant-like figures crawled about.

"But they can't stop there!" fumed Lemoine. "They must come on another kilometer before we can bring the full weight of our fire to bear on their flanks. I wonder whether they have spotted any of our people?"

"Very probably," agreed Marmontel. "I don't think we ought to give them time to reconnoiter our position. They're well within gun range, and we could—"

"I will not do it," snapped Lemoine. "A frontal attack will do no good. They'll run like gazelles unless we corner them."

"If we swung the 2nd Legion half-left—"

"No! That's enough. I will not change any of my plans. If Mulay escapes, the whole damn thing will have to be done over again—by some one else—and we'll be left high and dry. Confound him! He's bound to come on."

A minute dragged by; another followed, and another. The dust was beginning to settle. Black, swarming masses of men became visible through the haze.

"This can't go on," swore Lemoine. "It's enough to drive a man out of his mind. Some fool trooper is going to squeeze the trigger of his rifle just a little too tightly, and the whole mess is going to boil over. Two years' work—*zut!*"

Marmontel was gnawing the skin around his fingernails.

"That is what I have been saying all along," he pointed out. "There is nothing to keep us from outmaneuvering them. The 2nd Legion can pin them down while the other flank—"

Lemoine wiped the perspiration off his flaming cheeks.

"We'll have to do it, I suppose," he grumbled. "I can't understand why they stopped."

The words died away on his lips. He cocked his head first to one side, then the other, cupping his hand about his ear.

"Does anybody hear anything?" he demanded.

"Drums," said the Spahis officer. "I heard them too."

Tap-tap-tap. The sound echoed faintly across the plain. *Tap-tap-tap* . . .

"Drums!" exclaimed Marmontel. "Can't you tell a tomtom's beat from a drum. They'll be on the move in another second. I'll tell Audenard to open fire."

"Shut up and keep still!" barked Lemoine. "What's got into you? If that's a tomtom, I'll—"

THE beat grew faster. And all at once the brassy voice of a single bugle fused up toward the sky, ringing thin and clear through the sunlit stillness.

And the drums underscored the rhythm, hammering it out.

There was a stirring behind the haze of dust. Sunlight glistened on polished steel. A group of mounted men broke away from the massed ranks of the Ouled M'Tazzi and crept out across the floor of the desert. In front of this loosely formed group, resplendent in its white burnouses, moved two rows of grayish, inconspicuous figures with rifles on their shoulders.

The bugle's shrill yelp grew louder, more distinct . . .

> Tomorrow on our graves,
> The wheat will grow thicker.
> Close up your ranks!

"But, *mon dieu!*" choked Lemoine. "But I know that song. Of course I know it. It's very familiar."

"It is," admitted a liaison officer, speaking through stiff white lips. "That's the marching song of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Regiment of the Legion. *My* battalion, *mon Général.*"

"You don't say," muttered Lemoine. "You don't say! You hear that, Marmontel? That's the 2nd Battalion's marching song!"

Marmontel gave his shoulders an impatient shrug.

"They're playing it very badly," he pointed out. "Unless I am greatly mistaken they are trying to deceive us while they reconnoiter our position. We ought to open fire at once. It stands to reason that the 2nd Battalion hasn't lent any of its musicians to Mulay."

The bugle's blare died away. The steady thump of the drums vibrated inside Lemoine's chest. He blew his nose with unnecessary violence.

"My very dear Marmontel," he remarked, "I don't know what is going on any more than you do, but I will not give the order to open fire until I am ready to do so. And I am not ready yet." Raising his binoculars to his eyes, he grumbled, "You have never seen Arabs march like that. They're our own people. God bless my soul, it's incredible! Look at 'em, will you?"

"Unless I am very much mistaken," said the liaison officer, "that big fellow out in front in Grellon."

"*Hein,* Grellon?" queried Lemoine. "That's absurd. He went to Zaheur last night. I'm not mad, am I? I did sign that order, didn't I?"

"Certainly you did, *mon Général,*" admitted Marmontel. "That is why I am so sure we ought to—"

The bugle rang out again, joyfully proclaiming in its thin, strident voice that:

> The colonel's wife was pretty,
> The colonel's wife was young.
> She couldn't say no to a Legionnaire . . .

There was a sudden swarming of men all along the edge of the dry river bed. A tumultuous cheer broke out, rolled on, faded, and surged up again louder than ever. The desert was coming to life. At the imminent risk of sunstroke Legionnaires were hoisting their caps on the muzzles of their rifles and capering about like madmen. Black faces grinning beneath red fezzes popped up over the top of a low ridge.

Then as the bugler faltered, his lungs blown out, from the shelter of the river bed marched the music of the 2nd Battalion, twenty thundering drums, twenty shrill bugles.

It picked up the tune where the single bugler left off, telling the whole sunlit world of the amours of the colonel's wife —a tale so scandalous that, on the line of march through villages, it had to be rigidly forbidden.

Order, discipline and decorum ceased to exist outside the general's tent.

"It is Grellon!" the liaison officer was shouting. "It is the 4th. It *is* Grellon!"

Large, foolish tears dribbled down Lemoine's cheeks as he protested angrily:

"That explains nothing, monsieur. Absolutely nothing. What connection can there be between Captain Grellon and the Ouled M'Tazzi? It does not make sense. You can see for yourself how ridiculous it is. Marmontel, what do you make of it?"

Marmontel looked very bored and aloof.

"If that is Captain Grellon," he said in his most detached manner,"I am sure, *mon Général,* that he will be able to provide you with the very best possible explanation."

"I can't wait," declared Lemoine. "Fetch my horse. Tell the groom to bring my horse at once."

Horses arrived. Lemoine paused with one foot in the stirrup.

"Marmontel!" he called out. "Where's Marmontel. Tell him to hurry up!"

An orderly ran toward the tent. As he reached the entrance a shot rang out and a whiff of blue smoke curled up over the edge of the awning.

"Something wrong?" cried Lemoine, clinging for dear life to the saddle as his horse went around in circles.

Several officers dashed into the tent. Seconds later one of them reappeared.

"It is Captain Marmontel," he ex-

plained. "An accident—"

"What the devil do you mean?" sputtered Lemoine. "Who fired that shot?"

"Captain Marmontel," said the officer, "is dead. He shot himself through the head."

"Dead!" ejaculated Lemoine, his eyes opening as round as saucers. "Am I to understand that he has committed suicide?"

"I'm afraid he has," admitted his informant, pulling a long face. "The revolver is still in his hand."

Lemoine stared at the tent, but he did not take his foot out of the stirrup.

"Poor devil," he commented. "That's what overwork and worry and emotion will do to a good man. Too bad! Too bad! Well—" his manner changed abruptly—"I must be off. I really can't stop now."

WILLING hands boosted him into the saddle. Without bothering to thrust his feet into the stirrup irons, he dug his heels into the charger's flanks and went rocketing down the hillside, risking at any second a fall that might break his neck.

As he drew nearer the *clique* wheeled aside; the bugles were stilled and the drums, after a pause, rolled "General's Inspection".

Lemoine slowed down to a dignified walk.

A huge, bull necked man soaked in blood and dust brayed:

"*Garde à vous!* Present arms!"

Forty-odd rifles crashed to the present. Then the man marched forward, raising the stump end of a sword to his chin.

His voice rang like a gong:

"4th Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Foreign Regiment, *mon Général,* with prisoners."

Lemoine touched the brim of his cap with two shaking fingers.

"So you are Captain Grellon," he muttered. "I thought as much. I don't quite understand what you are doing here, but that will have to wait . . . You said something about prisoners?"

"I did, *mon Général.* We met the Ouled M'Tazzi about five kilometers north of Bled el Klouf. They have surrendered unconditionally."

The general fought back an impulse to break into shrieks of wild laughter. Generals can not afford to have hysterics. Not in public.

"That simplifies our task, of course," he admitted. "Am I to understand that all those people out yonder have surrendered—to you?"

"All of them, yes . . . Mulay—" Grellon flung over his shoulder. "Mulay abd el Hamid! *Imchi!* Come here!"

And the kaid of the Ouled M'Tazzi, followed by a score of venerable graybeards in solemn procession, came forward to make his submission and ask for the *aman*, the ceremonial pardon granted by a magnanimous conqueror to his defeated foe.

"Speak!" ordered Lemoine, breaking into Arabic. "And let thy tongue hold fast to the truth."

He listened in silence while Mulay told of the headlong rush of his people against the compact square; told of the slaughter which had wiped out whole clans; told of the Legionnaires' unwavering courage.

"And when instead of dying they charged straight at us," he concluded, "I knew that we could not hope to win. We could have crushed them, that is true. But if such men could hold us in check as they did, what would become of us when the real fighting began? When we thought you weak, sidi, we despised you; but there is no shame in making peace with a nation such as yours. My beard is in your hands!"

Lemoine spoke gruffly as a great conqueror should:

"You have been wise, Mulay. If you speak from the heart you will have no cause for regret."

Then he gave orders that Mulay be led to his tent, where the terms of surrender were to be discussed; and when

the Arabs had been shepherded away Lemoine faced the 4th Company.

"Legionnaires," he snapped, "what you have done today will not be forgotten. I am proud of you. That's all for the present. You don't want to listen to my eloquence now. You need a doctor to patch you up, and a liter of wine apiece to take the taste of dust out of your throats. You'll be thanked later on, when your comrades are assembled. Fall out!

"But I can't let you go just yet," he told Grellon. "You're rather badly cut about, I know, but there are a couple of points I must clear up at once."

"At your orders, *mon Général.*"

Lemoine cleared his throat.

"Will you kindly tell me what you were doing five kilometers from Bled el Klouf at sunrise, when you were ordered to Zaheur?"

From the torn lining of his tunic Grellon drew a crumpled bit of paper which he handed Lemoine.

The brigadier scowled at the typewritten document.

"*Sacre bon dieu!*" he burst out. "That's not my signature. I never saw this thing before."

Grellon looked steadily into the general's eyes.

"Those are the orders I had to obey," he retorted. "I have lost two-thirds of my outfit because of it. The man I want is Captain Marmontel."

Lemoine's lips were pursed in a silent whistle.

"I'm beginning to see daylight ahead. You had a row with Marmontel last night, and he sent you to Bled el Klouf instead of Zaheur. Of all the damnable, unpardonable tricks it is the very worst."

"He's a murderer," rasped Grellon. "Worse than that—he's a coward. He ran at Bac-Nahm, but he won't get away again, not if I can help it."

Lemoine nodded understandingly.

"Marmontel died not ten minutes ago," he explained. "Shot himself. Under the circumstances I don't quite see what else he could have done. And if I may make a suggestion," he added confidentially, "I think we ought to hush the whole thing up. We must not do anything that will shake the morale of the troops."

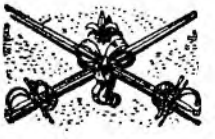
Grellon's red wrath immediately simmered down.

"If he's dead that ends it, *mon Général.* I wouldn't tell my men why they were sent to Bled el Klouf, not if my life depended upon it. Tell 'em—and have a mutiny on my hands and wreck the best company that ever wore shoe leather? Not much!"

Lemoine heaved a sigh of relief. The scandal would go no farther. The deceased staff captain could be listed among the "died in action", and the pride of the house of Marmontel would not be humbled. Now that he had scored such a victory, the ministry would be compelled to give him a job at the war college. The future was full of promise indeed.

He handed the crumpled scrap of paper back to Grellon.

"Keep it," he said gruffly. "It's yours. We'll let the order stand just as it is. It's a fake, but history's full of fakes. One more won't make much difference."



By the Author of "Painted Ponies"

The KILLER *in the* CHUTE

By ALAN LEMAY

IN SOME ways that rodeo at Las Cruces was one of the funniest I ever saw. It seemed like everybody was always ready to fight at the drop of a hat, so that it was very seldom that an hour went by without a brawl going on some place. There is always some scrapping behind the scenes at a rodeo, but during this show we had fighting all the time, until you would have doubted if cowboys were really peaceable men after all.

The funny thing was that nobody seemed to know just what he was sore about; or if he thought he knew, it was no good reason, and no two reasons alike. But as I think back now, I believe it was because of the way the Helmholtz brothers horned in that year and sort of took over that rodeo, until there was a kind of shadow of them all over the whole darn works.

These four Helmholtz brothers had started out in cattle, and got kind of halfway into banking, and ended up with a cattle loan company business

that was now likely to own more cattle than any three outfits in the State. Now, I've seen plenty of cattle taken up to meet loans, and the people who lost their cattle were often some displeased; and I don't know exactly what was different about the way the Helmholtz brothers did business.

But I don't think you can find anybody who will admit he ever got a square deal from those Helmholtzes; and I suppose half the cattlemen in the State had a knife honing for that outfit. So you can see why it made everybody feel rollicky to have these Helmholtz brothers come in and start out to run the Las Cruces rodeo, and get away with it, too, for a little while.

I was sitting on a bale of hay back of the chutes the day before the rodeo began, talking to Whiskers Beck and Ben Cord. And they were giving me a few reasons why they had gone sour on the Helmholtz outfit. It seems that Ben and Whiskers Beck were the only two riders left to Johnny Fraser and his Star Loop outfit up on the Tonto Rim. Johnny was a good kid and a white man, but the Helmholtzes had got him tied up where he stood to lose the whole works—what of it the Helmholtzes hadn't grabbed already. I wish now I had listened closer; for, if I had, maybe I would be able to explain to you better what happened.

But just then I was thinking about something else. You see, I knew Ben Cord pretty well, or did once, but I had never seen Whiskers Beck before. And I had a special reason for wanting to get to know him.

Whiskers Beck was a bald old cowboy, with white whiskers that were short but very bushy. While I knew him he always wore a wool brush jacket with big black and white checks, and held up his Levi pants with a four-inch leather belt with big silver conchos on it. But what interested me was that I understood this old boy had a running horse cached in the bushes, and was figuring to run him in the 440 that was coming off the second day of the rodeo.

I had brought a little sprint horse to this rodeo myself; so Whiskers Beck and I were sizing each other up, each one of us trying to figure out what he was up against in the case of the other fellow's horse. And the upshot of it was that by and by Whiskers and I agreed there wasn't any use of cow folks like us fighting among each other, so we just took our ponies off in the brush and tried them out.

As it worked out, both of us were kind of disappointed in the little difference between our two horses, and I may as well say right now that neither one of us ever ran his horse in that quarter mile race. But that was how it came about that I got to be a very close friend —and you might say a partner for a little while—of Whiskers Beck.

"You and me might as well figure to split second money, if any at all," I told him. "There's a feller here has a pony that can beat us both from here to Tuesday."

Whiskers was terrible let down because his pony had not stood out against mine the way he had hoped and figured.

"Darned if I know where I'm going to head in," he said, very hopeless. "Some way or another I've got to make an awful lot of money out of this rodeo show."

"How much money do you call a lot?"

He looked me over very cool.

"About five thousand pesos," he said at last.

I looked at him with pity.

"Maybe," said Whiskers Beck, "I can rouse up a few good odds against Ben Cord taking first money in the bronc riding."

I started to tell him he was crazy, but I let it pass. This Ben Cord was a good husky kid, maybe nineteen years old. He was half Indian, but one of the best built men I ever saw—long in the legs and thin in the middle, with a chest like a barrel and shoulders fit for an ox. And he had a head like a lion, wide set eyes, high cheekbones, and all cut very

square out of one piece. But when it came to riding I knew Ben was just a fair to average bucking horse rider; and as we went back to the corrals I was feeling sorry for Whiskers Beck, and figuring on how much I could do for myself by taking up some of these bets that Whiskers was so anxious to lay.

Then as we were walking past the bucking horse corral a thing happened that was going to change the whole dope on that rodeo, and Whiskers Beck's plans, and mine too; though I didn't fully understand all about that right away.

Just as we were passing the corral a horse let out a bawl, and there was some hoof hammering and a cracking sound like a horse kicking a six-inch post right out of the ground. You are always hearing that kind of row around the broncs; but this time there was a minute of silence right after that, as if everything within earshot suddenly stood to listen. And out of that sudden quiet we heard somebody yell:

"In God's name, kill him! Hasn't anybody got a gun?"

Then noise began again—horses milling, people running and shouting, and the snap of a rope end.

We ran over to where a little part of the bronc corral was divided off, and they were keeping a big black horse in the small part alone. Somebody had dabbed a loop over the fence and got this black horse around the neck, and he and three or four cowboys took on to the end of the rope and was choking him, and the heavy barred fence shook like it was going to come down as they tried to hold that horse.

The big black went straight up in the air, pawing at the rope, then came down on his back. And then I saw that a couple of other boys had jumped into the corral and were dragging something out under the lower bar of the fence.

Pretty soon I found out that this they dragged out had been a good little rider named Bob Dennis; but he would never scratch broncs any more.

Whiskers Beck and Ben and I went over and stood looking at that big black horse kind of gloomy, the way a man looks at a horse that has just killed a man.

"Boy, boy," said Ben Cord, "I'd give anything I got to draw that pony in the contest!"

Whiskers said, very dull and flat—"What horse is that?"

"That's Pain Killer," I told him. "I know that horse. He bucked me down in three jumps at Cheyenne. Pain whirled and jumped to come down on me, but Bill Daly jumped his horse across me and rammed him. Pain reared up and struck Bill out of the saddle and broke his arm."

"Funny name for a horse," said Whiskers Beck.

"It's a joke," I explained to him. "The first man he killed was named Payne."

"You think that's a funny joke?" said Whiskers Beck.

I was feeling kind of sick, but I had always thought it was funny up to now, so I stuck to it.

"Sure, that's funny," I said.

Whiskers Beck started to say—"Well, I—" Then all of a sudden he grabbed hold of one of the bars of the fence, and stared inside at the big black as if he would jump through the fence and bite him.

I saw the knuckles of his hands turn white on the fence bar.

"Whiskers, what's the matter with you?"

"Gil," said Whiskers, "my eyes ain't so good as they was. Look at that horse for me. Look on the inside of his off gaskin—and tell me what you see."

"I see a half moon scar, like from a wire cut," I told him.

Whiskers Beck's voice was awful quiet, but still it kind of quavered.

"Gil," he said, "I know that horse! That's a Stillwater country horse."

"He belongs to the Helmholtz brothers now," I said.

"So I heard," Whiskers Beck mumbled

so I could hardly hear him. "Yeah, I heard that. Only I didn't realize—"

Whiskers Beck drummed on the bar of the fence for a minute with the side of his fist. Then all of a sudden he turned and he walked away.

"He's got a hate on those Helmholtz brothers," Ben said, "on account of Johnny."

Still I didn't see why old Whiskers should take it so hard just to find out that the Helmholtzes had a horse, they having more horses than Whiskers had whiskers, many times over; so I got the idea that Whiskers must be somewhat nuts. And I thought no more about it right then.

IT DIDN'T come back into my mind until midnight, when the bronc fighters came together at rodeo headquarters, in the blacksmith shop, to draw for the broncs we would ride next day. There were pretty near thirty riders entered this year, about a dozen from away, like me, and the rest cowboys from the big desert ranches around there. Old Whiskers Beck was there, and he seemed to know everybody; not only people around there but people from all over. And he had worked it so that he was going to be an assistant arena director, on no pay, as is often the case with these old boys everybody knows.

So now it worked out that Whiskers Beck was the *hombre* who went down the list and gave numbers to the broncs that were going to be rode, and made out the numbers on little slips of paper to throw in a hat. Leaning over his shoulder, I saw him give Pain Killer No. 13. When you go to a rodeo, take special notice of the horses numbered 7 and 11, and sometimes 13, because it is a kind of custom to give these special numbers to the worst broncs.

Riders are always anxious to get 7 or 11 in order to show their stuff in a hard ride, but sometimes they are not so crazy to get No. 13. Like in the case of Pain Killer, for instance.

Pain Killer finishing Bob Dennis had taken the starch out of some of the boys. These were good game boys, but they didn't look forward to being tromped on on purpose; and there was hardly anybody there who really had any idea he could cowboy this horse. So they were quiet, not mentioning his name much, though by this time his reputation had grown until he pretty near overshadowed the rest of the show.

Ben Cord now came in kind of tipsy, crazier than ever, and he started right off by telling everybody in a bashful, quiet tone of voice, hardly any louder than the whistle on a steam engine, that he sure as hell hoped he would draw Pain Killer—that was all *he* wanted out of this rodeo—and if ever he got hold of that horse he was sure going to ride the tail off him, and show Pain Killer he had met up with his boss.

Mostly the riders didn't pay any attention to him, having seen tall talk before. But, you know, I think Ben Cord really wanted to get that horse. I don't believe he ever doubted for a moment that he could ride that horse right down into the ground. Those of us who had seen him ride, we knew better. From what Ben had showed so far, he couldn't have rode Pain Killer the best day of his life.

We waited around for time to draw; and pretty soon Ben went out, looking for another drink, and it happened that right then Whiskers Beck called up the riders to make their draws.

That drawing wasn't like any other drawing you ever saw. Mostly, riders are anxious to see what they've got to ride on tomorrow; but this time, instead of trying to make out they weren't interested, the riders were trying to let on it wasn't their turn, and they didn't know the drawing had been called. And they were hanging back, just casual, not wanting to stick a hand in the hat and make the test. I believe the feeling was on everybody that Pain Killer, who had killed one boy today, was going to kill

another before the twenty-four hours were out. And you'd have thought there was a sidewinder in that hat.

I took a step forward, fixing to draw; and I'll be darned if that same superstitious feeling didn't come over me, and I stopped. I couldn't any more have gone up to stick my hand in that hat than if the devil had me by the hair. I rolled a cigaret, figuring to let just one number go by.

"We got to get going some way," Whiskers said. "You're all so backward, I'll draw for some of the riders that has stepped outside. I'll draw for Ben Cord."

He stuck his hand in the hatful of numbers.

I don't know how many there saw what I saw then. Sometimes I'm not dead sure I saw it myself. Only, it seemed to me that something was palmed in Whiskers Beck's hand that went into the hat, and as he drew his hand out again I suddenly knew that the number he had brought out had never been in that hat to begin with.

"Ben Cord draws Pain Killer!"

Right away you could feel the whole works kind of draw a breath and ease down. Death was not in that hat any more. How many of them knew it never had been in that hat? I don't know. But whoever knew, there was none who begrudged Ben Cord the Pain Killer horse. Ben had asked for the killer, and he had got him, and he was welcome to him from them all.

Pretty soon I drew, and got just an ordinary bucker; and I went on over to the dance hall and danced with a girl rider from down in the Great Bend country, three or four dances, and got in a fight with a calf roper who had figured to dance them dances himself, and I got disbarred from the dance floor for a little while.

So then I stood outside smoking, waiting for the bouncers to forget that I was a source of disturbance; and I was thinking about Pain Killer and the boy he had just killed, and wondering if Ben Cord might get by with just a lay-up in a hospital. And while I stood there wondering over these things, here came Whiskers Beck.

Old Whiskers was quiet and casual, but there was a gleam in his eye so that I knew for some reason he was on the warpath and going strong.

"Gil," he said, "you've got to side-ride me."

"All right, Whiskers," I said.

We went off and we sat on the tailboard of a horse truck.

"You know these Helmholtzes?" he began.

"Not personally," said I.

"You're lucky," he said. "They're crooked, and they're mean, and they're hard. This boy, Johnny Fraser, that Ben and me have been working for on the Tonto Rim, he's the whitest kid that ever stood up; yet they've got him tied in a sack. They're going to strip him clean as a steer horn, and they're going to take off him everything that Johnny's pa worked for and fought for all his life. If ever there was a shame in the West—"

"It won't be the first time the Helmholtzes have picked the bones of a good outfit," I told him.

"The kid has made a good game fight," Whiskers said. "And he's come so close to winning, the crack of a bull whip don't separate him from holding on to his own. But every friend he's got has had to help him, and they've helped him all they can. More than a hundred thousand dollars has gone pouring through this fight, and now I tell you —Gil, you wouldn't believe it. I can't hardly believe it myself. But if that boy could lay hands on just five thousand dollars more, it would see him through!"

I looked at Whiskers in the dark. There's men who go through all their lives getting nowhere, just playing easy-come, easy-go. But if one of these men takes a liking to you, he'll fight your fight right down to the last penny or last cartridge, doing for you what he

never would have done for himself.

"The Helmholtz brothers have papers on the key water holes of Johnny's range—one in particular," Whiskers said. "If Johnny could raise five thousand dollars more he could save that one hole, and it would be the turning point of the fight. But when he loses that hole the bankers will go out from under him like quicksand, and he's through. Just five thousand dollars, in a fight that's seen a hundred thousand gone."

Whiskers Beck sounded as if he could fight or cry, either one, at the drop of a hat. I never seen a dead loyal old man more tied into another fellow's fight.

"At the last minute before I come here," he told me now, "Johnny scraped together fifteen hundred dollars. I got him to let me take those fifteen hundred dollars, as a last chance, to see if I could win the five thousand with this little fast pony of mine. Well, as you know, the way things stand here there's no winning any five thousand on that horse."

"It sure looks bad," I said.

"But there's one bet I can make with this fifteen hundred. And adding to that a hundred of my own and a hundred that I borrowed, I've placed twelve hundred through different fellers—every cent bet with the Helmholtzes. Some of it I got at three-to-one, some of it at two-to-one, some even. Now I want you to take the other five hundred; and somehow fix it to bet it with the Helmholtzes, at any odds you can. And, by God, we'll make them Helmholtzes furnish the rope!"

"What is this bet?" I said.

"That Ben Cord will qualify on Pain Killer."

"You're crazy!"

He didn't seem to hear me.

"Ben Cord come and begged me to fix it so he would ride Pain. Every rider in the contest was praying that some such fix would be made. And when I talked to the judges they told me go ahead, work it if I could. Gil, I fixed that draw to throw Pain Killer to Ben Cord."

Well, I already knew that. I asked him:

"Does Ben know this? And about your bets?"

"He doesn't know anything about it. He asked for the horse, and he got him, and he's happy. God knows," said Whiskers, "if I was twenty years younger I'd have thrown it to myself. But—Ben will have to make the ride for me. And he'll make the ride."

I'VE never seen a rodeo without some kind of shenanigan; but as Old Whiskers told me about this one, a kind of cold chill ran down my back. It seemed like he was telling me he'd as good as killed Ben Cord.

Suddenly I realized that this old man had real guts, more guts than it ever would have taken to set out to make the ride himself. It's one thing to take your own life in your hands, and another thing to throw the job to some kid. Riders will always pretend they would rather see the other fellow take the chance any day; but anybody that believes them is a fool.

And on top of that—

"I'm betting every cent of Johnny's money," Whiskers said, "and all I can scrape together on my own, that Ben Cord will qualify on Pain."

For a minute I couldn't hardly believe him.

"Then," said I straight into his beard, "you're a damned old fool! You're going to look good, explaining to this kid boss of yours that Ben Cord is crippled or dead, and that you frittered away his money betting on the ride."

The night was cool, but Whiskers Beck mopped the perspiration off the top of his bald head.

"I know," he said. "This is a tough box for me, Gil. But it's the only chance in the world, here at the last minute, to save Johnny's layout."

"And a fat chance that is," I told him.

"I know Cord and I know the horse. And there's not a chance in a million that Ben comes through."

But now suddenly Whiskers Beck seemed to be sure of his ground.

"The boy will ride," he said. "He'll ride, and he'll ride slick!"

"For maybe three, four jumps," I said.

Whiskers Beck shut his mouth and did not come back at me, and now I saw that he had some idea up his sleeve. I waited, but it did not come out. And it took me quite a little work to find out just what Whiskers did have in mind. But finally he gave me the story, to get me to place the final bets.

"I picked that colt up off the range two years ago," he said, "this horse they call Pain Killer. He was three then. He was a hard colt to handle—impossible for most fellers, because he was one you couldn't force. But I took him gentle. Gil, I've been on the back of this horse, Pain Killer, without saddle or bridle!"

"You sure must be mixed up," I told him.

"He would have worked—for me," Whiskers insisted. He leaned close to me. "He'll work for me yet," he said.

"You figure—?"

"I can take the hell out of that horse just with my voice," he said. "I'm riding pickup tomorrow in that arena. I'll be at the chutes when Pain Killer is saddled. You'll see him take the saddle easy and steady for once, with just me growling at him through the bars. I'll be riding close as Ben comes out, as close as I can keep my horse to the bucker; and I'll be talking to him like I always talked to him back there when he would work for me and for no other man. I used to say, '*Come on, boy; come on, boy*—' just like that; and that steadied him any day in his life."

Whiskers Beck had one of these deep, kind of chesty voices when he sung out to a horse, the kind of voice some men have who can lift a horse over a fence, or hold him down, just by talking to him. This idea of his was something I had never heard of before, exactly; but as I listened to him I was actually beginning to wonder if there could possibly be anything in this.

"He'll buck," Whiskers was saying. "He'll buck honest, and hard; but the edge will be off him, and the killer will be out of him, and you'll see Ben Cord make a pretty ride."

I began thinking about a couple of other things I'd run into one place or another. I've seen more than one horse that would work for only one man. And I've seen buckers that couldn't really come unwound if you kept shouting their name. Those things gave a kind of color to what Whiskers Beck said, so that I saw that maybe there was one long distance chance that the old man might be right. Not enough of a chance, though, so that I wanted to be mixed up in his losing his kid boss's money.

"Whiskers," said I, "you can't do it. I won't lay your bet."

He looked at a big fat turnip watch he had, and it was so late that pretty soon it was going to be early, but the Helmholtzes and their like would be around for an hour yet.

"Come on," Whiskers said, "I'll show you I know what I'm doing."

We got hold of a little broke down flivver and run the mile out to the arena. There wasn't anybody around the bucking horse corrals, and we went over to where Pain Killer stood in that little small corral alone.

It was awful quiet there in the starlight; the calves for the roping had quit bawling and bedded down, and about all you could hear was sometimes a kind of shuffle of hoofs as some mean headed bronc laid his teeth into some other bronc that had drifted too close. Pain Killer was standing quiet, and in the dark he looked half again as big as he should, and two times blacker than the night. As we came up to the bars I could see his ears prick up against the sky, and he blew out a long, ugly sounding snort. That Pain Killer had a salt-

pickled heart, if ever a horse had. Whiskers Beck crawled through the bars.

Pain Killer stood still, watching him. He was one of those killers that stands quiet, never making a move, until suddenly he moves all at once. Whiskers did not go toward him, but just stood a little out from the fence, his thumbs hooked in his big belt.

"Boy," said Whiskers Beck, in that deep, hoarse talking voice, "what's got into you?"

And they stood looking at each other for maybe a minute. Pain Killer moved his feet and whoofed an uneasy breath.

You couldn't see Whiskers' grin there in the dark, but I could tell by his voice that he grinned.

"Come here, boy," Whiskers said. "You ain't forgotten me. You ain't forgot me at all. Come over here."

My hair kind of raised, like is likely to happen if you are watching something that runs crosswise of the regular way things happen, and you have the feeling that something is almighty wrong, without just knowing what. For now Pain Killer took a slow, kind of cautious step toward Whiskers Beck.

I SUPPOSE it took Whiskers four or five minutes to get that horse to come really across the corral to him. But little by little Pain Killer came. Those killers have their bad days and good days, and sometimes you can handle them for months without their making a pass at you; but to judge by what had already happened that day I figured Pain Killer was in one of his bad streaks. I was figuring that any minute he might whirl and lash out, or else come high-striking with his front feet and reaching for a hold with his teeth.

Pain Killer came clear up to where Whiskers could touch him, and Whiskers took him by the ear, kind of rough and easy going, and whopped him on the neck with his big horny hand. And for awhile he stood there talking to him, while Pain Killer stood quiet as a wooden horse and never made a move.

Finally Whiskers crawled back through the fence and Pain came to the fence and stood looking through the bars after him. I went over to the fence just for a test, and Pain snorted and whirled and went to the far side of the corral. I turned to Whiskers Beck.

"I'll place your bet," I said. "Maybe you know better what you're doing than I do, for all I know."

I took Whiskers Beck's money and bet it with Ron Helmholtz, getting two and a half to one that Ben would not qualify on Pain.

I was the third bronc rider out of the chute the next day, and I qualified all right, making an ordinary ride on an ordinary bucking horse. But hardly anybody around there noticed, I hope, how close I come to slipping a stirrup, just through not having my mind on my work. Everything about that rodeo seemed the same as dozens of other rodeos I had worked in—the layout the same, the stock the same and the people the same—but somehow there was something unnatural about the whole thing.

There was the flat twenty-acre arena, sending up little dusty heat waves in the sun; and there was the grandstand full of people and the double rows of cars parked all the way around the arena fence; and there was the tall chutes with the big broadside gates that the broncs come out of, and riders roosting around careless on the part of the chutes that was not being used; and the calves were bawling and a loud speaker was squawking up in the stand, and a rumbling noise came from the crowd whenever something happened—everything just like usual.

Yet somehow nothing seemed usual about it to me. Stronger than ever I had that superstitious feeling that Ben had met his come-uppance. The more I thought about it the surer I was that Ben could not ride Pain, and would not live to try it again if he was bucked down; and all that stood between Ben and a bloody smashing under Pain Kill-

er's hoofs was just a gamble on the voice of an old man.

It seemed like all day before Ben's number came up; but Pain Killer was thrown into the chute at last. I saw him come into the chute fighting, hating the close quarters. They had a bad time getting him headed into the chute at all, and when they got him in he stopped halfway between Gate No. 1 and Gate No. 2, and wouldn't be driven and wouldn't be led. Somebody laid a quirt across him to drive him up in, and he came up on his hind feet and whirled, trying to get at the man, and came crashing down in the bottom of the chute kicking four ways at once. They finally had to use a bull gad to ram him into place.

By this time Whiskers Beck, who had been filling in for a judge in the calf roping, got loose from his job and came loping across, and maybe he could have gotten Pain into the chute without so much row, but by this time he was gated in and ready to saddle.

Pain stood there making a low, ugly kind of groaning noise down in his chest. His eyes had gone as hard as glass, not scared or unhappy, or worried, but just plain hard and ready for fight. His ears were pricked forward, and he was waiting for the saddle now. And suddenly I knew that if they would change their minds and turn that horse back in the corral, Pain would be disappointed, he was so plumb eager now for a chance at his man.

A couple of the handlers were easing Ben's saddle down on to Pain Killer's back, and Pain stood steady; I saw him shuck his shoulders to settle the saddle into place. He knew the game! And now Whiskers Beck dropped off his pony and came to the side of the chute by Pain's head.

I heard Whiskers talking kind of low and deep to Pain, as he had talked to him the night before.

"Easy, boy. Take your time now, boy. Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

Pain turned quiet so suddenly that my hair raised again, seeing the way that old man's voice could work on that killer horse. A kind of marvel came over me as I thought for a minute that Whiskers Beck knew what he was doing, had known all the time, and could quiet that horse till he would maybe buck no more than a little calf.

Then suddenly I saw that something was wrong. Pain was not standing quiet and easy at all, but just as rigid as if he was made of stone. I spoke to Whiskers, holding my voice casual and low.

"Whiskers, look out. Take your hand off that gate and look out."

And before the words were out of my mouth Pain let go.

Pain's wind exploded in his throat in a kind of cough. He came on to his hind feet quick as a lion and twisted in the chute to smash out with both forefeet at where Whiskers stood. If Pain had caught Whiskers' hand with the edge of his hoofs, Whiskers would have lost his hand. As it was, the side of one of his pasterns caught Whiskers' hand against the board of the gate, and we found out afterward that right there two fingers broke.

Whiskers Beck turned gray. He didn't jump, but after a second he took a step back and looked at his hand, as if he couldn't believe his eyes. The saddle they were putting on was only half cinched and when this happened it slid back and to the side, pretty near under Pain's belly, such as would make any other bucking horse go wild, but Pain paid it no mind. The handlers cussed and reached down and worked the saddle up into place again.

Whiskers Beck stepped up to the gate again.

"Boy," he said, "what's got into you? You gone crazy, boy?"

I tell you it was like as if he dropped a match into powder. Pain squealed this time as he come up again, lashing out at Whiskers with everything he had, till you'd think that he would either break a leg or smash that heavy chute.

I had climbed up on the fence ten feet away, and the six-by-ten post I was sitting on shook as if you hit it with a ten-pound sledge.

AS THE dust cleared and Pain stood quiet again, Whiskers spoke to Pain once more, but his voice was kind of wondering now, and very scared.

"Boy," he said, "why, boy—"

This time Pain didn't blow up, but he measured the distance and rammed his head between the bars, trying to get at Whiskers with his teeth.

The handler who was trying to get the saddle on Pain stood up on the side of the chute and shoved his hat on to the back of his head, cussing.

"Get that old brush faced pelican away from there," he said, "or get somebody else to screw this saddle down! Don't you know no better than to stir up a horse a man is trying to cinch?"

Whiskers turned away and walked a little way along the fence, and kind of slid down the fence to sit in the dust. Looking at him, I knew what was in his mind. He knew now that his scheme had blown up in his face and worked out so that he had just about as good as killed Ben Cord.

I dropped off the fence to squat beside him.

"It's all right, Whiskers," I said. "You done the best you could."

"Good God," Whiskers said, so you could hardly hear him. "Good God in heaven!"

"He may ride him," I said.

"The man don't live," Whiskers said in a dead voice, "that can ride Pain the way he is today."

I opened my mouth to say something, but I shut it again, I was so dead sure that Whiskers Beck was right. Whiskers turned to me.

"Listen," he said, whispering. "Stop Ben—get hold of him before he climbs that chute! You've got to—"

"There's no use talking to Ben," I said.

"Talk to him, hell! Call him the worst names you can think of, and then bring up your right clear from the heel of your boot and knock him cold! It's the only—"

I jumped up, not waiting to hear the rest. I hadn't ever interfered with anybody's ride before, but all of a sudden I was willing to interfere now. I don't know if I would have tackled it on Ben's account alone. For though my hunch kept riding me that he was going to die, that's the bronc rider's choice when he asks for a horse, and he has the right to make it alone. But here was this old man who had studied it all out, not for his own sake but for somebody else; and if things went on for a minute more he was going to spend what was left of his life blaming himself, and never able to get out of his mind the picture of a thousand pounds of crazy squalling horse driving hoofs down into something bloody in the dust.

I was going to do what Whiskers wanted, and try to crack Ben down before he could ride.

But now I saw that I was too late. It only takes a second or two to jerk tight the cinch and make fast, and the rider slides into the saddle and his helper, straddling the chute, heaves upward with his back, trying to cut the bronc in two with the flank strap.

All that only takes a couple of seconds, and the quicker after that you come out of the chute the less likely you are to be down in the bottom of it with a thrashing horse. They had gone through those motions very fast, once Whiskers had turned away, and now I saw that Ben was in the saddle and the boy who had stood over him to heave upward on the bucking strap was already off the gate.

Ben shouted—

"Damn it, will you swing that gate?"

The loud speakers had already announced four or five times that Ben Cord was about to come out on Pain Killer, and there was a second or two of complete silence now, as the boy

handling the gate snatched loose the rope and swung the gate clear. That gate swung open right in my face, and I like to got stampeded over as that big black cyclone of a horse came out.

I made a move toward where Whiskers' horse had stood, its reins down to hold it, but Whiskers had already flipped the reins over its head and was vaulting into the saddle without using the stirrup. So I turned back to watch how many jumps poor Ben would ride in maybe the last ride of his life.

I had seen Pain buck before. I knew that horse. I knew both sides of him —top side and bottom side—for I had seen the one from the saddle, and the other from the ground, with his hoofs coming down on me in that second when Bill Daly crashed his horse into the killer and made him miss. And nobody knew better than I knew that this horse had everything.

He had the double pound that is caused by a horse sucking his back from under you just before he humps it again and hits the ground, so that instead of just the plain shock of jump and hit, it is as if he hauled off and struck upward at you with a thousand pounds. He had a sunfishing twist, and he could come down out of it so straight up on his forelegs that at least once in his life he had gone clean over in a somersault, smashing the rider under the cantle of the saddle so that he never walked again.

He could twist and turn on his side so low that it seemed your stirrup swept the ground, plumb careless of how he would come down if he fell. But most of all he had such a terrific crazy power to him as I have never felt in any horse; and once his rider was unbalanced, Pain never jumped back under him again. After that it was just a question of whether your pickup men could get in to ward him off in time as he whirled and came back, striking down.

I said I knew that horse. I mean I thought I knew him. For I never knew Pain or any other horse to turn on as Pain turned on now. Maybe it was the blood in his nose from having got his man the day before. Maybe it was the voice of Whiskers Beck somehow tangling up and working backward in the dizzy meanness that passed for Pain's brain. I know that Pain never fought like he did that day, and never did again.

On the first jump, as Pain came out of the chute, Ben's spurs swung high, raking him down the side of his neck, and Pain bawled and blew up. He took two long leaping jumps to gather speed, then went up in the air and came down with such a full hard stop, straight up on his forelegs, that he was able to make his next jump really backward. Pain whirled, leaning so deep on his side that I thought he was down, then again two more of the hardest backward jumps I ever saw.

And still Ben was riding him—not just staying with him, but raking him crazily from mane to saddle blanket on every jump. It seemed like to me that Ben was not using his legs to keep him on that bronc at all, but just somehow balancing in the seat of the saddle, swinging both stirrups wild and free as he scratched the horse. That is the test of a bronc rider—not how long he can stay, but how high he can scratch.

I swear, time and time again I saw daylight under Ben's spurs—daylight between his boots and the top of Pain's neck. Somehow, for no reason, Ben Cord was making the ride of his life, riding better than he knew how, better than he could possibly ride. Cowboys who had seen a thousand bronc rides were staring glassy eyed. Only the ignorant ones, who had only seen a few, maybe failed to realize that you could follow the broncs for a hundred years and maybe not see such a ride again.

The killer bawled and put everything he had—more than any horse has a right to have—in maybe five more short, high, sunfishing bucks, and still Ben's spurs swung high, though he had long ago passed the first three bucks where

you really have to scratch the neck to qualify. And now Pain Killer, crazy wild that the man still stayed, threw himself turning into the air and came down any old way, no feet on the ground. I thought for a second it was a somersault, but somehow he twisted and came on the side of his neck, then down on his side.

And there was Ben, clear of the stirrup that was smashed under the horse, standing over Pain Killer. And he was in the saddle again as the black horse sprang up.

And now at last the whistle blew. I don't know for sure, but I'll bet that whistle should have been blown long before, only the timekeeper had forgot where he was or what he was supposed to do, watching that ride. Whiskers Beck crowded in as Pain still went down the field in those crooked sunfishing jumps. Whiskers got an arm about Ben and dragged him clear of Pain Killer, and Ben squirmed up behind Whiskers on the other horse.

I stood there and rolled a cigaret; and it was only beginning to dawn on me that Ben had made the ride that Whiskers had bet he would make. What got into Ben, that he was able to do that? I don't know. He didn't know about the bet with the Helmholtz brothers, let alone anything about Whiskers' shenanigan to make it a possible ride. He didn't know anything about any of that. I don't believe as he rode he even realized that he was riding for prize money, but just rode for the love of riding a tough one, riding the tail right off of a killer horse.

And what do you suppose Ben said as they set him down at the chutes? That wild Indian, that crazy kid, he just said—

"What's the matter—ain't you got any *tough* horses here?"

He didn't know yet he had saved Johnny Fraser's brand.

I didn't see Whiskers Beck until that night, when our trails crossed while he and I both were hunting around town for another drink.

"Well, Whiskers," I said, "I guess you won your bet."

"Yes, I guess I won the bet."

"The only thing now is to get your money."

"I got the money," he said.

"And this saves Johnny's layout?"

"Well, I guess it as good as saves his layout."

"It sure will be a big moment for you," I said, "when you ride in there and break the news to Johnny that you've laid hands on the dough."

Whiskers Beck shook his head. Some code of his own sure had him in a stranglehold.

"Everything I did worked out wrong," he said. "What it amounted to, I threw away Johnny's money. And not only that, but I threw away Ben Cord's life. Yes, his life, you hear me? All the smart things I rigged up went to hell in a cloud of dust; and nothing would have been saved out of it, except for the hellfire riding of a wild, crazy, half Indian kid. Gil, I'm an old man and a washout, and this is too much for me."

"Just the same," I said, "you got plenty guts—more than me, more than Ben himself. And you'll find you've got a home for life, back in the Tonto!"

Whiskers shook his head again.

"I'm sending the money to Johnny."

"Say—you mean you aren't going back to—"

"I'm hitting the trail the opposite way," Whiskers said.

He turned and walked off into the dark, walking just as steady as if he had not downed enough whisky to kill two men; and I never saw him again.

A Story of Morocco

OFFICIAL HONOR

By GEORGE E HOLT

"YOU'LL do," snarled the big man, whirling upon his companion and abruptly dropping all pretense, "just exactly what I want, an' nothing else. Understand?" With the question he moved his right hand swiftly and a gun appeared in it. "Understand?" he repeated, scowling, towering over the young man who sat cross-legged upon a small Moorish rug.

The big man was so big that the ridgepole of the small A-tent of discolored brown canvas was little higher than his helmeted head; and his bulk was in proportion to his height, so that the ten-by-twelve shelter seemed full of him. He was, one might guess, a man of about forty, and a man who had seen things with those small, hard gray eyes under pale brows, and who had done unpleasant things with those great hairy hands. His nose was predatory; his mouth, which could be right pleasant on occasion, was now the straight line of determination.

The smaller and younger man cocked a scrutinizing dark eye up at the automatic pistol so surprisingly drawn on him, at the angry face of his companion, shrugged the shoulders beneath the Moorish *sulham* which he had thrown over his riding clothes against the cool night air, and answered quietly:

"Oh, hell, Taylor, drop the bad man stuff. Or go ahead and shoot. I ought to be shot for not guessing what you were."

He withdrew his unfrightened gaze from the face above him, reached over to a package of cigarets lying upon the mattress on which he sat, extracted one thoughtfully, lighted it and expelled the smoke through his nose. The man Tay-

lor stood scowling down upon him, pistol still in hand. He could have killed his fellow-traveler with one hand, or just by sitting down on him. But despite his smaller stature and the menace of the gun, Jerry Lane preserved an air which suggested boredom and impudence. Certainly the latter, as he carefully blew a smoke ring and grinned as it encircled the muzzle of the pistol three feet away.

But had one been able to see inside the tousled brown head, a different story would have been discovered. Jerry Lane was far from bored. Jerry Lane was angry and very frightened, and most damnably surprised at what the last five minutes of time had so unbelievably and startlingly revealed. The personal danger in which he found himself didn't bother him—except as it had to do with other things. Except as it had to do with this mess into which he had so blindly walked, with this big traveling companion who had just thrown off all pretense and revealed himself a criminal, a crook and a killer. And worse, at the moment, a man who was too ignorant of Morocco to believe in the danger which menaced the pair of them from the natives among whom they were now being virtually held prisoners.

"Damn your eyes!" Taylor swore. "Will you get up an' get things goin'? I refuse to stay here. You promised we'd make El-K'sar. An' here we're stuck not more than thirty miles from Tangier. Get up an' get goin'. Or else—" He waved the automatic.

"Or else," said Jerry Lane, "I suppose you'll shoot me with that little pistol, and then fold up your tent like the Arab and as silently steal away. What?" He grinned up at the big man. "No go, my lad. Right now you're like the boy on the burning deck. If the M'zoras take a notion to rush us—*adios*. And as for you goin' any farther tonight against their orders, through their picket lines—man, you wouldn't get fifty yards." Lane flipped the ashes from his cigaret. "I s'pose you're in such a hellish rush because—because somebody's after you in Tangier, or will be, pretty quick, eh? Also, I s'pose that your name's not Taylor and that letter of introduction you had to me from Consul Benson at Malaga was a fake. Also, that it was just my bad luck that I was starting out for El-K'sar when you arrived, and—"

"Cut it out, damn you!" snarled Taylor, and took a step forward. "Are you goin' to do what I tell you, or have I got to do what I did to your guard? Huh?"

Jerry Lane felt his muscles tighten. His spirit rebelled against this rotten situation. But he held himself in check. It wouldn't do to get himself shot, or beaten up and left to the tender mercies of the M'zora tribesmen. He was the American vice-consul; he had been played for a sucker by this fugitive American criminal: Taylor had knocked out his consular guard, Omar, and beaten a couple of muleteers; now he was intimidating the second highest official of the American Government in Morocco, trying to force him to aid in his getaway. No; it wouldn't do. If Taylor should kill him, Jerry Lane was quite aware that there was no place on earth to which the United States Government would not eventually follow Taylor and thereafter hang him. But he was personally affronted, as well as officially. And very much did he desire to take the big fellow back to Tangier and let him pay for his fun.

The situation in which Lane found himself would not have existed had it not been for two or three scoundrelly adventurers. Lane had learned about them when his small caravan had been stopped by angry natives at M'zora, and forbidden, by the unanimous voice of a score or more of armed brown men and twice that number of women and children, either to go ahead or turn back. In short, when they had been taken prisoners by the M'zoras.

Now, M'zora was a small and unim-

portant village near a road between Tangier and Fez. The village itself was a collection of small thatched huts on a hillside at a little distance and almost invisible from the road because of its protecting high wall of Barbary figs.

Near the village stood a huge stone monolith, thrice as high as a man, and perhaps thirty inches in diameter—the one remaining obelisk of what had once been a huge circle of them, as was shown by the broken stubs which were here and there left uncovered by drifting soil and the equally obscuring centuries. Pre-Roman these stone monuments were; Druidian, perhaps, like those at Stonehenge in England, and elsewhere. El-Utad—the Peg—the natives called the remaining obelisk.

Jerry Lane, when they had been stopped, had been able to gain a little information as to the reason for such an insult to an American official. He himself understood enough Arabic to catch the meaning of the angry words thrown by the M'zoras at himself and his consular guard, Omar. A week before three foreigners claiming to be consuls had come through the village with a small caravan and had requisitioned all available food for man and beast. They had not paid for it—except with bad words and blows. Ungratefulness, in the opinion of the natives, would have been all right—if they had been consuls. But they were not consuls; they were liars.

Once before a similar thing had occurred. And now, in the minds of the M'zoras, and with some reason, all men who claimed to be consuls were liars; all *nasrinis* were devils; and the tribesmen were determined to hold those foreigners who next came their way and from them to extract payment for what the others had stolen, or else to kill them as a warning to all other *rumis*. After this plain statement of intention, they had refused to talk; but their picket line was to be seen and there was an ominous vibration in the afternoon air.

ON TOP of this, Taylor had gone quite mad when informed that they'd have to make camp at the Peg. He had viciously struck down Omar when the guard had laid an official hand upon him as he attempted to strike a native; and then inside the tent, which had been erected by the muleteers despite his ravings, had occurred the next surprising scene.

"I don't think, Taylor," said Jerry, "that you'd better try shooting an American consul. You're monkeying with a buzz-saw, fellow." He seemed cool enough, but inside he seethed with resentment, not unmixed with fear—the fear he would have had of a mad dog. "If you think you'll be able to find a safe place in Morocco, where we can't find you— Holy smoke!"

He paused and stared up at Taylor curiously.

"Hmph! It *isn't* just a bank robbery or anything like that, eh? Because there's no extradition. Somebody's after you with a gun, eh? Somebody's not trying to arrest you, but to kill you." He saw the answer in Taylor's eyes, in the sudden clenching of the strong jaws. "Not so good, is it?" he went on, forcing himself to pose. "Another—ah—another murder on your hands wouldn't mean—"

"Shut up, you!" rasped Taylor. "And *get* up. Up off of that mattress. We're goin' on to El-K'sar if I have to shoot you and every damned native in the village. Now—" Suddenly he reached down, seized the smaller man by the djellab collar and jerked him to his feet.

White and breathing harshly, Lane faced him, his eyes blazing into eyes that were murderous. His right hand began a slow movement toward the holster beneath the djellab, but the folds of that long garment were in the way. Taylor poked the muzzle of his gun into Lane's breast; then, his eyes never leaving those of the vice-consul, he slid his hand under the djellab and got the revolver Lane carried there. He dropped it into his coat pocket, slipped his own gun into his

left hand and, before Lane could guess his intention, struck him full in the face, knocking him backward upon the mattress from which he had just pulled him.

For a moment Lane's mind went blank. Then he realized that he was again being jerked to his feet by the big man and that a voice was asking:

"Do you want some more of that? I'll kill you, damn you, if I have to! Don't forget that."

For a moment Lane stood swaying, weak with anger and pain. Then by one superhuman effort he got control of himself. Taylor had assaulted a consul. By all the gods in heaven and the devils in hell, Taylor would pay for that if he, Jerry Lane, had to lick his boots until the time came. Oddly, a native proverb flashed through his mind: "Kiss the dog upon his very snout until you have gained your will."

"All right, Taylor; all right," he assented. "But—"

"You're damned right it's all right," snarled Taylor. "Now we get goin'. Those natives—hell! I'm not afraid of 'em. I've got twenty shots, more or less, in my rifle and pistol—twenty shots that'll go where I want 'em to go, and that'll make these niggers plenty sick of their game. We go through, understand? We go through! Now come along."

He drove Lane ahead of him into the blazing sunlight. Outside the tent he stopped.

"Tell your men to strike this tent," he commanded. "And to get the mules packed."

Lane gave the necessary orders. But scarcely were they out of his mouth when Omar, the guard, came rushing up, a big bruise on his forehead showing where Taylor had struck with the pistol muzzle.

"Sidi," he cried. "Sidi Consul, it means death if we try to go. The M'zoras—"

"Shut up!" shouted Taylor, raising his pistol for another blow.

Omar fell silent, but his eyes looked at his master with fear and question; yes, and to Lane's sorrow, with surprised melancholy.

At Lane's commands two brown muleteers had seized hold of the tent ropes; others had led up the mules; still others had started lifting the traveling boxes which were carried in panniers, one on each side of a mule. Then all activity was brought to an abrupt stop—suspended instantaneously like a moving picture when the film sticks—by the sharp crack of a rifle.

One of the muleteers, tent rope in hand, howled with fright and clapped a brown hand to his ear. Another shot, which tore through the canvas. And then a tremendous shout as half a hundred M'zoras sprang surprisingly from a nearby gully and from behind bushes scattered about the scene, and rushed the camp.

There was no attempt at opposition save from the big Taylor, and he held out for only a moment against the hurricane which swept upon them. Lane had only time to shout to him to throw down the gun he held, and to spring toward the advancing natives among whom he recognized the kaid, or headman. He could not really believe that the kaid would draw down the vengeance of the sultan and of the foreign powers upon himself by permitting *rumis* to be killed. But he had no chance to reach the chief.

He heard Taylor's gun explode once—twice—thrice; saw two of the approaching M'zoras fall; realized that Taylor had probably signed a death warrant for them all.

Then the brown warriors surrounded them, smothered them.

Lane, an hour later, awakened to consciousness in a mud hut, saw an armed M'zora seated in the open doorway, realized that he had been knocked out and was now a prisoner. He sat up, feeling better than he had expected. There was a small bump on his head, but it hurt little.

"Tell me," he addressed the guard,

"what have you done with my men?"

"We have made them prisoners," replied the guard cheerfully.

"And the—the other *rumi?*"

"He, too, is a captive, praise be to Allah!"

"He is alive then," said Lane, more to himself than to his captor.

He was relieved at that news. But his relief was brief.

"But he will not be very long," said the guard, grinning.

"You mean he is injured? Dying?" The guard shook his shaven head.

"He is not injured. But he killed M'tub and Saïd, wherefore he must die."

"You mean you are going to kill him?" asked Lane, quite unnecessarily. "That will mean great trouble for the M'zora. The sultan's *harkas* will come and eat you up. And my own country will send warships to Tangier and soldiers to M'zora to make sure that you *are* eaten up."

"No doubt, no doubt," assented the guard phlegmatically. "Nevertheless the *rumi* dies first. One can not have bread without paying for it. However, as to the sultan's *harkas*, they have first to find us. This village becomes infested with Christians who steal our food and spit in our faces. Wherefore we shall leave it—for the *harkas* to occupy and the warships to shoot at. This is no longer a place for a decent Berber to live."

"So you're going to kill Taylor—the *rumi*—and move on, eh? And what are you going to do with me—the American consul?"

Before replying the guard spat at a wandering beetle. Then he grinned.

"We are going to send you back to Tangier—to warn others."

No more would he say, and perhaps half an hour passed in silence after that. Then the guard rose as the headman came to the hut, followed by three lusty brown fellows, one of whom led Lane's horse. Omar, Lane's *makhazni*, or consular soldier, was with them, looking very glum indeed.

"Now you go," said the guard, and this proved to be the case.

Paying no attention to his inquiries concerning Taylor, or to his threats, or to any other of his words, the M'zora headman forced him on to his horse and motioned him to ride northward. The brown warrior who held the horse's bridle started off, leading the animal. Omar's mule was urged into line, and the other natives followed behind.

Well, there was nothing in the world to do except make the best of it at the moment; he could not resist their driving him out of the village. Wherefore he commanded the M'zora to release his bridle and rode on quickly.

ABOUT a mile had been covered when they came to a big tree by the roadside, and here the M'zoras left him. Suddenly realizing that he and Omar rode alone, he saw that they had stopped and were now returning to their village.

He and Omar continued to ride on, until a twist in the road cut them off from the view of the natives. Here he drew to a halt, looked about him. At a little distance to the east he saw a grove of trees. Toward these he went, followed by Omar. Reaching them, he dismounted, led his horse within the cover and told Omar to do the same.

"But, sidi," protested the soldier, "let us—pardon, sidi—but let us make all haste to Tangier, therefrom to bring a *harka* which will eat those M'zora devils up in one bite, and thus redeem the honor which they have taken from us."

"No, Omar," said Lane, squatting on the ground beside a tree and getting out a smoke. "Not so. By the time we returned they would have killed the American sidi and departed for the high hills, where we should never find them. No."

"But that other American sidi, he is—is a fat pig. I beg your pardon, sidi, but that is the truth. Wherefore why not let them do as they will with him? I myself—" He fingered the bump on his forehead and scowled. "*Y'allah!*"

"You yourself would take pleasure in killing him, eh? Of course. So should I, my lad. Nevertheless, Allah has willed it otherwise. No, I do not run to Tangier. I remain here. I remain to rescue the other *rumi*, so that he may not be killed by the M'zoras."

"You—you remain to rescue him, sidi?" Omar looked at his master as if doubting his own ears. "The man who—pardon, sidi—the man who deprived you, the consul, of honor. Who—"

"Even that, Omar." Lane smiled, but it was an odd sort of grimace. "Even that. I mean to rescue him so that his own people may punish him as he deserves. Thereby I shall punish him myself, and thus redeem that official honor which worries you."

Omar, who was twenty years Lane's senior, rubbed his black beard and stared at his master. Two or three times he opened his lips as if about to speak, but each time he swallowed the unuttered words. And at last, admitting that his master's mental processes were too much for him, he merely saluted formally and said—

"I await my Lord's commands."

Lane nodded.

"I await darkness," he answered. "In an hour it will come. Sit you, Omar, and rest while you may."

It was somewhat more than an hour before he dared to begin his return to the village. Two hours before, having left Omar with the horse and mule at what he thought to be a safe distance—much against the will of Omar, who desired to accompany his master—he found himself creeping through the darkness along the high hedge of Barbary fig which encircled the village. He paused for a little while listening to the sounds beyond the hedge; but they were few, and apparently indicated that the M'zoras were settled down for the night. Not that they were yet asleep, but that the day's work was done. And that no execution of a *rumi* was pending.

It was quite possible, Lane knew, that they had already shot Taylor; but while he had been in the grove he had had his ears tuned for shots and had heard none.

While he was thinking thus, two men came along on the other side of the hedge talking about the *rumis*, but they did not mention Taylor specifically. A few minutes later several more talkers went by, and from a comment made by one of them Lane decided that Taylor still was alive. Thus relieved, he waited with more patience until the village beneath the stars should be asleep.

At last he arose and adjusted the brown djellab which he still wore over his khaki riding clothes. He pulled its hood up over his head, let its folds fall to conceal his face. The skin of his face was pale no longer, for he had colored it with a mild solution of iodine which he had remembered having in his baggage against chance injury. Also he had removed his riding boots and had donned Omar's white woolen stockings and yellow slippers. To the casual observer he would pass as a country Moor. His right hand reached under the djellab to the holster which Taylor had emptied of its gun. It was not empty now. It contained the brother to that pistol, which Lane had carried in a shoulder holster of which Taylor had not suspected the existence.

Getting through a hedge of Barbary fig is not the easiest or pleasantest way to spend a quarter of an hour. It can be done, however, and Lane did it.

At least his head and shoulders were beyond the hedge. He looked about and, as he had taken a careful view of the village when he had left it a few hours before, he now knew where he was. He was behind the kaid's house. And fifty feet to the right was the house where Taylor had been. That he knew, because there had been a guard there—still was, he suddenly perceived, as the starlight glittered upon a rifle barrel.

Cautiously he drew the rest of his body through the hedge, getting, at the very last inch, a sharp prod of a thorn in his heel. Then he sat motionless for a moment, considering the procedure

he had planned. Suddenly he became aware of the fact that he was not of that glorious, fearless stuff of which heroes are made. Became aware that he felt sickish, as he had felt once or twice in a ship at sea. Somehow this proposition looked not quite the same as it had from a longer distance. One man against an excited and unfamiliar village.

It looked like suicide. His disguise wouldn't deceive anybody. He was a fool.

Better let Taylor go; that swine deserved killing. Better go back to Tangier, as Omar had recommended. Yeah—and admit that he'd been made a sucker by Taylor, had stood for threat and manhandling and intimidation; had had his beard spat upon by the M'zoras, as it were; had let the natives insult him and beat him and throw him out of their miserable village like a dog.

He couldn't do that, he, Jerry Lane—an American consul! . . .

Jerry Lane was no violent nationalist, no flag waver, no applauder of the screaming eagle, but somehow there came into his mind now a picture of the stars and stripes waving over the American consulate in Tangier, and he began to curse himself for a coward. And as he cursed Jerry Lane beneath his breath, he moved forward toward the kaid's house.

At the corner of the house he rose slowly, stood erect, waited a moment—then turned the corner, went to the door, pushed it open and walked into the den of the chief lion of them all, the headman of the village.

There was a candle burning in a square tin lantern hanging from a rafter. Jerry looked quickly around the low room, hands inside his djellab. In the farther corner a man breathed deeply in his sleep.

Thank Allah that there were no women and children here to awake and yowl their heads off when things began to happen.

JERRY pulled his gun, closed the door gently and slid a small bolt which, judging from its rust, was not much used. He strode across the room to the sleeping man. But the noise of the bolt sliding home had broken his sleep. He turned suddenly now to face the intruder, scowling up at him, and his hand reached for a long knife hanging on the wall beside his pallet.

"What do you here?" the kaid growled, sleep-heavy eyes trying to recognize his visitor.

In answer, Jerry Lane poked the cocked pistol within a foot of his face.

For a moment the kaid's brown, bearded face stared up in dismay and unbelief. His eyes shifted toward the bolted door. Lane shook his head, as the glance came back to his own face.

"No good, sidi," he said. "I'd have time to shoot you a dozen times. Now get up."

"What do you want?" demanded the kaid, not moving.

"I want that other *rumi*," Lane told him. "And I want him quick. Get up—and no moves that I can't understand."

"If I let you have the other *nasrini*," said the kaid, "will you go away and let us alone?"

"I shall not. I shall go to Tangier and have your village wiped out. And if you don't behave yourself, I'll shoot you before I go. Get up."

He prodded the kaid with his toe.

"Very well, sidi; very well," assented the kaid. "You are a brave man, and your pistol speaks commands."

He sat up; he put a hand on the floor to raise himself—and then lunged forward, knocking Lane's feet out from under him, throwing the American to the earthen floor, piling on top of him, hands searching for his neck.

Jerry had been taken off guard. As he fell he tried to clutch the head of the kaid, dropped his pistol, and then the native had his hands upon his neck. Powerful hands they were, too, hardened by hard labor. They came around

Lane's neck like a garrote; he could not breathe. His own hands were like a child's in their efforts to pull aside those of the kaid. The bearded face grinned down at him, and then two such faces, and a third, and Lane knew that he could not remain conscious many moments more.

He ceased to struggle, ceased trying to breathe. The blood pounded in his eyes, in his head; his heart drummed madly. And then a memory came to him from an older day; he waited a tenth of a second to prepare himself. Then his right knee shot upward toward the back of the neck of the man astride of him; it caught him at the base of the skull, and with a grunt the kaid toppled slowly over, his hands slowly relinquishing that deadly pressure on Lane's throat. For several minutes they lay thus, the kaid unconscious, the American getting much needed oxygen into his blood. But while he waited Lane watched the native, and when his eyes opened at last it was to find his hands tied securely and the consul squatted beside him, gun in hand.

"Now, damn you, will you obey me?" demanded Lane when the kaid grinned up wickedly. "I'll bet you will."

He hauled the Moor to his feet, looked him in the eye, gave his orders.

"We are going to open the door and call that guard from the house where the other American is. When he gets here you will give him orders to bring the *rumi* here at once. I shall stand behind you, with this gun, as you speak to the guard. I know Arabic, so don't try to be smart. Now do as I have commanded."

He kept his pistol muzzle against the kaid's back as they went to the door. Lane opened it and the kaid called a name.

"*Aiwa, sidi, aiwa.* I am here," replied a voice, and a M'zora strode up, rifle in hand. "I was not asleep, sidi."

Lane jogged the kaid's memory with the pistol muzzle, and waited for the next words. He felt sudden consternation as they came from the kaid's lips, for they were not in Arabic; they were in a tongue which he did not know, which he guessed to be Shilha, the language of the Sus Berbers. Damn it! Had the old man tricked him again?

But the guard saluted and walked away, and the kaid turned to grin impudently into the American's face. He found there no answering grin. Instead, he saw that he was very near to death.

"I—I told him to bring the *rumi,*" said the kaid.

"Is that all you told him?" demanded Lane. The kaid's gaze evaded his. "Well—don't forget that if anything goes wrong, the M'zoras will need a new chief."

Now came the sound of footsteps again; the guard appeared leading Taylor, whose hands were tied, whose ankles were fastened together with a rope which forced him to walk mincingly. At the doorway he looked up into the faces of the kaid and the man he naturally mistook for another M'zora, and Lane saw fear in his eyes.

"What—what do you want now?" he asked.

The kaid motioned him inside the house, dismissed the guard with a single word—Arabic, Lane took note. The consul closed the door, but did not bolt it now. He spoke to Taylor, but his eyes were on the kaid's face, his gun in the kaid's back.

"Taylor," he said, and was amused at the surprise and bewilderment which showed on the big man's face. "Taylor, I'm Lane. I came back to get you. To keep these people from shooting you, as they intended. Now—"

The big man had been frightened. Left alone with the viciously angry M'zoras swarming about him, within an inch of death at their hands, his bluster and swashbuckling, which had passed with him for bravery, had melted like ice in a Summer sun, and the craven thing he was—that craven thing which had been able to shoot another Boston crook in the back—came

forth to the eyes of man.

"Lane! Lane!" he cried, and stared. "You—I see! You colored your face. You came back to save me. To save my life. By God, old man—"

"Oh, shut up," snapped Lane. "I didn't come back to get you because I love you. You're a dirty swine, and ordinarily I'd buy a gun for any man who'd shoot you. So don't get me wrong. I don't care a tinker's dam about you. I'm doing it because it's the duty of the United States Government to give you what you have coming. And because I'm the United States Government here at the moment.

"Now let's be on our way. You, Mr. Kaid, are going with us—for a little way. Oh, yes, you are. Don't argue." As he spoke he got the kaid's knife from the wall and cut the ropes which bound Taylor. "There we are. Now the play is this: The kaid leads you out, me behind him with my gun. With my gun, Kaid, get that? And it's going to go off at the slightest provocation. Remember that. Anyhow, you lead us out of your village. If any one approaches, send them away. If any one asks questions, you answer them and answer them right. Forward march!"

Taylor and the kaid stepped through the doorway. Lane followed them, the pistol covered by a fold of his djellab, but punching the kaid in the spine. They reached the gate without mishap. There the kaid stopped.

"Keep going! Keep going!" Lane commanded.

And then he saw why the kaid had paused; understood what had been said in the Shilha tongue to the guard. For half a dozen M'zoras, guns in hand, raced up to the kaid's house, threw open the door and tumbled into the dwelling, calling out the name of their chief.

"Another trick, eh?" Lane snarled. "Get going and keep going. Quick, or I shoot!"

He pushed the kaid onward with the pistol muzzle. A greater racket rose from inside the house.

"Christian dog!" bellowed the kaid. "Shoot and Allah curse you! Do you think a *nasrini* whelp— To me, men! To me!"

WITHOUT hesitation Lane let him have the weight of the pistol muzzle behind the ear. He struck hard. He didn't know whether it was hard enough to kill the man or not—and he didn't particularly care. The M'zoras were tumbling from the house now in answer to their chief's yell, looking about trying to ascertain whence it had come.

"Do some footwork, Taylor; do some footwork," muttered Lane, "if you want to live another five minutes. This way."

He raced off, Taylor at his heels. Behind them they heard the village shouting.

Their start saved them. When they reached Omar and the mounts the village was a volcano of noise, and shouts from different points of the compass told them that the search was now on outside the town.

"They'll have horses in a minute," gasped Lane, leaning against a tree, panting from the run.

"Hmph! Those dogs haven't got horses," grunted Omar. "Maybe one, two, three."

"Three are enough," replied Lane. "You, Taylor, climb that mule and ride. I'll take Omar up with me."

He watched Taylor get into saddle, take the reins from Omar. Then he mounted, called to Omar to join him. But the *maghazni* politely refused.

"I can run faster than that mule," he said. "Go, sidi; I follow."

They set forth, going swiftly, although it was true, as Omar had said, that he could go faster than the mule; and Lane found it necessary to restrain his horse to keep back with Taylor. Fortunately they were not discovered, although shouts gradually growing more distant told that the search was on in earnest. Omar expressed Lane's own thought.

"Those fellows think we are still around the village."

And so about midnight they mounted a hill whence the scattered lights of Tangier were visible, and there they paused to rest.

"Well, half an hour more and we're there," Lane said.

"Not me," said Taylor, surprisingly.

Suddenly perceptive of something which he had overlooked in the flurry of battle and flight, Lane whirled toward him.

"What's that?"

"If you think I'm going into Tangier with you, you're crazy," said Taylor. "Me, I leave you right here."

With a laugh he turned his mule and started off to the west.

For a moment, but only for a moment, Lane hesitated. Then he touched his horse with his heel and galloped up to the fleeing man. He reached out and seized Taylor by the arm.

"You're coming into Tangier with me, fellow," he said. "Get that."

His answer was the flash of the kaid's long knife through the air, the feel of a sudden fire on his left arm. He straightened up. Taylor jerked the knife back.

"Damn you!" he snarled. "I'd just as lief kill you as not, so come on."

Lane went, seeing red. At risk of his own life—for his official honor—he had torn this murderer out of the hands of death. He would keep him. Dead or alive, he would keep him. Even though he himself died in the keeping. And so, without the slightest memory of the fact that he was a foot shorter and a hundred pounds lighter than Taylor, Jerry Lane hurled himself from his horse, leaped up at the big fellow, took another lunge of the long knife between arm and ribs and dragged the big one from his mule. They hit the dust together, Taylor's arms about Lane.

"Now I finish him, sidi," Lane heard a voice say, and became aware that Omar had come up, that he was holding a knife in his hand.

"Go away! Go away! Don't you dare touch him!" Lane cried.

He saw Omar back away, heard him grunt something disrespectful.

Taylor's big hand was creeping up his back now, toward the neck. The other held the knife, but he, Lane, was lying upon that hand. His own right hand, which held the pistol, was gripped by Taylor's left arm against his side as if in a vise. The big hand crept closer to his neck. But Lane knew now that he had one chance, and one chance only. He must free his right hand. He must take Taylor's attention from it for a moment, then put everything into a quick pull.

He sensed that for a flash Taylor was resting. And so, with lightning-like concentration upon his own right arm, he jerked it away from the clamp which held it, putting into the motion all the strength he had.

The arm came free. In the motion which released it Lane raised the pistol, brought it down upon Taylor's head. The big man grunted. His hold relaxed. Lane got to his feet.

"Tie that fellow up on the mule."

Omar obeyed swiftly, joyfully.

"Now come on," said Lane, remounting his horse.

He was quite content, in spite of a nasty wound in the arm, which he had bound up with a piece of Omar's turban cloth. The big swashbuckler who called himself Taylor couldn't be extradited for the murder he had committed in Boston, but for attempted killing of an American consul he could be locked up in Morocco for a long, long time. There'd be a lot of new presidents in Washington, D. C., before Mr. Taylor —or whoever he was—would again see the outside of a jail.

As they rode into the city, Omar kept muttering to himself. Muttering things which would have surprised Lane had he understood them. But they might also have embarrassed him. For Omar was very proud of his master, and very happy because the sidi consul had vindicated his official honor.

The RED TRAPS

By HUGH PENDEXTER

CHAPTER I

THE SCOUT

IT WAS war to the knife, to the ax, to the torch in the valleys of the Mohawk and the Schoharie.

Those who had not come off these two rivers believed it was but a question of days before the Senecas came burning and scalping in retaliation for the destruction of their villages and crops by General Sullivan a year back. Nor had three years sufficed to blow away the powder smoke of Oriskany, the bloodiest battle of the Revolution.

Yet, strangely enough, the population along the frontiers persistently increased, people moving in to take the place of those slain or made captives. It was that land hunger which no suffering could stop from expressing itself.

Beginning a Novel of the American Revolution

Where one family fled in panic to Albany town, a dozen remained and risked worse than death for the sake of harvesting a poor crop. And it was on this grain, thus perilously raised, that the American Army often depended.

The parents of Joseph Budd, living a few miles west of Weiser's Dorf, commonly called the Middle Fort, had come off their clearing. The son, used to the forest from his earliest recollections, accompanied his father and mother as far as Fort Hunter at the junction of the Schoharie and the Mohawk, and tarried there after they had joined the trailing line of fugitives traveling eastward. His business was with Major Wyndert Wemple, the commandant, who told him—

"I knew a fine, upstanding young fellow of your kidney could not be frightened by a parcel of Brant's savages and the white scum under Sir John Johnson."

"It's a choice of fighting on our frontiers, or enlisting."

The officer smiled approvingly and inquired—

"Happen you know Atel Grankin?"

"I know him and respect him highly, sir. He and his stepdaughter live within two miles of the river and within half a mile of our cabin. A very grave, very religious man."

"Exactly," agreed the commandant. "I never encountered a man more grimly in earnest."

He wondered whether the young man was blushing because of the girl, or from the dull warmth of the early Autumn sun. Through the open windows one could see that the whole north country was flamboyant with the rich colors left by that master artist, the frost.

Young Budd further explained—

"I'll go where I can serve best, but I know I'm better scouting the forests than in charging across an open country with a bayonet."

"And scouting is vastly important work for the Schoharie men to do," said the commandant. "I have a letter here which Grankin sent to the Albany Committee of Safety in reply to one he received from those gentlemen."

"And I'll vouch for the reliability of its contents, sir," Budd promptly said.

"Good! I'm glad to hear that, although the committee has appreciated the worth of Grankin's secret reports for some time. But this letter concerns you, young man." There was a twinkle in Wemple's eyes as he observed Budd's embarrassment. "He vouches for your keenness and ability to go where very few forest runners can go and return. In fact, he recommends you for a very important piece of business."

The young man's heavy tan could not conceal his heightened color. He diffidently suggested—

"He may be prejudiced in my favor, sir, from suspecting I hope to marry his stepdaughter."

"He does not impress me as being a man who would be influenced by any of the gentler emotions," dryly said Wemple. "The one time I talked with him he was much for smiting and cutting off, and such-like pieces of violent action."

Eager to change the subject, Budd said:

"I've ranged far ever since we heard that Brant and old Johnson had combined forces to raid the poor people who remain on their farms and clearings. No savages as yet are within striking distance of our river. You wish me to make a scout to the west?"

Wemple hesitated, then picked up an official communication.

"This is very confidential. It treats of several matters which need investigation. The Albany committee is informed that stores of powder are concealed somewhere along the Schoharie, to be picked up by Johnson and Brant when they strike the valley. No one knows the name of their informant except certain members of the committee."

Budd fretted his brows and said:

"I never thought of that. They would need a supply of powder beyond what they could bring with them. I've never heard it suggested in our valley, however; and there's but one place where it could be securely hidden: on or at the base of Onistagrawa Mountain. In all Vromansland there's no more likely hiding place for powder or other stores."

"It is important and should be investigated. But there is a matter of even more importance. You understand something about this country's sorry plight because of the currency?"

"It's commonly talked," said Budd. "The officers at Weiser's Dorf have said in my hearing that our Army has not been paid for five months. That a major-general's pay won't hire an express rider, nor will a colonel's pay buy oats for his horse!"

He hesitated, slightly embarrassed, and Wemple promptly added:

"And a major's compensation is just as worthless, while a captain's pay won't buy a pair of shoes. Four months' pay of a private soldier won't be accepted for a bushel of wheat. The mutiny of two Connecticut regiments was one result of our worthless paper money. Perhaps you do not know that that matter gave General Washington more concern than anything else that has happened. The revolt of the Pennsylvania line was even more serious. The pay of those poor men, when they received any, was worthless.

"I'm telling you this so you will understand the importance of the business before you undertake it. And Grankin speaks highly of your intelligence. Our Congress committed a great error in making paper money legal tender. Gold and silver at once went into hiding. The continuing depreciation is abnormal and has ruinously deranged the price of anything we try to buy. To make a thoroughly bad business worse, the States are attempting to circulate an unlimited currency of their own . . . And our Congress has not even the power to lay direct taxes. Now, if all this were not disastrous enough, the enemy is flooding the land with counterfeit bills."

"I've heard talk about that, sir."

"Then this will be another angle of your job. We can not call back the worthless currency lawfully issued, but it may be possible to discover just where, and by whom, in this State is the vast amount of bogus money being poured into a stream already polluted. You will be doing your country a rare service if you can uncover the source of the counterfeit trash."

"I'll try my best, sir. Either the Tories are slyly printing the stuff, or it's being sent here from Canada by the Johnsons and Brant."

"We believe that much of it comes from Canada, and yet there's a strong suspicion that much of it is originating somewhere in this State."

"May I ask what's back of that suspicion, sir?"

"A Frenchman, known as Old Raoul; a ginseng trader before the war came."

"Why, sir, I know him!" exclaimed Budd. "A very pleasant old man. He's lived much with the Iroquois. I saw him but a month ago while out on a scout with Tim Murphy."

"Aye? Grankin believes he is the man."

The vivacity died from Budd's face. Then his mouth became grim.

"Then I'll get him, sir. It'll be a hard task. It'll hurt most mortal. But if he is guilty—"

"He's more dangerous than Brant with all his Mohawks; Cornplanter with all his Senecas; Johnson with his blue

eyed Indians," broke in Wemple. "But you won't have to prove him guilty. Fetch him in here for me to examine. He's old and can't give you much trouble.

"Now, this is the way that I see this job. Here's a map. Say you scout toward the Susquehanna and learn if Brant and Johnson have left their base at Unadilla. On the way there and back you can look for Old Raoul. And on the way back you can scout Onistagrawa Mountain and hunt for the powder."

"Isn't there any other counterfeiter suspect besides the Frenchman?" hopefully asked Budd.

Wemple threw up his hand.

"No. There was Colliger, a quarter-blood. He has a fine manor house five miles from the Becket farm at the foot of Onistagrawa"—the commandant indicated a spot on the map. "He's well educated. Doesn't mix much with people. He has lived several years in England. The Albany committee found him sound. He has sent quite a lot of grain and other supplies to our Army. Have you ever heard mention made of the Red House among the settlers on your river?"

Budd's eyes opened wide. He nodded his head.

"Yes. But nothing definite. It's like a fairy story—a red house in the wilderness. No one knows who built it, who lives in it or where it is. It's just some of that foolish talk that gets started with no one ever really knowing who set it a-going."

"A crazy man was brought in here. He died in this room without recovering his reason. A horse trader from Corbus Kill. He babbled about a red house and the devil. He had been over on the East Branch of the Susquehanna. Some hunters found him wandering about in the woods. Something drove him crazy. He died of that fright. It's rather loading you up, but keep the Red house in mind when out scouting in that direction."

THIS ended the interview. Budd mounted his horse and rode south, his mind busy with the four-fold nature of his task. Gunpowder, bogus currency, location of the enemy and the mythical Red House in the wilderness. It seemed years that he had been depressed by the horrid clamors of war and the desperate situation of his friends. The one ray of happiness was the Eckson maid, and the thought of her permitted him to wrench his mind from dark misgivings and take note of the perfect Autumn.

When he came to the Lower Fort and was nearing the bridge over Foxes' Creek, where the road turned aside to take one to Albany town, his faculties became objective as he spied a familiar figure—that of Big Henry, a Mohawk halfbreed, whom he had met more than once in times of peace when he was a welcome guest in any of the Mohawk villages. Big Henry was exhibiting a new warclub to a wayside smith and a few loungers. As Budd reined in and gave him greetings, the breed eyed him sullenly and said:

"I'll wrestle you, Budd. I'll put my new club against a dollar in hard money that I can throw you."

The smith, behind the breed, shook his head in warning. Budd stared at his old acquaintance of the days when one could roam among the Indians and encounter only kindness and unstinted hospitality. He shook his head.

"No, Henry. I don't feel like wrestling now."

The breed came closer, his eyes glittering, his breath odorous with rum. He said:

"You wrestle, or I'll pull you from that horse. You're a damn coward!"

Budd reluctantly slipped to the ground and stepped to one side. Big Henry threw down the club and demanded that a dollar be placed beside it. The club was a work of barbaric art, and Budd knew its owner believed it possessed medicine qualities. He threw down some Continental script,

but the breed sneered.

"No good. My club is a good club. That money is damn money."

"It's all I have until we've whipped Johnson and Brant and brought peace to the valley," said Budd.

With the screech of a tree-cat the breed flew at him. The two crashed and, by the simple process of allowing the breed to throw himself, Budd had his shoulders pinned to the ground almost before the onlookers could realize a contest was being waged. Rising like a released spring, the victor picked up the worthless currency and club, and warned:

"We'll wrestle no more, Henry. Keep away from me or I shall hurt your thick head."

The breed glared at him malignantly for a moment, his hand hovering over the short knife in his belt. Then he glanced at the silent spectators, and he was quick to note the heavy hammer in the hand of the smith. Without a word he walked away. The smith warned:

"You've put a bad man on your trail, Budd. He's taking to the woods and is bound up the river. Watch out for him."

"There are others far more dangerous than he to watch out for," gloomily replied Budd as he mounted to continue his journey.

He was on the alert, but saw nothing of his enemy. When within a mile of the river fort he swung aside from the beaten path and followed a trail into fairy land. Yellow lights filtered through the multi-colored forest crown. He fancied that Mother Nature for a brief moment had ceased from labor to play the artist. There was a poignant sadness in all this seasonal beauty, and melancholy was heavy upon the young traveler as he made for the Grankin cabin. He found smoke issuing from the chimney and, as he approached, the door flew open and Grankin came hurriedly forth to greet him.

"Where's Mistress Betsy?" Budd asked as he slipped to the ground.

"At the fort."

"Thank God! And you should be there, sir."

"No savages are near. What news do you fetch?"

"I've come from Fort Hunter. I was shown the letter you were so kind to send. It was more than neighborly of you, sir."

"It's your just dessert, friend Joseph. Get after that Frenchman and squash him."

As he spoke he raised his bony hands and slowly contracted the long, strong fingers. His heavy face became grim and terrible of expression. Major Wemple put it correctly when he said Grankin was a zealot. His type never would countenance halfway measures.

"It's for my betters to pass sentence," Budd reminded.

"Such dilly-dallying is weakness, Joseph. A poisonous snake should be killed at sight. Crush him, even as Moses fell upon the Amorites and overthrew them. Let him be spewed into outer darkness even as Sihon and his evil brood were driven among the Philistines."

Grankin's powerful hands worked convulsively as he spoke, and his deep-set eyes under their jutting brows seemed to take on the quality of phosphorescence.

Budd had witnessed such displays of emotion before when Grankin was aroused; for the man ever was of somber mind and much given to brooding. With a slight jerk of his head, as if to change the train of thought he had been following, Grankin became objective and asked—

"What else passed between you and Major Wemple?"

It was on Budd's tongue to give the substance of his interview, but he recalled his commandant's orders.

"It was about him, whom I mustn't name, that we talked," he answered.

"Aye. I know, I know. But already I have indicated him," mumbled Grankin. "But a closed mouth never be-

trayed anything. Be brave, be tenacious, be merciless. There is no code for you to follow any more than if you were hunting a rattlesnake. 'They shall be plucked forth, root and branch' . . . You ride to the fort?"

"After a visit to our cabin."

"Then I shall be there ahead of you."

"Please make my most dutiful respects to Mistress Betsy."

"Betsy? Yes. Of course . . . And on that day of retribution they shall know the full price to be paid."

Grankin was still talking under his breath as he turned and entered his cabin.

Budd was used to his moods, yet the effect of depression never lessened. The man seemed to possess such an inexorable tenacity in all he undertook. It was unusual that any woman could find him acceptable as a mate in face of his gloomy moods.

Hitching his horse to a sapling, Budd entered the path leading to his cabin. He knew no Indians or Tories were near, yet he stole furtively up a sun-kissed slope in an opening and paused not to feast on the wild grapes, ripened for his enjoyment. By instinct he "froze" behind a fire crowned maple as the squirrels ahead set up a clamorous scolding. He regretted he was armed only with a knife, although until he had talked with Wemple he had not sensed the need of a gun. He waited, believing the squirrels were scolding a tree-cat. As he waited for the angry chatter to cease he discovered a figure at the far end of the slot through the timber.

He was thrilled at first, believing he was in for a fight with an escaped slave, as a Hercules in strength and a devil in ferocity had recently fled from the Upper Fort presumably to join the Iroquois. But as the figure drew nearer the man was revealed to be white and slight of build. The next moment he was nonplused on recognizing him to be the man he was to seek, old Raoul, the ginseng trader. Not having anticipated such an early meeting, the situation disturbed him. When the old Frenchman was quite close, Budd stepped from cover. The trader, white of hair without recourse to powder, halted and greeted:

"*Bon jour, M'sieu Budd.* You do good to walk with a light foot."

"And you are on your way to the Middle Fort and we can walk together," said Budd, and he slowly advanced.

"No, no. Your commandant, Wolsey, is a coward. I will not be shut in with the likes of him."

Budd was greatly embarrassed. It was difficult for him to practise finesse. He was driven to say bluntly—

"It's necessary you go with me, M'sieu Raoul."

The trader darted him a sharp glance, then halted and broke off the red fruit of a sumac and cocked his head to one side and admired it. Then he softly asked:

"A necessity? But why?"

Budd was in a quandary. His embarrassment doubled. He was not fitted for subtle work. Deceit was abhorrent to him. He bluntly replied—

"You must go with me to one who wishes to talk with you."

"Must? What a queer word to one who is as free as those gossiping squirrels! M'sieu Budd, it is not a relish to be talked to, or at, in that tone. But you had better go at once to the fort as your cabin has had a caller."

Budd had known the old man for years, and his duty was hard. He advanced, saying:

"You must go with me, M'sieu. I do not like this task, but it must be finished."

With incredible quickness the trader plucked a pistol from the back of his belt and retreated rapidly to a thick cover of cherry bushes, and coldly warned—

"Keep back!"

Budd hated the nature of his task, but not its possible perils. Without even drawing his sheath knife, he advanced. With a muttered imprecation the trader leaped into the bush growth, and, although Budd believed he must be at his

heels, he failed to glimpse him again. He scouted the tract until the shadows thickened, then admitted defeat.

He returned to his original errand, reconnoitered his cabin, and found the door open. He scouted entirely around the structure and, after seeing a hedgehog leisurely come forth, he burst from cover and, with drawn knife, leaped through the doorway. Nothing had been disturbed, except where the hedgehog had gnawed the salt box; but Big Henry had been there. A warclub, hastily fashioned, was in the middle of the floor. Budd tossed it into the fireplace.

CHAPTER II

AIRESKOI GOES HUNGRY

WHEN Budd arrived at the Middle Fort, as Weiser's Dorf, or farm, was now called, a sentry informed him that Major Wolsey wished to see him at once. He hastened to Johannes Beck's stone house inside the palisade, and found Wolsey nervously pacing the floor of the kitchen, haggard of face. In a corner sat Colonel Vroman, stolidly smoking a pipe. Wolsey came to a halt and stared at Budd.

"You've been absent from this post when every man is needed. What the devil do you mean by such behavior?"

"But I told you about the message from Major Wemple and his request I see him at Fort Hunter. You did not object to my going, sir."

"Well, well! You've been and returned. What did he say? Is he sending us reenforcements?"

"He did not mention reenforcements, sir. I assume he believes we have enough men."

"Damn your assumptions! What did he want of you?" excitedly demanded Wolsey.

"That this post be held at all costs, sir. He calls it the headquarters, being in position to support either the Upper Fort—"

"Support a post five miles up the river?" shrilly interrupted Wolsey. "My God! What's he thinking of? What did he want of you?"

"To go on a scout and see if I can locate any of the enemy."

"Depriving me of a rifleman! Young Spencer is still out with a scout band. Tim Murphy, Bloom and Curtin are out. How many more must go and thereby weaken this post? Curse such a mad business!"

"Budd must do his duty," slowly said Colonel Vroman.

"What his boy's judgment calls duty," bitterly decried Wolsey. "A crazy notion for him to go out and get lost, or killed, or come running back with those devils at his heels. Budd, you stay here."

Colonel Vroman slowly removed his big pipe and gently asked Budd—

"Major Wemple said for you to go out?"

Budd bowed his head.

"So. Mynheer Wolsey, he must go out."

"But, Colonel, this post is so weak—"

"So weak that the devils can take it. Or so strong one man gone won't hurt much. He must go out."

Wolsey slumped down in a chair and buried his face in his hands. He was no man for frontier duty. Colonel Vroman was the type to hold a dangerous post. Old Herkimer had set the example for his race for all time when, wounded, he smoked his pipe and directed the unparalleled fighting at Oriskany. Wolsey's appointment as commander was a great blunder, and there was no loyal American along the Schoharie who did not bitterly resent his coming.

Budd looked after his horse and oiled and polished his double barreled rifle which had the accuracy of the single barreled Deckard favored by men who were holding the Kentucky country. It was a duplicate of the weapon Tim Murphy had used in shooting General Fraser at the battle of Saratoga. The barrels, one over the other, were bored through the same piece of metal, and pivoted on a central axis. There was one lock for

the two barrels, but each had its own sight, and the lower, almost instantly, could become the upper. That Budd lavished much attention on this arm was as characteristic as it was for a trooper to look first to the needs of his horse.

Finishing with the gun, he next sought the Eckson maid and called her away from the women and walked with her about the enclosure. She was uneasy because of his reticence concerning the Fort Hunter visit.

"Just some regular work a man must attend to, Betsy. I saw your stepfather in the woods."

"This war will drive him crazy, I fear."

"He has very strong emotions in certain directions."

"He is never halfway," she sighed. "He goes the full distance for or against little or big things. But you can stay here now, can't you?"

"Not if I do my duty."

The girl had her mother's soft brown eyes and was most winsome of figure. She scarcely could remember her own father, and life with Grankin had accustomed her to believing the ways of the male were along inevitable lines.

"May it please God to send us peace sometime before we both get old and gray," she said sadly.

"Why, we have this war almost won, sweetheart," Budd told her with forced optimism. "Just a question of holding out a bit longer. The lobster-backs haven't much fight left. Then we'll make a clearing and just live."

Betsy became transformed for the moment. Seizing his arm with both hands, she stared up in his face and whispered:

"To just live! Think of it! To go for water without fearing the Indians. To leave a door open. To sleep sound of nights. Oh, my dear, my dear! You must do your duty even if others shirk. God give us patience. God give us peace."

He knew she was bidding him goodby, then and there, rather than to go through the ordeal more openly. She asked nothing about his plans, and he was thankful for that much. But their parting steeled him against all dangers, all fears, and never again would he think and act as a youth.

Budd quit the fort after she had returned to join the women refugees. With thin biscuits, baked almost to the hardness of flint, and a quantity of smoked meat, as tough as the bread was hard, stowed away in the deep pockets of his hunting shirt, he crossed the river.

AS HE plunged into the painted forest and raced toward the sunset he kept on the alert for Big Henry, who he believed must be ahead of him. His program called for the elimination of the breed.

Never had he seen the gentle slopes in the openings more beautiful than now. Contrasted to it was the horrible ferocity of war. But even in his hatred of it all he could not ignore the pathos of the Five Nations at last divided, with the Senecas, Mohawks and some of the Onondagas serving King George, while the Oneidas and Tuscaroras were actively engaged on the side of America, or at the worst remaining neutral. The roof of the Long House was broken and its glory could never return. To one who had often been in the red villages in the gracious times of peace, this dissolution of a powerful people was tragic.

Doubtless Budd hastened along the more rapidly because of his belief that three superlative scouts were ahead of him. Yet he carried a heavy burden through the twilight in addition to his arms and rations. There was a wealth of imported ghost lore and demonology along every frontier. England's laws were Colonial laws, and ordained the death penalty for werwolves. Dwellers in almost every isolated cabin would shiver while awake and dream when asleep of fearsome things and unnatural forces not of earth. Those living, as

Budd had, close to the Iroquois towns, knew by heart the red beliefs in cannibalistic ghosts, and often heard of skeletons who disported themselves at midnight in many a gem of a lake. Demoniac forces were at work, if the full heritage of the frontier was to be accepted by those living in a period when laws against witchcraft were enforced. And Budd unconsciously had absorbed some of the fearsome lore.

But the persistent hooting of an owl behind him in the east, and seemingly answered by similar calls in the north, permitted the scout to wash the supernatural from his mind. Human agency was busily signaling to human agency the fact of his departure. His thoughts turned to Old Raoul and to Big Henry as being the possible purveyors of the news. He carefully selected his couch just as the twilight was fading. He spent the dark hours in short naps, his acutely trained senses assuring him that he was safe for the time being on each occasion of wakefulness.

The second night, after a day of no alarms, he slept beneath the huge bole of a fallen tree. His progress was slow the third day out, and he watched his back trail as apprehensively as he looked ahead. The third night he enjoyed a soft bed of deep moss beneath an overhanging ledge. With the first light he was up and was lying flat on top of the ledge. He spied on the country while munching hard bread and tough meat. He had traveled through an empty land and had glimpsed no human beings. The few isolated cabins he came upon had been abandoned in haste. Late each afternoon the same uneasiness had enveloped him; the sense of being followed.

It was the petulant complaining of the squirrels that gave him a possible clue to the persistent uneasiness. Below him, through an opening in the trees, he could glimpse a few rods of the narrow rut which from ancient times had been the red path between the East Branch of the Susquehanna and the Schoharie. Into this opening loped the bowed figure of a man. When about to leave Budd's field of vision the man turned and looked back, holding his head high. There was no mistaking the huge bulk. It was Big Henry.

Budd drew a bead and was about to pull the trigger when there appeared another Mohawk. Budd dropped his rifle on the moss, so that the early sunlight might not reflect from the barrel and betray him. He was well acquainted with many Mohawks from boyhood, but he did not recognize the second man. The latter turned his body, and the scout believed he identified the painted figure on the bronze breast as being that worn by a member of the Wolf clan, which with the clan of the Turtle formed a brotherhood.

Had the section of the open path been longer, he would have used his two barrels on the couple. Fortunately he had not a fit chance to do this, for a third warrior now loped into view. He was more savage in mien than his companions, and Budd put him down for a Seneca.

Never had the Schoharie scout flattened out so thin and motionless as he did when this third savage, weirdly painted with red and blue bands across his face and neck, halted and commenced swinging his head about, his fierce gaze riddling every patch of cover. He looked like some demon peering through a colored grating. He was very suspicious of his surroundings, although his companions seemed to assume they had the world to themselves. But the Senecas ever were as suspicious as wild animals in such matters. Less given to visiting white towns, because of their isolation at the Western Door, they could not resist sniffing and spying when in a new locale. And this even in times of peace.

Budd was woodsman enough to remain motionless after they had disappeared in a westerly direction. This precaution saved him a fight against great odds, if not immediate death, as within a few minutes they were under

the west side of the ledge. They began talking in low tones. Budd easily followed what was said in the Mohawk tongue by Big Henry. The full-blood's talk he could not catch, as he spoke barely above a whisper. But he did several times hear the word "Aireskoi". He naturally deduced they were discussing him and were planning, if they caught him, to sacrifice him with horrible rites to that monster god, "the Master of War".

Had they walked around to the east side of the ledge they surely would have discovered where he had slept, and where he had scrambled up the face of the rock in the last of yesterday's twilight. The three became silent, and he could imagine them stealthily climbing the rock. Voices from the path broke the stillness, and the three warriors, so perilously close to him, ran to meet the newcomers.

Budd was fascinated and horrified by the tableau now presented in the trail. Two Indians, a giant negro and a white man had come from the east. The half-breed and his two companions stood a few feet from these four men. The negro, Budd knew, must be the runaway slave. That he stood in high favor with the Indians was indicated when they patted his powerful shoulders and made much of him.

The white man had his hands tied at his back and was wearing a leather apron. The early sunlight revealed the beads of sweat trickling down his face. The negro carried a smith's hammer; and from this implement Budd learned the prisoner's calling. He was square of build and had powerful arms and legs; but he was woefully afraid. Terror was driving him mad as he stood there, glaring at his captors.

THE Seneca danced up and would have cut his face with a knife had not the negro barred the way by extending the hammer. His two red companions talked and gesticulated. Budd gathered that they were insisting that the prisoner be taken into camp alive. The Seneca was like a wild animal, lusting to kill and forgetting for the moment that the prisoner was not his own. He padded back and forth continuously, the big negro watching him closely. Big Henry called out for the Seneca to desist, and reminded him that the prisoner was for Aireskoi. The smith kept turning about, his jaws agape, so as to keep his gaze on the hideously painted figure.

Suddenly the Seneca, ignoring all protests, edged closer. By a superhuman effort the smith burst his thongs and lifted his two brawny fists and brought them down on the Seneca's partially shaven skull. To Budd it sounded like the breaking of a melon. With almost the same motion the smith reached forward and wrested the hammer from the negro's hands and, with a mighty swing, caught another red captor on the head and dashed out his brains.

With a wild yell, in which fear was mingled with hate, an Indian discharged his musket without raising it, the heavy ball smashing through the smith's powerful chest.

Reacting automatically, Budd fired at the Mohawk between Big Henry and himself. The man dropped as if hit by a bolt of lightning. Amid the howling and yelling, the explosion of the trade musket still in their ears, the whip-like report was not heeded. Budd hugged the moss more closely and feared they might glimpse the thin smoke.

The captive and two of the savages were dead so unexpectedly that the others seemed to be stunned for the moment. Budd was tempted to descend to the ground. Conquering this desire, he held his position and reloaded the empty barrel. Then came a low cry of discovery, and he ventured a glance and saw Big Henry pointing to the mortal wound given by the rifle bullet. The three savages now knew death came from a strange rifle. Budd remained

quiet. The silence in the trail was intense and more nerve racking than all the howling. The last death had caused great consternation.

The squirrels, silenced for a bit by the unusual noises, resumed their excited chattering. Budd now could see nothing from his prone position and had to trust to his ears. Suddenly the chattering ceased. After five more minutes the scout heard a faint sound at the base of the ledge. It scarcely was more than the fluttering of a dead leaf, only there was no breeze to blow leaves about.

Budd detected motion near the edge of the cliff, and he fully expected a copper colored hand to appear. His hair felt as if it were standing on end as five feet of rattlesnake wriggled out of a deep crevice in the rock. It should have been denned up for the cold season instead of seeking the Autumnal sun. Before it could coil Budd gingerly advanced the muzzle of his rifle and flipped it over the side.

Yells of fear, interspersed with prayers to "our grandfather", and the sound of a sudden withdrawal told the scout how close his enemies had been. He felt thankful for the snake. Despite the sharpness of the early morning air he was wet with sweat. The Indians hastened back to the trail and hurriedly retreated to the west. Budd left his hiding place and cautiously gained the path. The smith had died painlessly with a bullet through the heart—a far better finish than serving as a kettle-offering to Aireskoi. He was more heavily muscled than any man Budd had ever seen.

Budd furtively followed the trail and depended upon the discovery cries ahead to give warning of any band traveling to the eastward. The second tragedy of the morning was encountered where the trail turned sharply around a huge boulder. He was upon it almost before he saw it—the stark body of Curtin, a scout. He had been scalped and his right arm had been cut off. His broken rifle testified to a hand-to-hand encounter; and the dark spots leading away from the place allowed Budd to hope he had taken some toll before he had been killed.

There remained but Blum and Murphy from the little settlement to be accounted for. The scout halted before the poor body, regretting he could not pause and give it a decent burial. The squirrels were at their everlasting chattering, busily storing up nuts and scampering over their glorified aerial highways, while high above the gay forest roof widely spread triangles of geese were flying south.

Budd had not contemplated the terrible scene more than half a minute before strong arms suddenly were flung around his neck from behind, and a hand clawed his rifle from his grasp while another plucked his ax from his belt. Giving before the rear attack, and bucking his shoulders, he sent one assailant flying over his head, and at almost the same moment he had wrested his rifle from the hands of another man. Whirling about, he faced five Indians, ready to close in on him. Two guns were aimed at his head. In the Mohawk tongue he cried:

"What do my brothers do to the friend of Wa-ra-i-ya-geh *? Is this the way to meet the friend of your dead friend? Take me to his son. He will give me a mat to sit on and a kettle to eat from."

"The one that is called is dead. He can not hear you," sullenly replied a Mohawk, who wore the emblem of the Turtle clan painted on his breast.

"His son lives. Take me to him. I come to meet him, following an open path. I find my way filled with briars. He will pick them from my feet."

The man Budd had thrown over his head, a Seneca, kept a hand on his tomahawk handle, eager to kill. The Mohawk, of the Turtle clan stepped between them and gravely said:

"This must be talked about. Let him open his bag of talk. If bad talk comes

*Sir William Johnson. Sir John Johnson was his son.

out, he shall be cooked in the kettle and fed to the Master of War."

Budd was fighting for time; fighting to prolong his existence by minutes. Before any could make a hostile speech, he said—

"Take me to my friend, Thayendangea."

"You found a dead man in your path," said the Seneca. A Mohawk translated.

"I found bad flesh in my path. Does a man of the Cat People have to tell me that?"

AT this juncture the burly negro came running back along the path. Budd called to him in English, saying:

"I want to talk with Sir John Johnson and Joseph Brant. These men make trouble for me. Tell them you have seen me many times at Brant's village, Ko-la-ne-ka, when they gave thanks to the maple, and held the feast of the green corn; when thanks were given to Ha-wenne-yu so long as the tobacco burned."

The negro understood but little of this, although he did catch the key words, and Budd's confident assertions impressed him. Budd was a white man, and he was a runaway slave. It touched his conceit that a white should appeal to him for aid. It pleased his vanity that he should be asked to conduct a prisoner to such men as Brant and Sir John. He edged forward. The Seneca began a passionate harangue and shook his ax. A Mohawk told Budd:

"The man from the Big Black Door claims you. He was first to put a hand on you."

The Seneca was well within his rights, and from his point of view was licensed to feel incensed did another come between him and his prisoner. A prisoner was personal property, and a captor could do with him as he wished, except when the welfare of the tribe might be involved; in such an event the prisoner could be taken away by the chief, but always with due compensation made to the disgruntled warrior. To the Mohawk Budd said:

"This man from the Western Door is a very brave warrior. But he has placed a hard hand on the friend of Thayendangea. Let him have a new gun when we find Thayendangea."

The Mohawk spoke at length. The Seneca continued to eye the prisoner murderously; but he was one Seneca against the Mohawks and the negro. At last he sullenly drew back, and Budd breathed freely for the first time since his capture.

The negro, feeling a new importance, made a harangue, using a jargon mostly Greek to the border man, and which must have been scarcely less puzzling to his red friends. When he had finished the Indians drew back. Puffed with importance, he told Budd:

"Young massa yassa. You no lie you big man. You lie you cook in kettle."

"Thayendangea will thank you and give you new cloth," Budd haughtily told him. "Is my friend near?"

The negro shook his head.

"Tioga."

Budd could scarcely believe Sir John's full force, including Brant and his Mohawks, was still encamped at the Point. The people along the Schoharie were positive their peril was almost upon them, and that the foe was no farther away than the East Branch of the Susquehanna. However, the scout's duty was to fight for inches of life, to procrastinate even if only for minutes, on the off chance of securing some little advantage which might culminate in an escape. Failing to do this, he must seek Brant in earnest and throw himself upon his mercy and gain his protection.

He believed that Brant would do what he could to save him for the sake of the days when Mohawk and white man lived amicably side by side. One thing Brant could not do, however, and Budd understood it thoroughly; he could not take a prisoner away from the Seneca unless the latter was left perfectly satisfied by the bargain. Success on the

Schoharie and Mohawk rivers might hinge on the Senecas.

The negro stalked ahead, wearing the air of a conqueror. Immediately behind the prisoner came the Mohawks, a shield between him and a hatchet blow or knife thrust from the blood lusting Seneca. Budd retained his rifle, although more than once a Mohawk reached around him to appropriate it. These attempts at appropriating the weapons of the Seneca's prisoner were only half in earnest. What puzzled them greatly were the two barrels, one above the other. One of the Mohawks asked Budd if he stood on his head when he sighted along the under barrel.

Budd figured he had traveled close to the East Branch and a trifle northwest of Harpersfield, which was destroyed that Spring. And he was worried tremendously by finding the enemy scouts so close to the settlements and in such numbers. Either the negro was vastly mistaken, or else the Mohawks were ranging much farther ahead of the main body than was their custom. If the latter surmise were correct, the settlers would have the advantage of fighting a divided invading force. If the negro was correct it savored of evil for the valley. Budd endeavored to test the black man's knowledge by asking if the army were at the Point, or Owego, or at Oghwaga, or Unadilla. The man grinned broadly and answered each question with—

"Yassa, massa."

The band trailed along a well beaten path for three miles, when they came to a red camp. A dozen men and three women rushed to meet the group. The latter fought like wildcats to get at the prisoner and claw out his eyes. Budd kept shouting Brant's Indian name. The negro grinned widely and brushed the squaws back with his powerful arms.

The Seneca restored a semblance of order by calling for silence. He told the story of the capture and took all credit for being the first to place hands upon the prisoner. He demanded that Budd be given up to him. A Mohawk advised patience, repeating the prisoner's claim to friendship with both Johnson and Brant. This was closely listened to by all but the few Senecas in the camp. Budd was shoved under the partial shelter of a lean-to.

After much speechmaking the hubbub quieted down, and the negro brought the prisoner corn and bear meat boiled together. He appropriated the rifle and Budd feared lest he damage it by his futile efforts to learn how to sight the under barrel. Finally he squatted before the lean-to, the gun across his knees.

Budd dared hope he had a fair chance of surviving until Joseph Brant arrived. This hope was dashed by the sudden arrival of a white man, a notorious character along the whole border, and the equal of Walter Butler in cruelty. He was known as Captain Black, a courtesy title bestowed by himself, as he held no rank and ranged with the Indians. He wore a calico shirt with leprous yellow spots, with soiled ruffles at the neck and wrists. What added to the beastliness of the creature was his act of scalping an Oneida woman and then taking her with him as his squaw. This unfortunate creature soon appeared to stand dutifully behind her master. The top of her head was wrinkled and hairless.

Black sounded a red war cry on beholding Budd. The big negro eyed him sullenly and pointed at Budd, and then tapped his own chest and patted the gun, all of this to indicate ownership.

"Clear the trail, you black hound!" roared Black.

THE negro flashed some wonderfully white teeth and shifted the position of the rifle. Black shot forth a hand to secure the weapon, but the negro, in leaving bondage behind him on the river, had put on all the airs of a free man. His huge hand closed about Black's wrist, and the outcast winced as the grip tightened and threatened to crush

the bones. Releasing his hold, the negro pointed at Budd and said:

"My man. Yassa, massa."

"Why didn't you say so in the first place?" snarled Black.

Budd spoke up and told the scoundrel:

"As the friend of Sir John Johnson and Joseph Brant, I expect to be treated well. This colored man rescued me from some Seneca scouts, who were undecided whether to bring me here alive, or to do me to death on the trail."

"Huh! How do I know you're a friend of Brant's?" Black demanded. "You look to me like a damn white livered liar. If you belong to the Senecas, I'll see they have you." He turned to speak with the Senecas, when a familiar voice at the end of the shelter called in English:

"M'sieu Black! Old Raoul says it is so." The trader came from behind the lean-to and stood before the prisoner. "Oneida men are talking about you. They say they must look you up. A matter of business."

Black, mumbling curses under his breath, withdrew. The squaw dutifully followed at his heels.

Budd stared at the Frenchman. Raoul sat down beside the negro and said:

"Death walks close to M'sieu Black. Some day, some night, it will put a hand on his shoulder and call him away."

He noticed the gun and lifted his white brows, glancing at Budd for the first time. The prisoner said:

"The gun is mine, of course. I should like to have it before it is spoiled."

To Budd's surprise Raoul took the weapon from the black guardian, without the latter's displaying objection, and handed it to Budd. The black he warned—

"Bad juju medicine on that gun." To the prisoner he said, "M'sieu Budd now is glad he did not pack old Raoul off to that Fort Hunter."

Budd placed the rifle across his knees, undecided whether to appreciate the restoration of his gun, or to loathe himself for accepting help from the enemy. He compromised by asking—

"You are free to come and go?"

"I am free like a bird. I am old. I have learned much. I am welcome to eat with Sir Johnson. There is always a mat for me when I find Joseph Brant."

"Being a Tory, that all is very natural."

Considering his plight, Budd realized his words were ill advised. Nor did he know how he could change them.

"I have been a good friend to you this day," murmured Raoul. "Your guard has spells as black as his skin. Times when only blood will keep off evil spirits. No one else in this camp could take that gun from him. He thinks I am a witch-doctor. Perhaps I am. Who knows? I make charms for him when his African medicine is weak."

"You show no surprise in finding me here," said Budd.

"When I feel surprise, I never show it. Tell me your story. How come you to be here, claiming to be a friend of the mighty, and yet with an escaped slave holding your rifle?"

Budd briefly recounted the incidents of his capture. Old Raoul nodded his head and gravely said:

"You have told these simple ones that you are the friend of Sir John and Brant. I heard about it at the other end of the village. I felt it must be you. Why did you tell that story to these poor people?"

"Poor devils!" bitterly corrected Budd. "True? Surely it is true."

But Old Raoul read uneasiness, or fear, in the scout's eyes. Budd, essentially honest, qualified his statement somewhat by adding:

"With Brant, personally, I know I would be safe. But whether even the greatest of the Mohawks can keep me from the kettle, I don't know. That's true."

"But yes. I believe that is true. But Brant can't save you and retain control of his red army if the Senecas demand you. He has indulged in many acts of

mercy. He has saved the lives of quite a number of prisoners. But in such instances some of his red children have deserted him. Even Brant dare not take a prisoner away from a Seneca. Cornplanter, very necessary to Sir John, would bitterly resent any such interference. In almost every instance of mercy, even with his own people, Brant needs must buy the prisoner with lavish gifts. If a Seneca man won't sell his prisoner, Brant is as powerless as the commandant at Fort Hunter, who is so sharp to meet me. The Senecas never have forgotten that the Mohawks in early days failed to hold the Eastern Door."

Budd said nothing, but his eyes revealed his hopelessness. Old Raoul continued—

"I might be able to help you, if we can trade."

Budd's brows came down in a scowl.

"So? It does not appeal?" murmured the Frenchman. "Duty is so precious you would toss life away? Even when knowing the sacrifice advanced your duty none?"

Budd drew a deep breath. His voice was hoarse as he said:

"I took the chance. I'm still hunting for you. I'm just out of luck, that's all. There must be a loser in every game."

Old Raoul motioned for the African to withdraw, and the black obeyed with haste. He then said:

"Your death won't help England any. I think I'll risk you won't be very dangerous if you keep on living for awhile. You must go away."

Budd whispered:

"In God's great mercy, where is there an open trail? I came upon poor Curtin, dead in the path. I do not know what's happened to Murphy and Blum."

"Blum has made the great traverse. He suffered none. The other—the savages are quick to catch his name—had a dozen on his trail the last I knew. It was known the scout band was coming. It was known that you, too, were coming."

Budd was aghast.

"How could you know it?" he demanded, his eyes blazing as those of one deranged. Suddenly his manner changed. "You didn't have to tell them I was coming. Big Henry did that. He was right ahead of me. He and others were in the trail looking for me after my third night in the bush."

"I do not believe Big Henry knew anything to tell."

"If not him— If not some damned traitor at the Middle Fort—then it's you."

Raoul rose with a shrug of his shoulders and answered:

"It is simple to fight for an idea, to oppose a conflicting idea. But sometimes it's not necessary to sacrifice individuals. Especially a young and rather insignificant individual. . . . See here—never mind your pride: If you live to my age you'll find pride has worked much harm. Let me make this plain. You'd never believe it, yet I am a fastidious man—not tender hearted, but fastidious. You must go. Tonight they cook a man from the Lower Fort. Brant and Johnson together can't save him even if they wished to. I can not save him. I'm too fastidious to watch such spectacles. You must get away."

Budd, nausea nearly overwhelming him, managed to whisper:

"Here? They will—do it here?"

Old Raoul grimly bowed his head. Budd slumped forward, his elbows on his knees, his eyes on the ground. He heard Raoul's voice, sounding far off.

"This is an advance camp for prisoners brought in from the east. Thayendangea's heart is hard just now because the border men burned Oghwaga, the finest of the red towns, and destroyed his supplies. And there are the destroyed Seneca cornfields, orchards and villages to be remembered. They call for bloody payment. I must go. The black man will bring you food. There may be a chance for you tonight when they cook the Dutchman. But

it will be a slim chance."

"At least a chance to be killed while fighting," muttered Budd.

Old Raoul hesitated and ranged his gaze around the camp, then said:

"I believe I can promise you that much. You may get clear." He thrust out his hand and explained—

"They must believe we are friends."

IT WAS but a sample of the horrible dilemma one must risk during the years of war along any frontier. Budd's father had told him much of the suffering and agony of his generation; and it did not seem the time ever would come when men and women could raise their families, unafraid of beholding the glow at night of burning cabins. But those bickerings with the French were as nothing, so far as the people of New York were concerned, compared with the ferocious attacks of this year of grace, 1780.

The Senecas had held the Western Door against the French, while Sir William Johnson and his Mohawks went through the Eastern Door to fight on Lake George. Red ruin in those days marked the frontiers of Pennsylvania, while the savages often were burning and slaying in Kentucky and even piling on to the back of Virginia. But those under the eaves of the Long House could sleep sound of nights.

It was the Oneida woman who brought Budd some deer meat. In Mohawk he told her:

"A woman of the Bear clan lives with bad flesh. She was happy under the care of her white fathers." This last referred to recent times when her people took refuge with the Americans near Schenectady.

Her face remained immobile, as if she had heard nothing. As she turned to go away she said—

"There was a dream about a bear fighting."

The escaped slave returned, but did not tarry long. Nor did he offer to take the prisoner's rifle. This evidenced to Budd that he was a quasi-prisoner, and was being held for Johnson and Brant to pass upon. He would be fed and left unmolested unless he essayed to escape.

In the afternoon Bud became conscious of much bustling throughout the camp. Indians were renewing their paint. Several Senecas, whom Budd had not seen before, hideously adorned with pigments, and wearing the scalps of tree-cats over their heads, came along and dropped on all fours to stare at him. He pretended not to see them and even affected a yawn. He also observed that firewood was being collected, and he noticed it was very dry and not mixed with green stuff such as they used in roasting one at the stake. A huge trade-kettle was brought to a blackened stump and was suspended over the fire by means of an iron bar resting on notched sticks.

Budd sought to avoid looking at it, but it was a magnet he could not resist. Its significance was terrible. He found himself wondering how many times it had served for the delectation of Aireskoi. As the sun was trembling on the roof of the western woods Old Raoul came along, singing in English.

His voice was high and shrill, and the savages turned to him in admiration.

"Your singing has a sorry suggestion," said Budd.

"Not all these hours should you stay in this one place. Get up and walk boldly around the village. Be bold. Be brave. Enter any lodge and take food."

"I'm always thinking of that other man." As he spoke Budd closed his eyes to avoid the fascination of the new fire. "I would rather die than have to see that."

Old Raoul's face was somber. His eyes grew stern as he harshly said:

"Think what you will of me except that I enjoy such sights. But one must not criticize one's host while being entertained in the Long House."

"It's broken in the middle, thank God!"

"Maybe, m'sieu. But be so good as to recollect that the roof in falling has pinned you down in this camp. I will try to lay out a path for you, but you must be ready. You must get them used to seeing you wander about. Then they will not be watching every move you make."

"For God's sake, can't you do something for that man?" whispered Budd, his agony making his voice hoarse.

"I can not. I never interfere with what to savage people is an ancient practise. That is why I can travel from the unhinged Eastern Door to the open Western Door and always find food and shelter."

"Can't you *shoot* him?" persisted Budd.

Raoul averted his gaze and slowly shook his head.

"Then I will!" suddenly decided Budd.

Raoul took a step forward and gripped Budd by the wrist, squeezing cruelly hard as he warned:

"Do that, if you want to take his place. Even Brant couldn't save you. Nor would he try. You must be north of this place. When the prisoner is seized and is being led to the kettle, you must run for it. It's all I can do for you. You must not travel east toward Schoharie, as that is where they will look for you. Go north. I have learned that a Seneca man was the first to touch you. The village is now stirred because you are not a Seneca's prisoner. Be ready to run for your life. And this—very particular. If you come to a cabin painted red, keep clear of it as you would the devil."

He passed on, humming "Malbrouck." If not for his great danger Budd would have inquired about the red house, spoken of by the commandant at Fort Hunter. But now Raoul's place was taken by Captain Black, who swaggered close to Budd; this time he tried no roughness. Behind him patiently walked the Oneida squaw. Scowling at Budd, he said:

"You'll follow the Dutchman. You're nothing but a damn spy."

"I see a black shadow over your head," said Budd. "You will die before I do."

Black attempted to laugh; then he cursed. Next he suspiciously demanded—

"Did that witch-doctor say that?"

"I don't know who you mean."

"The Frenchman. Old Raoul."

"I said it," Budd replied.

For a moment Budd believed the brawny fists would be dashed into his face. But either the renegade feared the possibility of the prisoner's friendship with Brant being true, or else the rifle deterred him. He did not strike, but the rage of the devil was in his eyes. He gave vent to his passion by wheeling about and giving the Oneida woman a savage buffet that sent her sprawling. This amused the Indians, for the Oneidas had cast their lot with the Americans. The woman crawled to her feet and slowly brushed the dirt from her face and hair, then took up her position behind the brute without changing her facial expression in the least.

A SHRILL outcry at the upper end of the camp called Black away. Remembering Old Raoul's advice, Budd wandered among the temporary shelters. He entered the first hut he came to. The only inmate, a Mohawk, hurriedly departed. Securing a piece of meat from a kettle, Budd continued his stroll.

"They have caught a bear!" shrilly screamed a squaw.

"They will cook a bear!" howled another.

A Seneca, wearing a hideous false face, came dancing down the path. He kept on, although Budd refused to step aside and give him the right of way. One hand went to his tomahawk, but the twin muzzles of the rifle were to the front, and the masquerader at the last moment avoided collision by leaping to one side. Now all the Indians were

shouting:

"Here comes a bear! Here comes a fat bear!"

Budd halted. Never had he pitied any one more than he did this captive from the home valley, a man carrying something pressed closely to his breast. An Indian attempted to wrest it from him, but the poor creature, his glassy gaze fixed and seemingly beholding nothing, clung to his poor possession desperately. His face was streaked and daubed with black paint. On beholding a white man his gaze took on intelligence for the moment, and he called out something in Low Dutch. Budd did not understand, but knew the unfortunate was asking for help. A hand touched the scout's arm and Old Raoul murmured:

"You can do nothing. Be ready to run for it. To the north—and keep clear of any red cabin if you get that far."

"I have two shots. I will spare him one," mumbled Budd.

"And put yourself in the kettle. Do as I say."

Then he called out to the prisoner in Dutch, the incisive quality of his voice penetrating the man's horror frozen senses. The dull eyes quickened as if in understanding. To Budd the ginseng trader explained:

"I tell him to help himself to a quick crossing. The last portage of all is open if he does as I have told him. Now do you go beyond the kettle and get to the north end of the camp."

For a moment Budd's feet seemed to be glued to the ground. The Dutchman, prodded with a sharpened stick, continued his death march. His eyes fairly bulged from the sockets when he beheld the fire and the big kettle. He slowly removed the thing he had been clutching so convulsively against his breast, and Budd discovered the object was a hatchel board. The man was a flax-hatcheler. Doubtless he had been surprised while at work and, tenaciously even if unconsciously, had retained the tool of his trade. The long nails in the board had punctured the skin, so tightly had he clasped it to his breast. The red dots formed a sort of pattern and stood out vividly against his fair complexion.

As one awakening he drew a deep breath, a mighty breath, and then walked up to the big kettle and with a kick dislodged a stake, tipped over the container and deluged the fire with boiling water.

Demoniacal howls of rage greeted this unexpected maneuver. The slow work of bringing so much water to a boil was wasted. The nearest warrior struck the prisoner in the face with the flat of his ax. The man gave ground, and the stupid eyes suddenly became vindictive. With great quickness for one of his bulk he raised the hatchel board and smashed it down on the half shaven head of his assailant. With the skull punctured in half a dozen places the man went down as if struck by lightning, the top of his head fairly riddled. Wrenching the curious weapon free, the Dutchman gave a mighty bound and leaped into the woods.

The pack, stupefied for a moment, streamed after him, insane with rage. This defiance of the Seneca people was nothing compared with the insult extended to grim and implacable Aireskoi, still waiting to be fed. As the camp's attention was thus employed Budd walked to the north and, at the first turn in the path, took to his heels.

Instead of sticking to the path, he quit it after a few rods of travel and laid his course to the northwest. His plan was to strike the river and follow it to Summit Lake and thence travel due east to the Schoharie.

The escape of the Dutchman must have absorbed the entire attention of the camp for some minutes. Not until after Budd was well into the timber did he hear the squaws screaming for the men to follow the "young bear". As successful flight demanded a clear head even more than fleet feet, Budd conquered any inclination to panicky haste

and picked his steps with great care. The confusion behind him ceased as suddenly as if some one had closed the sound-proof door of a noisy room; and he knew the most astute trailers were casting about to find signs of his flight, and that the silence was a sinister portent. As he heard no cries of exultation he believed the Dutchman, for all his bungling, had succeeded in giving the red men the slip.

That night he slept for a few hours in a cedar thicket, and it lacked two hours of sunrise when he awoke. He made his breakfast on parched corn from his big wallet, and a strip of smoked meat. By the time he had finished his throat was burning with thirst. Next in importance to his peril was the conviction that Raoul was the settlement spy, busily engaged in supplying information to the enemy. Of lesser import was the red cabin. What and where was it? If it did not belong to the old ginseng trader, why his desire that it should be avoided?

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE PAINTED RED

DRUGGED more by nervous rather than any physical exhaustion, Budd slept as soundly as if in the stone house of Johannes Beck. The level rays of the rising sun stabbing into his leafy hiding-place awakened him. He had thrown himself down in a semicircular opening, where he would be easily visible to any one coming from the south. He mentally vowed such a technical error should not endanger his freedom and life again, and that he would take to cover while the light afforded him some choice of selection. He remained motionless for a few moments, studying the three walls of his enclosure. The foliage was blanched yellow and streaked with the bronze of the oak. It would have been the simplest of tasks for a copper colored arm to thrust an ax through the frail barrier and give him a death stroke. This fault of his woodcraft annoyed him much.

However, he could detect no signs of pursuit and, after examining his rifle, he resumed his flight. He was enormously hungry, and thirst was beginning to trouble him. He thrust wet leaves into his mouth to cool his hot tongue. Then the tranquillity of a perfect dawn was shattered by a quavering cry in the south. It came thin and tenuous, yet death was in its ululations. Had his pursuers been a trifle more forward they might have entered his bedroom and ended the last of the Budds. The cry was repeated, only this time with new timbre.

It contained a thrusting, keen note of exultation. It was a discovery cry and became a powerful spur to the fugitive. He cast about for the ancient trail, a narrow, deeply trodden slot, the like of which formed a network over primitive America. He found the path where it forked, one branch leading to the east and the main stem keeping on to the north.

Realizing that several bands must be hunting him, he abandoned his plan of trusting to strength and fleetness of foot, and resorted to cunning. Ordinarily, he believed, the enemy would take it for granted he would strive his utmost to make a successful flight to the Schoharie. They would endeavor to head him off by following along the base of what he pictured to be a huge triangle. A second band, he knew full well, would endeavor to follow him to make sure he had not gone into hiding, or changed his course. This maneuver naturally would drive him into some ambush along the path to the Schoharie.

A soft shaking of the smaller hardwoods brought down a shower of leaves over his night's couch. For several rods to the north he gently dislodged more of the brilliant foliage to hide any possible traces left by his carefully placed feet. Then he buckled down to

the real work of the day and glided northward rapidly. As long as he could keep out of gunshot he was as safe as if having a lead of several miles. Tim Murphy had repeatedly warned him that new hands at scouting often ran themselves off their feet at the first alarm; also, that the best of one's strength should be saved for the final effort.

Until nearly to the meridian hour he held to an easy lope, and then halted only because of a bubbling spring in a small outcropping of rock. There was the mad desire to drink and drink until he could hold no more. Instead he repeatedly filled his mouth and emptied it before swallowing any of the nectar. For ten minutes he tarried thus, and it was not until he was ready to go on that he permitted himself to drink a moderate amount.

The East Branch was on his left. The trackers, he was confident, were between him and the Schoharie. He knew his safest move would be to reach the branch and cross it, as the enemy would not be expecting any such maneuver. While this plan tended to serve him best, it would leave the folks at Weiser's Dorf in ignorance of the impending danger. He adhered to his original design of keeping to the north until he might deem it safe to swing in a wide half circle to the east. He planned to strike the Schoharie near the Lower Fort, where he had wrestled with Big Henry.

Taking great care in leaving the rocks and the delectable spring, as a carelessly overturned leaf would be sufficient guidance for the sharp eyes seeking him, he gained the narrow trail. It had required generations of red feet to tread the ancient forest mold to a depth of nearly a foot. For practically all the perspective ahead Budd could only see his way as a narrow tunnel, with branches so low as to compel a stooping posture. For much of the way ferns and other low growth encroached upon the slot and called for much patience and cunning in following the path.

So soft was his tread that he glimpsed a tree-cat and came upon a bear, fat from a chestnut diet. Overhead the squirrels were following their aerial ways, and these he dreaded for their proclivity for scolding. From above the forest roof came the honking of wild geese flying south. Once, when passing through an opening caused by a blowdown, he found the sunlight blotted by an endless raft of pigeons. He envied the bird life, so free from all earthly dangers. A few hundred feet, perpendicular, was worth a dozen-mile lead along the horizontal.

Again he heard the quavering discovery cry; it reminded him of the terrible ghost and demon stories the settlers told and believed. This vocal assurance that the chase continued startled Budd, even though he took it for granted he would be hunted without stint. After estimating the distance he had traveled, he decided some of the enemy had found the spot where he had passed the night despite all his efforts to conceal it with a layer of fresh fallen leaves.

He should have expected this, and yet it was monstrously alarming. It meant the pursuit band would not follow the winding trail to the east, but would hold to the north and hang to his heels even to the waters of the Mohawk. He tightened his belt, lengthened his stride and exchanged cunning for speed. There were no settlements nearer than the Schoharie in the east and the Corbus Kill in the north. Nor did he see so much as a lean-to, such as hunters put up.

There came the doleful cry again, only this time it ended with a sharp yelp. Budd ceased even a pretense at cautious running and made it an open race. That one sharp exclamation bespoke fierce joy, a ferocious certainty of overhauling him. He wondered what clue he could have left thus obviously to advertise his passing. His ax was in place, but his sheath knife was missing. He knew he must have dropped it while

bending over the bubbling spring. In border craft such negligence was unpardonable. Secrecy no longer would serve him; the enemy knew he was definitely committed to the northern course. With flankers out to guard against a last desperate stand in the nature of an ambush, the pack would come on at top speed.

BUDD bounded around the bole of a tree and almost crashed against a very unusual obstacle. It was a cedar post, some five feet high. The bark had been removed so it might be painted red. It was set in the middle of the trail, as if warning that the way was closed. The color quickened his memory. He recalled Old Raoul's last warning against venturing near a house painted red. However, with Cornplanter's Senecas and Brant's Mohawks endeavoring to hunt him down, Budd had no choice. He had reacted to his environment in an age when supernatural beings of evil intent were commonly believed in. But with death clipping along at one's heels, any haven should be welcome which promised respite. Budd passed by the post.

The zone he now entered was not so thickly wooded, and the low hanging hardwood branches, heavily fleeced with crimson and gold, permitted a mellow, subdued light to filter through and speckle the ground oddly. Budd continually swept his gaze from side to side, and no longer practised caution as to where and how he should step. The only thing which could keep his hair out of the smoke would be some very stout defense—and the house painted red became his heart's desire.

On his left, where a narrow lane of outcropping rock extended west through the growth, he discovered more of the red posts. They were planted with much precision and obviously were boundary marks. He came to another post set in the trail, and he concluded it marked the northern limit of the forbidden domain. He turned to the west and ran for several hundred feet, keeping the posts on his left. His throat was parched and he breathed in gulps.

Then it was before him—his goal! It was a substantially built cabin, with a narrow door in the middle; and the peeled logs were painted a vivid red. If it belonged to the Evil One himself, Budd was determined to use it as a sanctuary.

The latchstring was invitingly out and the door gave readily to Budd's hand. But barely had he touched the door and felt it give before he snatched his hand away. It was all too easy. The invitation to enter was too broad. It urged, rather than invited. And there was Raoul's warning. There, too, was the yelping of the pack, following a hot trail with swift feet. Never was a border man placed in a more disquieting dilemma. Stepping to one side, Budd placed the muzzle of the rifle against the door, pulled up the bar and gave a smart push.

The door swung fully open, and a loud explosion and the swish of bullets bespoke the presence of a mantrap. The leaden pellets whizzed by, leaving Budd unharmed. Stepping over the threshold, he beheld a musket of large bore mounted with great cunning. A stout cord extended from the bar under a cleat, across the low room and down to within a short distance of the musket. At the loose end of the cord dangled a weight of lead. When the door swung open the weighted cord slackened and allowed the pound of lead to drop and hit a second cord tied to the trigger of the cocked piece. The contrivance was simple to the point almost of crudity; yet ordinarily it would have been deadly.

As Budd closed and secured the door he wondered how the owner entered and left the building, as there were no other exits that he could discover. The small openings, serving as windows, were high up and were not large enough to permit the passage of even a small boy. They were more like enlarged portholes. Had

not Budd been repeatedly warned, he would have stepped squarely into the path of the riddling charge. He refastened the door and threw himself on a couch of skins and devoted several minutes to regaining his breath.

A keg in a corner caught the attention of his roving gaze and reminded him of his dry throat. He investigated and found it contained rum. In another corner was an open keg. This held water. He filled a noggin with the two beverages and, reckless of the possibility of either containing poison, he drank and was mightily refreshed.

Then he climbed up the notches cut in the logs beside the door and examined the forest through a peephole. At the end and sides of the house he repeated this spying through the small apertures which afforded air and light. Each essay brought the same result. There was no sign of life within the forbidden area. As to how many painted trackers were in waiting beyond the posts he could only guess.

His first thought was that a woman lived in the cabin and was the last to leave. This was suggested by the clean swept floor and the general tidiness of the place. The dishes, too (and there were many more than were to be found in the ordinary backwoods cabin) were washed and neatly stacked on a shelf in a most housewifely fashion. These were of different patterns and suggested to Budd so much loot from various sources. Either the Indians accepted the house and its surroundings as a place to be shunned, or else they had lost the trail entirely. Budd did not believe the latter, although he heard no more calls and discovered no other signs of life.

With his thirst satisfied, he was ravenously hungry. A door, giving into the east end of the room, caught his curiosity and aroused his hopes for food. Taking the same precaution he had used in entering the cabin, he opened this door. But there was no trap. The room was quite bare and contained no food. Let the owner be what he might, Budd doubted his ability to live without eating.

Always on guard against traps, he crossed the room to a curtain that concealed one corner from ceiling to floor. Still suspicious, he advanced his rifle between the two folds and started to brush them back. The weapon was nearly knocked from his hand by something which struck the barrel and slithered off to the floor. The intruder's eyes widened with horror as he realized the danger he had avoided.

This second device, intended to secure privacy for the owner, consisted of a long cutlass, heavily weighted at handle and point with pieces of lead. Had he advanced a hand between the curtains in the ordinary manner the freighted blade would have given a ghastly wound even if it failed to sever the member. He ran his thumb along the edge of the weapon and found it to be as sharp as a razor. There was nothing behind the curtain.

A further examination revealed a trapdoor extending out some two and a half feet from the wall. Thrusting the end of the rifle through the loop of rawhide, and standing well back, he raised the trap to the full extent of its leathern hinges. Nothing happened.

Budd cautiously advanced close to the opening, and his nostrils were assailed by the delicious aroma of cured meat. Dropping flat on the floor, he peered down into a shallow cellar. Half of the excavation seemed to be packed to the floor with smoked hams. As his eyes grew accustomed to the half light he observed the hams were of different colors, with a wide variance in shades. He applied his theory concerning the cookery in explaining this lack of uniformity. The meat had been smoked by different people at different times and in different places.

This conclusion brought back to mind the complaints of surviving refugees from outlying cabins, that their meat supplies had been carried off. This cache of meat could be explained only

on the theory it was stored for the use of Johnson's and Brant's forces. And Budd wondered how many other and similar depots were awaiting the enemy.

HE ATE his fill; and then he took time to dwell on Old Raoul's repeated warnings. Suddenly the tragedy of burning border cabins was pictured in his mind, with many instances of the poor people captured and put to the torture. He heard himself crying loudly:

"Damn him! He's a monster! I'll tell Major Wemple what I've found."

He caught his breath and fell silent, tilting his head to listen. It came upon him that he was not clear of the forbidden zone, and that the owner of the cabin would be merciless to whoever learned its secrets.

The desire to be off was almost overwhelming. His nerves tingled with the fear of an awful wickedness. Every one knew that the Senecas from earliest contact with white men were always partial to Frenchmen. For a hundred years the French had had a vastly greater influence at the Western Door than was possessed by Dutch burghers at Albany, or by the English. The meat represented many burned cabins, prisoners, torture and the kettle of Aireskoi. Had it been night, Budd would have slipped through the narrow, ominous door to take his luck in the forest. And the sun was never slower in making its daily journey.

"If the owner comes I will do my best to kill him," Budd vowed half aloud.

"If he comes? But how does he gain entrance?" he asked himself. There was but one means of ingress to be seen. And a person on the outside had no means of disengaging the firing cord. As a belated discovery he perceived that it would be impossible for the owner to set his trap and depart by the one door and leave the firearm ready to discharge its hail of lead. By this halting process of elimination Budd found he had one hypothesis left, and he knew this must be the answer regardless of all appearances. With walls and roof tight, the owner's entrance and exit must be from the cellar.

Before putting his conviction to the test Budd gave attention to a wooden chest covered with blankets and serving as a seat. It was secured by a padlock. He drew the staple with the spike end of his tomahawk and threw back the cover. It was filled with paper money. His first thought was that the owner of the cabin must be a rich man. Then he remembered that a huge amount of paper money in circulation was counterfeit, and that two hundred millions, legitimately issued, was nearly worthless. It required sixty dollars in paper to equal one of specie. The store before him was not even exchangeable at that ratio.

He picked up a bundle of sixty-dollar notes, theoretically redeemable in as many Spanish dollars, or pieces of eight. He wet his fingers and rubbed them across the bill, and the ink stained his hands. He held it up to the light. There was no watermark. Most of the notes, he observed, were for large sums. There were neat packages of notes for eighty dollars each, showing a majestic oak and a motto in Latin, which, had he been a scholar, he would have translated, "It shall flourish through the ages."

He dumped the whole mass into the fireplace and ignited it with tow and his flint and steel. In doing this he found a store of pieces of jewelry at the bottom of the chest. There was tragic significance in the light gold neck-chain, broken because the despoiler was in too great haste to unclasp it from some slim neck.

Protruding from beneath some kitchenware was a folded piece of paper. He opened it eagerly and at a glance recognized it as being a map of the Schoharie valley. In minute letters were the names of the residents. The list included nearly all the holdings on both sides of the river. That it was up to

date was proven by the names of those who had put up cabins within the last three months. Beginning with the house of Daniel Budd, a distant relation, at the Lower Fort, there scarcely was a habitation omitted that Budd could discover. But what was most sinister was the tiny red ax drawn opposite every name whose owner was hostile to King George.

He was thrilled to read the names of his father and mother as well as his own. The thing had been prepared by one who took great pride in his work. Budd believed the map maker to be a man of precise habits and much nicety of manners. Such a man was Old Raoul. He put the paper in the fireplace and watched it burn.

The room began to darken, although Budd knew it could not be within three hours of sunset. He sliced half a ham and again reconnoitered from a peephole over the door. The woods were darkening. There came the ominous bellowing of thunder, like a thousand bulls in an upland pasture. Budd suddenly was overwhelmed with a desire to get clear of the evil place.

He started for the door, halted and used his wits. Securing a candle and lighting it from the fireplace, he dropped into the cellar, where he found the head of a barrel braced against the earthen wall. Removing this, he found it masked the mouth of a tunnel. He advanced the candle. It flickered, but did not go out. He felt a slight draft of air.

Pushing his rifle ahead, butt first so that no dirt could enter the barrels, he experienced no difficulty in following the narrow passage on his hands and knees. He could feel the ends of roots in the sides and roof of the tunnel, and he realized they did much to prevent the soil from caving in. At a distance of about a hundred feet the darkness lightened and soon he emerged.

The tunnel ended in a huge hollow stump, around which grew some bushes. Overhead the dark clouds appeared to be resting on the roof of the forest, and the muttering of the thunder was very menacing. The storm was sweeping down from the northeast. The endless procession of passenger pigeons was broken and their hurried descent for shelter in the woods was advertised by the cracking of limbs, where unwise choice had been made of roosting places. Blue sky still showed on the western horizon. In the north, gilded by a vanishing beam of sunlight, was a red post. Behind him was the red cabin; and there was no storm, or fear of red men, which could drive him back to its shelter.

With the pan of his rifle protected by his hunting shirt, he left the stump and raced for the northern boundary of the ill omened premises. He was convinced that so long as he remained within the posted area no savage would offer him harm. It was a medicine, or mystery place. Nor could they know about the underground exit. Those who tarried to watch the place would have eyes only for the door.

ONCE beyond the red post Budd dropped to the ground and studied the growth. There was dusk under the trees, and the tops of the tall evergreens were swinging back and forth as if they were wrestling with giants. High in the heavens swirled dead leaves, caught up from some eminence far to the north and now swept along like storm tossed birds. A big drop of rain struck his nose. He worked into the timber beyond the post and made for the north. Overhead he could hear the rush of the storm and the crash of the rain. Dead leaves drifted down, and an occasional crash warned of the peril from dead or weakly rooted trees. He made his way to the east and found the beaten path to be nearer than he had estimated. Once he was in the deep slot, he traveled more rapidly.

There was danger from the falling timber; there was danger of the savages having gotten in advance of him. But

most of all he feared the owner of the Red House. But what was the whim which would permit a prisoner to escape?

The way grew darker as the clouds pressed lower. He was traveling through the dusk of early evening. He began to believe the day was ending when, suddenly, at a bend in the trail he saw it was much lighter ahead. He pressed on and found his road had entered a burned over stretch of dismal blackened trunks and charred underbrush. Shading his eyes to keep the rain from blurring his vision, he sought to discover a roundabout way which would permit him to continue under cover. He would have plunged into the jumble of stumps had not a terrific display of lightning revealed for an instant the moccasined foot of a man protruding from behind a bush. He froze behind a clump of chokecherry bushes and watched.

Speed was imperative while the storm was obscuring the land. He left the path, rather than pass closer to the exposed foot, and worked to the east. Rain splashed in his face, but his hunting shirt kept the pan of his rifle dry. Again he was much startled, this time by beholding the head and arms of a man in front of him. He could not perceive that either hand held a weapon. He was about to remove the covering from his rifle when another bolt through the heavens illuminated the belabored earth in detail. For an instant the head and shoulders were lighted.

Budd aimed his rifle and called for the man to stand and keep his hands above his head. The prostrate figure remained motionless. Budd leaped forward and stared down at him, holding his ax ready. He was a white man. He had been tomahawked, but not scalped. Budd turned him over. He was Blum. Old Raoul had said in the red camp that this borderer would not return home. Budd wondered how the ginseng trader came by his knowledge.

Budd dived into the timber where the water was gently raining from the branches, although above the forest tops there was blue sky and sunshine again. The dripping water made the trail greasy for traveling. Budd found a deep pool, covered with leaves, paused and drank his fill, and took time to consider what course he should pursue. He was greatly tempted to turn at right angles and make for the Schoharie. Reason warned him that his pursuers had expected this and that already several bands must be strung across the country to intercept such a line of flight.

Obviously it still was best for him to continue far enough north to pass around the enemy. Curtin had attempted the most direct route and had been killed. Blum had attempted a safer plan, but had been surprised and had died under the ax.

Nor was there any virtue in haste. For the cautious man there would be time enough. Therefore Budd decided to find some spot where he could eat of the smoked ham, satisfy his thirst and sleep. Such a place soon presented itself—a low, overhanging ledge on a gentle slope, where the rain could not seep into his hiding place. And there was dry moss to lie on, although he was used to hard beds.

He spent ten minutes in gaining the crude shelter after he had passed it for a distance of several rods. Each backward step was picked with the utmost care, so as to leave no signs of his return. When he stretched out under the lip of the ledge he prided himself that no Iroquois could find any trace of his doubling back.

As soon as he had eaten some meat he was asleep. Nor did he stir until the sun returned to redden the east. He would have slept longer if not for some untoward noise. When he opened his eyes he knew something had aroused him, something he believed to be inimical. Instinct had called on him to awaken and be on his guard. He remained perfectly motionless, not knowing whether the peril was distant or

close by. There was a pin prick of light, and a white man was mouthing profanity. Profane language was monopolized by the white race, the red man lacking its equivalent.

Slowly turning his head, the scout saw the point of light blossom into a curling flame. He heard the familiar sound of an old stump being kicked to pieces for firewood.

"I'll kill you yet!"

Budd realized he had heard the man speak somewhere, sometime, before; but for the moment he could not place him. He was some twenty feet from the ledge. His companion did not answer him. The flames expanded and were lavish with their light. Budd beheld Indian leggings and moccasins. A hand was projected into the radius of the firelight, holding a piece of meat on a green stick. As Budd slowly uncovered his rifle the white man fiercely exclaimed:

"Hungry, damn you? You're always hungry. I told you there ain't more'n enough for me. You'll have to wait." Then he repeated this, minus the expletives, in the Oneida dialect. Budd could follow him quite well.

A voice answered him, and there was the blur of a figure behind him.

"You dreamed of a bear, huh?" growled the white man. "Catch him and eat him. But you be careful you don't dream of a wolf and fetch me bad luck."

The blaze increased rapidly; and had it not been for the low hanging lip of the ledge the scout must have been discovered. Higher leaped the flames, entirely unsuited for a cooking fire, and Budd made out the evil features of Captain Black.

AS BUDD quickly pieced the puzzle together, the couple's presence could be explained on supposition that the two had taken the trail and had followed it until delayed by his taking refuge in the Red House. Either Black had been slow to discover the scout had fled, but had been quick to find his trail once he knew the ominous cabin was empty, or his Oneida squaw had done the trailing. In either event Budd had gained such a lead on all enemies as to permit him a night's sleep before being overtaken. He admired the skill which had enabled the two to follow him so exactly. Once the sun was a bit high the squaw was sure to discover his hiding place.

Black bolted the piece of meat before it was more than warmed through. The woman dutifully remained behind him, talking softly over his shoulder. In a second burst of rage he brutally commanded her to be silent; and he added for good measure:

"I'll kill you yet. Oughter done it before. I'm tired of your bleating. I can read a trail better'n you can. He went farther'n this, I'm telling you. When the light comes, and I've had a snuck of sleep, we'll go on."

Again she must have asked him for food, for with an oath he wheeled and struck at her, then cried—

"Next time I'll land, and you can chaw on that if you're hungry."

Budd could not know whether or not she would indorse his decision, but he had decided to make her a widow. Drawing his ax—to use if his gun missed fire—he slowly shifted the position of the rifle and waited for the woman to move out of range.

She commenced singing, thereby allowing Black another inch of life. Budd caught the word, "Ga-go-sa," or "False Faces." Captain Black mimicked her, and with a hoarse laugh cried:

"Ga-go-sa Ho - nun - nas - tase - ta — Keeper of the False Faces was you. But you lost your hair."

The woman came into the firelight and dropped some wood. She asked him to repeat.

He appeared to be much amused. He chuckled grossly and from the pocket of his hunting shirt produced a flat bottle and drank with much gusto. He was committing the unpardonable offense of getting drunk on an important trail.

Budd's interest in the woman quickened tremendously. He forgot her position as slave to the brute; forgot the terrible treatment he had extended to her, although the wrinkled skin, where once had been a scalp, was reminder enough.

He realized she had been a person of great importance in an ancient red civilization; none less than "The Keeper of the False Faces." As such she had held a powerful and unique position in that secret society. There could be but one woman in each organization, or lodge, of the Faces.

As mistress of the band she not only was custodian of the hideous regalia, but she alone knew the identity of all the members. It was her duty to call for meetings and to notify each member, with every male coming masked and unrecognizable. The fact she was reduced to being a camp drudge, practically the slave of the man who had scalped her, testified with terrible eloquence to the great havoc made in the social structure of the most powerful Indian league in all America. Black, in his brutality and ignorance, could not realize the full import of all this. To him she was but a squaw, tireless and uncomplaining.

She stepped back from him and in a low voice began the Bear Song. Budd remembered that she was of the powerful Bear clan. Black thrust his bottle in his pocket and commanded her to be still; and he phrased it most profanely.

The woman at once obeyed and squatted behind him. He produced his pipe and commenced filling it. The day was growing lighter, and Budd no longer needed the aid of the fire in studying the two.

As he rolled the tobacco in his hands Black continued a stream of abuse of her and of her people. He twitted her because her tribe sought refuge with the Colonials at Schenectady during the fighting in 1758. He spoke foully of her people in various other ways. As he talked and prepared his tobacco Budd saw the woman's copper colored hand hovering over the head of the ax in the back of her master's belt and he held his breath. It seemed impossible that the poor degraded creature could display any resentment.

Black leaned forward to pluck a brand from the fire. The hand, as quick as the dart of a serpent's head, plucked the ax from the beast's belt. Budd could never forget the sudden, craven squawk of fear as the man endeavored to twist about; or forget the dull clump of the ax chopping through the shaggy head. Captain Black sank forward, his head between his knees. The woman glared down at him and told his deaf ears:

"There was the dream of the Bear. The Bear had sharp claws."

Then she tossed the ax into the fire and made direct to Budd's hiding place, and said—

"The path is open for the Bostonnais." The last was generally used by Brant and his Mohawks in designating Americans.

Budd crawled from under the ledge, and in the Mohawk tongue told her—

"A brave woman of the Bear clan has killed a skunk."

"Her head had smarted. It feels better," she replied. Then pointing to the north, she said, "Go for one sleep. Then go there." This time she pointed to the east.

"Back there is a house. It is red. Who is the man who lives in it?"

For a moment her stolidity vanished; and if ever Budd saw mortal fear in human eyes it was in hers. He believed she doubted him. He pulled forth the butcher knife he had appropriated in the red house to replace the one he had lost. He said:

"I give this to the woman who dreams of a Bear. I found it in the Red House."

If he had handed her a poisonous snake she could not have displayed more fear, or repugnance. Without a word, a single backward glance, she circled about him and ran back over the trail

leading to the south. By this incident did he again learn that the Red House was a very bad medicine place.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEVILS OF ONISTAGRAWA

IT WAS two miles above the Lower Fort that Budd struck the river and crossed to the east side. He halted at Christian Richtmeyer's place just as the family was sitting down to breakfast. His arrival brought them flocking outdoors. His forest dress, much travel stained, eloquently testified to his return from a scout. Richtmeyer insisted he enter and eat, but he paid for his victuals by relating some of his adventures. After he had described the position of the enemy, Richtmeyer said:

"Old Johnson will never enter this valley."

"He will come as sure as tomorrow comes. His white Senecas and his red Senecas, his Royal Greens and Brant's Mohawks will scalp and kill all they find outside the forts. There will be close to a thousand men under Johnson."

"You may be right, Joseph Budd," said Mrs. Richtmeyer. Bitterly, she added, "But they won't scalp no Tories. It's safer in these sad times to be a Tory, or a sneaking spy for the Tories."

"Mother, you keep still. Hold your tongue," ordered her husband.

"I was speaking of any spy," the woman sullenly explained.

Budd suspected some one was under the family's suspicion, a condition not strange in a time when father fought son and brother turned against brother. He advised them—

"You all pack into the Lower Fort and you won't be hurt."

"And they'll burn all our property and carry off our stock," said the farmer.

"They'll do that anyway. Why lose your lives in the bargain?"

But the man's respect for his property rights was vast. It was his religion. He stubbornly vowed he would not stand by idle while his house was being burned.

A hired hand insisted that the Lower Fort would be "busted" first.

Budd patiently used the tableware in mapping the location of the enemy and the certainty of their striking the Lower Fort first, of being repulsed and retreating up the river, burning and killing as they fell back, and attacking the Middle and Upper forts if not discouraged by the settlers' show of strength.

"If you will feel safer, travel three miles farther and enter the Middle Fort. That won't be taken."

Mrs. Richtmeyer shook her head.

"A weak man holds the reins there. He'll be quick to surrender. That leaves the stone walls no stronger than if they was made of cheese."

"The garrison will never allow any commander to surrender," Budd assured her.

When he ceased his urging and departed, however, he left them a unit in refusing to seek protection where Major Wolsey commanded.

Throughout the next three miles of travel the talk along the gracious river was much the same. The belief was general that Wolsey would surrender his stout defense, and that there were Tories in the valley who kept Sir John fully advised as to the strength of the three forts.

When Budd was within a fourth of a mile of the fort there sounded a discovery cry, which for a bit threw him into a panic, before he realized it was his coming which caused the outcry. Ashamed that he should have displayed nervousness when entirely clear of danger, his tanned face burned with humiliation. Had he been older, or wiser, he would have understood this reaction was only the result of suppressed emotion during his long and danger beset flight from the red camp.

All those physically able flocked out from Weiser's Dorf to meet him and belabor his ears with excited queries. It

was a relief not to behold Betsy Eckson in the throng. A rumor had come from the north that Schenectady had been attacked and that all who were able had fled to Albany. Budd vigorously denounced the report as having emanated from Tories and other mischief makers. Some asked him if he had heard stories of a mysterious enemy spy in the valley. He answered in the negative, but had no doubt as to the identity of the man gossip was guessing about. What he had to tell about Old Raoul would be told first to Major Wemple.

He did not need to ask if Tim Murphy had returned while faced with such news hunger. He briefly explained the situation on the Susquehanna and told of the enemy gathering at Tioga. To stamp his information as being truthful he had to speak of his brief captivity. While he was evading queries relating to the details of his captivity, Major Wolsey, very red of face, came on the scene. In a querulous voice he demanded—

"What's all this nonsense about the enemy collecting at Tioga Point in great numbers?"

"They are there, sir. Some eight hundred Indians and whites under Johnson and Brant," Budd replied. "By this time they are making the East Branch. I am convinced they will strike the Lower Fort and follow up on this side of the river, and then will retreat up the way they came and enter the Mohawk from the east."

"If I believed that, I'd quit this poor place and move my garrison to Schenectady," said Wolsey, his uneasy gaze shifting to stare up the fertile valley.

"You won't move me an inch!" roared a blacksmith. "We won't quit this place."

"Stay behind and be scalped then," snapped Wolsey.

Budd knew the smith was not the only one who hoped the commander would flee to Schenectady, thereby giving the settlers an opportunity of electing a new commander, pending some official action taken by Governor Clinton. As Wolsey turned and hastened back to the stone house, Budd stared after him and beyond him, and wondered what was keeping the Eckson maid indoors.

"Tell us what they done to you," coaxed the smith.

Budd diverted this line of inquiry by announcing—

"I found Curtin dead in the path before I was captured."

"Oh, such woe to his poor people!" cried a woman. "Poor Curtin gone!"

"What's t'other news?" harshly demanded the smith.

"Blum will never come back."

This caused a fresh outburst of sorrow and anger. Both men were very brave and popular.

"For God's sake, tell us the worst in a lump!" cried a farmer. "Tim Murphy is gone too, I suppose."

"I don't think so. At least, he was not a prisoner when I escaped from the camp. If they'd downed him they would have danced his hair . . . But remember this: No matter how strong the enemy may seem to be, when they come, don't surrender this stout place. They never can take it, nor either of the other two forts on the river. They can not halt and lay a siege. Both Brant and Johnson know they must work fast. Their business is to destroy crops, so our Army will lack for bread. Now, good folks, an end to questions for awhile. I must speak with Mistress Eckson."

"Her pap's been here and took her away," shrilly cried a boy.

Budd stared at the smith, who read the unvoiced query, and said:

"Younker's right. Grankin don't like the way things are managed here. Too much talk of surrendering and running away to suit him. If I had a smart girl here, I'd be skeered till she was in Albany town."

"She would have been safe here. One man can't surrender our stout band of settlers who are willing to fight it out."

"He never can surrender *me*," cried the smith, brandishing his heavy hammer as if it had been a trade hatchet. Then he added, "If I had a wife or child I'd feel the way Grankin does. I'd put them where they would be safe and then come back to give old Johnson his needin's. They went away two days ago. Grankin told some of the men he'd be back."

Even Budd, for all his insistence the enemy could not capture the fort, secretly approved of Grankin's action. That grim, dour man would return, and it was impossible to imagine him flying a white flag. Budd broke away from their curiosity and went to find Vroman. The gallant old soldier was smoking a big pipe outside the south wall and gazing on the gracious beauty of Onistagrawa Mountain. He shook hands with Budd most heartily and said:

"I knew you'd look me up. I wanted to talk with you when all those fussbudgets weren't around. Tell me the things that matter."

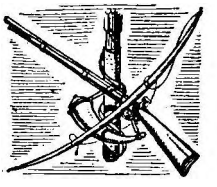
Budd wanted to tell him everything, but Wemple's instructions restrained him from mentioning Old Raoul and the fact that the trader was with the enemy. He gave a condensed report, omitting his personal adventures as much as was possible. But it was necessary to mention the man who escaped the kettle, and also that sinister trap, the Red House.

"So!" softly exclaimed Vroman. "Then it is true. I've heard talk of it before, but never repeated it. No good comes of frightening people. But there was a poor creature picked up by Murphy a month ago and brought to the Upper Fort. He had lived through something too awful and had lost his mind. He hurt himself sadly running into trees and falling over rocks. The savages could have caught him, but, seeing him bereft of his senses, they were afraid to hurt him. He was scared to death. Fear killed him. About all he'd say was, 'Oh, that house! The Red House where the devil lives!' Then he'd scream hard enough to split your ears. He died doing that. Murphy and me took it for a poor crazy man's ranting."

"Major Wemple might not approve of my telling anything before I have reported to him, but I know you are prudent, sir. I've seen, and have been in that house." Then he described the interior and the contents of the cellar, and the map marked with tiny red axes. He concluded by saying, "Your name was on that map, sir. And all this is just between ourselves."

"A foul place. It mustn't be talked. Our poor people have enough evil to think of without that. But who," asked Vroman, "can be the evil one who built it and uses it?"

"I believe you have named him, sir. It's the devil himself."



TO BE CONTINUED

SEA SOLDIERS

By CARROLL R. MILLER

SOUTH by southeast from the Atlantic Seaboard and down through an awful lot of the adjacent ocean lies a portion of the West Indies—the tropical islet of Santo Domingo. Here, says history, Christopher Columbus tied his boats on his first overnight stop in this portion of the good Lord's footstool.

A volcano-made, sun blistered wart on the face of the earth, Santo Domingo is —where bananas and mangoes grow wild; where burros and bulls grow wilder; where the hairy, jumping tarantula and the jointed scorpion lie in wait; where scrubby forests and scrubby underbrush form at once a hiding place and a source of breakfast, dinner and supper for the sun kissed inhabitants; where the sun beats down pitilessly day after day; where the blood of the white man grows thin and thinner; until dengue fever, buck ague, or disturbed mentality, or all three, set in. This, in sketchy outline, is Santo Domingo. But it has its good qualities. The rum is good; and the fighting is good; and *manaña*—the morrow—is always good.

I'm telling you this in advance. I didn't know it until after the terrible battle of Puerta Plata.

For four days the little white gunboat, the U.S.S. *Sacramento,* with three hundred Marines crowded aboard it, plus a crew of gobs, had steamed steadily south-southeast from Hampton Roads. For four days under cloudless skies, with only gray-green water and flying fishes and porpoises and themselves for company, they had throbbed southward. Now there was a blur of land ahead.

Out of this blur of land there crystallized, after a bit, quite suddenly, the colorful town of Puerta Plata. On first view, Puerta Plata is entrancing. All red and green and white; vivid and strange and adventuresome; with its red roofs, white stucco buildings half hidden in tropical gardens of brilliant green; its shimmering white beach lined with palms that always spell mystery to the white boy. Windows, strange of shape and shutter, stood wide open. Mountains rose sharp, rough and jagged, just

behind the town. We drank the picture in greedily.

We were "boot" Marines most of us; not long away from home; and shorter still from the boot camp at Norfolk. The tropics were one of the things we had signed up for; and here we were. A foreign land—and tropical!

"Tropics are like women," said Beast Bulman, alongside me on the lifeline. "Look good from a distance; but not good for men to fool with." Beast was one of the few old-timers aboard—a blond youth, to look at; an age old Marine, to listen to and to follow. Beast knew both women and tropics from experience.

"It ain't a white man's country," he went on belligerently. "These spigs sleep under trees; that's their home. When they wake up they heave a club up into the tree they slept under—and down comes their breakfast in a banana peel." I listened, respectful but unbelieving.

Puerta Plata was grouped about a perfect, round, bottle shaped little harbor. As we swarmed over the superstructure, the forecastle, the quarterdeck and the lifelines, the little *Sacramento* nosed its way into the harbor, with much chanting from the lads heaving sounding lines over the side.

"It's a d-e-e-p e-lev-en," dwindled gradually to, "It's a b-a-re sev-en." Fathoms were getting scarce.

Little bells tinkled as we coasted in. Engines reversed, churned backwater powerfully. Anchor chains jolted out noisily from the bow—and here we were! A foreign land—and tropical.

Bumboats propelled by black boys came pushing across the bay and alongside. Grins, white teeth and rolling eyes, gave welcome. A brisk trade sprang up in the bananas, pineapples, queer native cooked preparations, and delicious but stringy mangoes, that they carried in the bottom of the boats. We tossed pennies into the lucent depths of the bay and the black boys went tumbling and battling down after them. More grins when they came up.

After a bit we forgot those pleasures in staring at the squat, domineering pile of gray masonry, the fort that covered the top of the hill just off our port midships. It was heavy, solid walled, ominous.

Pointing directly toward the midships of our little wooden gunboat *Sacramento* was a huge black cannon, with a wide-open mouth that was empty—extremely, threateningly empty.

One shell, now—it must use eight-inch shells, at least. And an eight-inch shell, what would it do to the insides of this little wooden gunboat? Three hundred Marines, plus a lot of gobs—where would we be if one of those loafing spiggoty soldiers pulled the lanyard?

For lounging in the shade of the thick doors of the fort were nondescript soldiers, some overall clad, plus a red and blue cap; plus sometimes a tunic. Their lady friends loafed with them.

This, with their utter lack of military precision, scandalized us, fresh as we were from the boot camp drills. For they were, after all, our brothers in the profession of arms. And women—right in the fort with them! To budding soldiers of fortune the thing was somehow obscene. Periodically an unkempt, long rifled guard detail marched about, making the relief listlessly. Just what kind of revolution was this?

We had come, we understood, to rescue revolution ravished Justice; to take over the volcanic little country's exchequer, customs offices and such; and to restore the value of certain American investments. "Stabilizing the Dominican government" was probably the correct diplomatic term.

As nearly as we could find out the trouble started when the report was allowed to get out in the island that there was some money in the Dominican treasury. A cabalistically inclined ex-official got rum, gathered time bored companions and raided, successfully. Once inside, the government printing press was started up and the revolution was

declared a success. At least, the black boys in the bumboats had great wads of handsome paper money whose only fault seemed that it was not signed by any one. Those were Bulman's deductions, anyway.

Sometime that evening a message about like this, set in painful Spanish, was sent to the fort:

U.S.S. *Sacramento*
May 29, 1916.

To The Commandante,
Fort San Felipe:—

The United States Marines will move to occupy Fort San Felipe at 6 o'clock, Thursday morning, June 1st. You are given until that time to vacate.

—JOSEPH HERSHINGER, CAPTAIN, U. S. M. C.
Commanding Provisional Brigade

Warfare—open and aboveboard! Told them we were coming; and when; and almost how. That was long after the Civil War; and before Belleau Wood. Captain Hershinger was called on to pay in full for his frankness, as it turned out.

We knew the ultimatum had gone, knew that the U.S.M.C, commonly interpreted "Useless Sons Made Comfortable", or this certain portion of them, were about to begin earning their salaries as professional warriors. But we didn't know anything else much about it. And it looked right foolish, warning that bunch of bandits up there on the hill, with that eight-inch cannon aimed directly at our midships. That was Tuesday night. The attack was Thursday morning. We slept that night on the topside of the *Sacramento*, our faces to the stars, wondering about a lot of things—real warfare, for instance. Most of us had never seen a man killed.

Wednesday morning the bumboats and the black boys came back with more fruit; the same grins—and the same gee-strings. Business picked up. There was more sun—much more sun—all day long. A shark nosed furtively about astern, gobbling galley scraps. We rushed for rifles and shot until the shark went elsewhere.

About six o'clock in the evening, with twelve more hours to go, the waters of the harbor became suddenly filled with green bunches of bananas; floating, floating, everywhere; outbound with the tide. Our sailors put off hastily in small boats, with the laudable idea of retrieving all of them. They filled their boats, and the waves of bananas floated steadily seaward.

Small boats, from the lines along the docks farther in the harbor, began to follow the bananas, slipping past the *Sacramento* furtively, close to the opposite shore. Out through the bottle mouth of the harbor they went, scudding then like rabbits around the point to the north.

"Banana traders," said Beast Bulman, "waiting for the Lamport and Holt tramp freighter from the States. They're scared about tomorrow morning at six o'clock. Must be a awful story going around among 'em. They're heavin' cargo into the bay and tearin' out."

So! The morrow looked more serious than ever. Adventure and war were ahead of us, all right; probably death too. Tomorrow morning at six o'clock! We stretched out on deck that night as taps sounded its silvery notes over the bay, with some very solemn thoughts—some of us confiding remarks, and some with notes already written in our shirt pockets.

We were routed out in gray, chilling dawn. Two bells, five o'clock, sounded from the superstructure as we finished breakfast. We covered a variety of feeling with unnecessarily hard boiled conversation—and staring eyes. That cannon, now—

The sun, red in the east, turned yellow and hot. We stood about in marching order, ammunition belts jammed full and extra bandoleers thrown over shoulder; every one nervous.

A muffled report from shore; and a couple of bullets rattled briskly off the funnel of the *Sacramento*. Captain Hershinger ordered every man to the starboard side, for protection of the super-

structure. More bullets, lower now, against the boatside.

Under fire! For the first time in the lives of most of us, some one was deliberately trying to kill us. The big cannon up there, when would they touch that off? Captain Hershinger had the sergeants form us in the lee of the upper deck, and talked to us briefly. He warned against panic; told us what we were to do. Always a grave, silent man, this morning he seemed slightly uncertain, sadder than usual. Some premonition, probably. The spatter of bullets against the ship grew as he talked. I kept listening for the boom of the cannon that would rip us wide open . . .

SAILORS were launching the boats from the lee side for protection. They came in two pairs; each a steamer and a trailer. A stocky old Swede, wearing about his knotty neck the Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery years ago, was at the tiller of the first pair, and engineered them alongside. A party of gobs, to reenforce the Marines, got into one of these boats.

The second pair of boats came alongside. A young sailor, boyish looking, was coxswain of these. The boys swarmed down the rope ladders. I waited—was the last man down, except Captain Hershinger. He sat on the rear cross-seat of the last boat, his knee touching mine. Together, the two sets of boats spurted around the stern of the ship and headed for the beach.

Something very sudden happened to us. From the inner harbor came, like a wave, a shrieking sheet of flying lead; close, very close; just inches above our heads. The whole air was alive with the hot, hurtling, wailing slugs of destruction. No warning. We were caught—tricked! Death was inches away! Lower—it will lower—

Spines chilled. Blood ran cold. Panic raced among us. Helpless—a death trap—everybody helpless. Three hundred of us wedged into slow moving boats—broadside to them—screaming lead—murder! Can't move. Helpless, helpless . . .

Powell, big, handsome young Georgian, plunged suddenly into the bottom of the boat, wailing piteously. Johnny Hexton, veteran sergeant, kicked at him with curses that were a blur in the bedlam.

The young sailor at the tiller of the boat pulling ours followed Powell, abandoned his tiller and flung himself into the bottom of the boat. Farther, farther from that sheet of lead just over our ears he groveled. The shelter of the gunwales looked wonderfully appealing to me, but I didn't move, somehow. The motor putputted on. We began to drift from the course of the other boats. Over in the other steamer, the Swede stood upright, regardless of the shrieking death pellets, staring straight ahead. Corbett, fierce eyed, mustachioed first sergeant, seized the tiller the boy had dropped. But Corbett was a Marine, not a sailor. We drifted farther from course. The lead screamed about us, lower now, it seemed.

Captain Hershinger, at my knee, moaned once. A big, red flowing hole appeared suddenly at his temple. A big ball had gone through his head. He sagged slowly downward, without sound. I watched, stupefied, powerless to move. The first man I had ever seen killed. Suddenly the thought— We were leaderless! Leaderless!

Added panic struck through as the murmur passed around. The hail of hot lead seemed about our shoulders now. They were getting our range. The captain was only the first. Couldn't they hurry? Couldn't they hurry? Still only halfway to shore. Sitting here to be murdered.

Buckalew, in the bow of the boat ahead of us, had the one machine gun. He was trying frantically to swing it from dead ahead to where it would drill the boats to our right, where the enemy was hidden.

Panicky hands messed all his attempts. There was a terrific roar from behind us—the *Sacramento* had finally cut loose with her three-inch gun. Well over into

the town the shell went. A building crashed dully in the bedlam. The boys were trying to help us, but they didn't know where. There was increase, if anything, in the whistling death sheet that was about us.

Buckalew, after much shouting, got the machine gun trained to the right, cut loose with a long clip. The storm of bullets about us tapered off abruptly. The machine gun jammed, and the spigs picked up their fire again. Another long burst from the straightened machine gun; and the spine chilling lead shower died away. Suddenly we were close ashore.

The old Swede in the other boat had already beached his steamer well up in the shallows. Our steamer, behind, came to a lurching stop. The trailer we were in rammed it gently, stopped—well out in deep water. Corbett had put the steamer on a rock.

The boys in our boat piled over the side and struck into a swim. But I could not swim!

Finally I realized that the crumpled up captain and I were the only ones in the boat. There were some forty yards of deep water between me and the beach. But I had to be with the rest of the boys. That was all. There were holes and rocks in the green depths under the boat; but there was only one thing for me to do—walk it. I charted a quick course ashore and dropped over the side.

My loaded ammunition belt and bandoleers and rifle and other equipment took me straight to the bottom, but I kept feet downward. Under how many feet of water I'll never know, I started ashore. Stumbling, slipping off sharp rocks, down into holes; lurching forward again to trip over more angular sea stones—lungs now bursting cylinders of pressure—I hoped blindly that I had not got turned around. I stumbled forward.

An age later I shoved my head up into the air, let go my bursting lungs and rolled dizzily, weakly, beachward. But I was all together.

My khaki breeches and wool shirt bulged with gallons of water, from leggings up. I ran, gasping for breath, after the rest, now charging up the hill on the rush-and-flop plan. Hell's fire! The gobs were in the lead! Those gobs would do anything to get ahead of a leatherneck. We Marines belonged ahead in this.

I caught up with the others halfway up the hill, and on into the fort we charged, on the run. Nary a spig! The swart *soldados* had evacuated during the night and had done their fighting from the small boats in the harbor.

The big black cannon was an antique, we found; cold, old and harmless. Well, anyhow, "the Marines have landed and have the situation well in hand." We were excited. War! The real thing.

We dashed on through the fort to the thick masonry walls beyond, overlooking the town. The wall was waist high and a yard thick, of crumbling masonry. In the town we saw citizens. Promptly we started shooting over their heads. Terrified, they began scurrying from hovel to shack; while we pursued them delightedly. A soldier must have some exercise for his rifle. The charge up the hill had been bulletless. The natives all safely under cover, we took to shooting at dogs that ventured furtively forth. After a bit there were no more dogs.

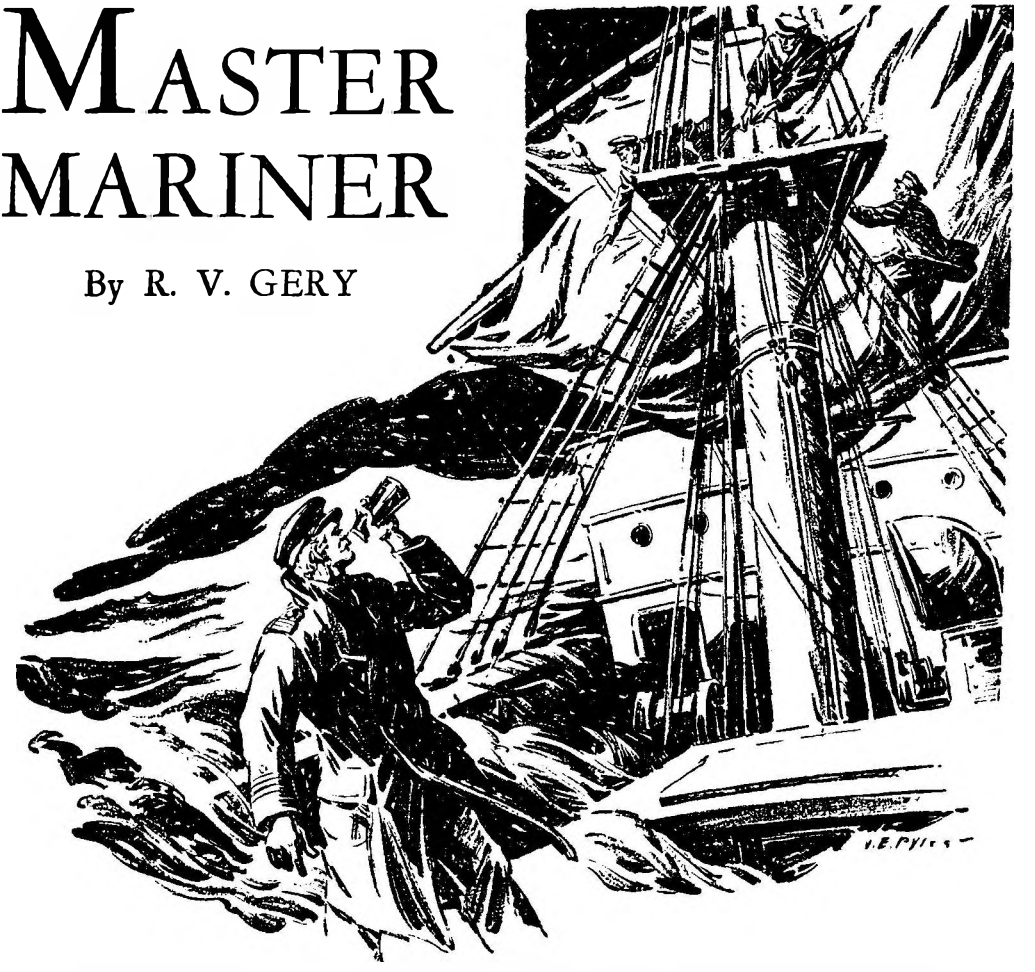
The battle was over.

And then, there we were, on a turbulent, hostile island; three hundred of us against thousands of Dominicans; far, far from the United States and assistance. The gobs returned to the *Sacramento*, taking Captain Hershinger's body with them, and brought over our tents and equipment. We pitched camp inside the fort walls.

Shooting was going on sporadically down through the town. Reports were of a counter-attack by the enemy after dark. A heavy guard solemnly took position around the walls as night came on. They waited, wide eyed and fearsome, for the shadowy figures advancing from the black shadows of tropical night. But the stealthy riflemen never came. The battle of Puerta Plata—the storming of Fort San Felipe—was finished.

MASTER MARINER

By R. V. GERY



A DAPPER, red headed man, with hard blue eyes, a sharp nose and the indefinable lilt of the sea in his walk, came to the foot of the *Highlander's* gangway and looked about him with some disdain.

"H'm!" he said to himself. "Don't think much of her. Looks to me as if I've drawn a lemon."

The *Highlander,* a 3000-ton tramp of ancient lineage and not extravagant seaworthiness, lay at dockside taking on odds and ends of general cargo. Crammond—for such was the red headed one's name—had been appointed her first officer the previous day; he had come down by train that afternoon on orders from the vessel's owners, who were notorious even among minor shipping companies for driving hard bargains. He had known all about it when he took the berth; but six months' idleness had left him none too particular, and the sights and sounds of the quay once more were as grateful to his senses as the advance of pay had been to his slim purse. Mr. Crammond, in fact, for all his criticism of the *Highlander,* could not afford to pick and choose just at this moment.

Nevertheless he looked the ship over dubiously. She was a high pooped, rusty affair, with "out-of-date" written all over her, and "neglect" as a companion epithet to that.

Muttering, "Lemon!" to himself once again, he ascended the gangway.

There was a man at the top of it—a

short, spare graybeard in a dirty old peajacket, his hands thrust into the pockets and his shoulders hunched against the night wind. An empty black pipe protruded from the side of his mouth, and the general impression he gave Crammond was one of doddering frailty.

Crammond addressed him.

"Captain Wall aboard?"

He spoke with the deep sea rasp in his voice, and with a certain impatience of manner. It reflected a tendency of his—already instanced by his comments on the ship—toward buckodom and hustle; in fact, Mr. Crammond suffered acutely from the knowledge that. through no fault of his own, he was at thirty-seven still without a command.

The man in the peacoat took his time about answering the query, his deepset gray eyes under their heavy brows—he was a gray figure altogether—roaming about the dock. Then he said—

"You Mr. Crammond?"

"Yes." There was more impatience in the mate's tone. "Where's Captain Wall?"

Once more the veteran was deliberate about replying. He submitted Crammond to a leisurely inspection.

"What's your last ship?" he asked suddenly.

Crammond bristled.

"What's that to you, uncle?" he said with extreme incivility. "Captain Wall's the man I want. Where is he?"

"In a hurry, aren't you?"

"Yes," snapped Crammond. "I am. I'm also first officer of this vessel, my man, and there seems to be some people aboard her that want gingering up a bit. You, for instance. What's your name?"

The venerable anatomy removed the pipe from his mouth.

"I'm Captain Wall, Mister," he said.

For a moment he enjoyed the mate's scarlet confusion. Then he chuckled once more.

"Well?" he said. "Don't stand there on one foot looking like a blooming stork, Mr. Crammond. You wanted me, eh?" he asked maliciously.

"Reporting for duty, sir," said Crammond.

"Duty, eh? You don't look much like duty, Mr. Crammond. Another of these jumped-up young whelps they keep on sendin' me. Still wet behind the ears, I suppose. How old are you?"

Crammond told him, his temper rising. Captain Wall sniffed.

"Baby," he remarked. "And you with a mate's ticket."

"Master's," Crammond corrected him.

"Say sir to me, damn you!" Captain Wall fumed. "Master's ticket, good gad! Humph! They'll be givin' 'em out as prizes at girls' schools next. Well, well, I suppose I'll have to put up with you. But lookee here, now; no mate-with-a-master's-ticket stuff with me, understand. There's only one master here. Know who that is?"

He stuck out his withered little chin and wagged his head ferociously in Crammond's face. The mate felt himself growing dangerously warm, but maintained his self-restraint with an effort.

"I know my place, sir."

"Believe it when I see it, Mister. If you don't I'll soon show you."

He swung away from Crammond with an "All right, get below!" to meet the engineer, a lean fox of a Clydesider. As the mate moved off to his cabin, he heard Wall.

"Well, Mr. McAlister, and what the hell's the trouble now? Too lazy to settle things yourself, eh, and want me to do it for you. Same thing again. You engineers are all alike—"

A string of sultry expressions followed, until Crammond escaped them by closing his cabin door with a slam.

HE PUT his suitcase down and, sitting on the edge of his berth, began to consign all such pestiferous old he-goats as Wall to the nethermost pit. He was almost enjoying himself in the process when some one laughed in the doorway.

Crammond looked up and saw a rotund little man with a wispy mustache.

"Pochin—Second," the newcomer introduced himself. "I see he's begun on you already."

"Begun," Crammond said. "But that's as far as he'll get. I've no time for that kind of thing."

"Yes," said Pochin. "That's what we all say at first. But you'll get over it in a month or two. He's a difficult chap."

"He'd better not try any of his difficulty with me," said Crammond darkly, "or he'll find I'm pretty difficult too."

Pochin laughed again.

"Just what Morgan said—and Foster. Your predecessors. They're on the dock now."

"Ah," said Crammond. "Like that, is it? Or is it just shooting off his silly mouth? He means it?"

"Try him and see. But if you want to keep your berth, I wouldn't. He's a—"

"Mister Crammond!" A saw-toothed hail came along the alleyway. "If you've quite completed your toi-let, Mister Crammond, come up here. I want you. And don't take all night about it either."

The mate jumped suddenly as if some one had pricked him, and said something unprintable under his breath. Then he ran up the ladder two steps at a time and marched straight up to Wall, flushed and truculent.

"Sir—" he began.

The captain whirled on him in a fury.

"Take that look off your face, Mister!" he said in his venomous, piping voice. "I'll have none o' that on my ship. You were going to say somethin' smart, weren't you? Didn't like the way you were addressed, I've no doubt. Upset your dignity. Well, let's have this out right away. There's the dock, Mister. Get ashore if I don't please you, and we'll have the owners send me down another mate. They'll do it. They know me." He paused, his red rimmed little eyes on Crammond. "Now, what's it to be? I'll give you ten seconds to make up what you call a mind, for I'm a patient, forgivin' man. Oh, yes, Mr. Crammond, by Jehoshaphat—patient and forgivin'."

Crammond choked down the outburst rising within him, though he came near apoplexy in the process. Berths were scarce, and he had had too much of hanging about shipping agencies in the last half year. The quay looked cold and desolate. Moreover, this ancient meant what he said, every word of it.

"Very good, sir." He spoke in a creaky voice. "You wanted me?"

Wall looked him up and down with sovereign contempt.

"Humph!" he said. "Thought better of it, did you? Well, you stay that way, Mister Mate, and maybe you and I'll get along. Maybe. And maybe not. Now, here's my orders. We sail at seven in the morning, Mister—seven, you understand. Get round and have things in shape; and don't you come worryin' me about details, like that slack jawed Scot McAlister. Settle things yourself, and tell me afterward. And that'll be all, Mister. I'm goin' ashore."

He went off down the gangway, looking very much as if a puff of wind would blow him away. Crammond turned to go forward and ran into the engineer.

McAlister was trembling with indignation. He seized Crammond by the arm and spoke in a hoarse and furious whisper.

"Eh, Muster Mate," he said. "I'm verra glad to see ye. Maybe ye'll be able to pit a stopper on thot bletherin' auld kafuzalem thot's commandin' us. Ye didna hear whut he said to me awhilie back?"

"No," said Crammond.

"The dom ram-faced auld chrysanthemum servit me wi' notice that if I didna stop complainin' o' ma engines he'd send ashore an' bring oot a cycle mechanic for tae instruct me (says he) in rinnin' 'em. Me, thot's been wrastlin' wi' beasts at Ephesus in engine rooms this thretty year!"

"They're bad, eh?"

The Scot rolled his eyes skyward.

"Mon, ye've no conception!" he said. "They're a runnin' miracle. Sardine cans is plain efficient beside 'em. An' d'ye think yon prancin' panjandrum we've got here'll listen to sense? Deil a bit of it! 'Awa' wi' ye!' says he. 'I'm no tae be bothered,' says he. 'Rin yer scrap-heap your ain scrap-heap way, an' dinna fash me!' Thot's whut I get, Muster Mate."

Crammond considered the enraged engineer, and incautiously half voiced a sentiment that was beginning to take possession of him.

"It's about time," he said, "you had a change of command here."

"'Deed aye it is," said McAlister in heartfelt tones. He suddenly looked at Crammond with new interest. "Eh—" he went on, "If thot's whut's in your mind, Muster—Crammond, isn't it?—weel, ye've Angus McAlister wi' ye for yin. An' the rest o' the ship's company too."

"Think so?" Crammond asked.

"There's no thenkin' aboot it," said McAlister. "If ye'd seen an' stood for as much as I have aboard here, ye'd no ask the question. The mon's clean crazy—a peril o' the high seas."

"Well," said Crammond, "we won't talk about it. It's too early yet. But he's been at me, too, and I don't take the sort of stuff he dished out lying down, I'll tell you that. We'll just wait and see."

The engineer laid his finger to the side of his nose.

"Aye, aye," he said. "We'll wait—but here's hopin' we'll no have to wait owerlong. There'll be the deil's ain wark aboard here itherwise!"

MR. McALISTER may have been a disgruntled back number as an engineer, Crammond found, but he was a distinct success as a prognosticator of trouble. The devil's own work began to make its picturesque appearance on the *Highlander* before she had left the Channel. And it was Captain Wall who played the leading rôle in it.

Whatever the Old Man's methods might have been with the ship tied up at a dock, they were a thousand per cent more drastic with deep water beneath her keel. He had, the mate discovered, sailed before the mast in his time; indeed, almost the only means of getting him to slacken his continual stream of abuse was to mention the windjammers, and mention them in terms of admiration. Then he would square his aged shoulders, glare about the saloon table and embark on reminiscences designed to prove that Bully Hayes was the man and that sailoring died with him.

But normally he directed affairs from the bridge or prowled about the *Highlander's* decks with a chip on his shoulder and no particular choice in who knocked it off. The cook in his galley came under Wall's guns as readily as Crammond forward, or even as McAlister on his platforms below. The Old Man put in the best part of a morning dressing down the engineer in his own engine room, and when McAlister came into the cuddy to dinner he was blue about the nostrils and still sweating.

Wall greeted him with a cracked cackle.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Engineer, is it?" he asked malevolently. "Those engines o' yours well again yet?"

"They're improved a wee," McAlister growled.

"Of course they are," Wall crowed. "Of course they are. Don't wonder in the least. They've had a real seaman lookin' 'em over—not a hamfisted plumber, Mr. McAlister. There's nothin' the matter with my engines—yes, they're my engines, McAlister, so you needn't look so black. I'm master here. If they get a bit of a bellyache now and then and you want to know why, just look in the glass."

He sniggered as at a supreme jest and went on with his meal in a dead silence.

"Of course," he proceeded cheerfully after a moment, "this steam's easy. Kid's work. Yes, gentlemen, a pulin'

kid from school could handle one o' these vessels. There's nothin' to it. Just a handful of machinery to learn, about as simple as a mousetrap—and the owners hire Scotchmen to look after that. Why, I don't know. Cheap, I suppose. Or maybe it's because Scotchmen are too big fools to look after anything else. What d'ye think, Mr. McAlister?"

The engineer glowered at his plate without speaking. Somebody giggled, and Wall was encouraged to further efforts.

"Why," he went on, "there hasn't been any seamanship since we got out of sail. All you've got to learn on these mechanical bathtubs is to shoot the sun and keep her nose pointed just so, and the ship does the rest. That's the way some officers nowadays get tickets. Master's tickets, at that. Ain't that so, Mr. Crammond?"

"Oh, probably, sir," said Crammond, who was beginning to wonder whether, after all, this ancient wasn't mad—mad enough to allow him to hope for a total breakdown by the end of the voyage. Command loomed attractively nearer as he considered possibilities.

Wall twisted his wizened little face into an unpleasant grin.

"Probably, eh? Glad you think so, Mister. You young pups don't know a great deal about sailorin' do you?"

"As you say, sir."

After all, there was no sense in letting oneself be baited into a quarrel.

"Don't shuffle, man. Answer. Think you know anything about sailorin'? Think you could run this hooker, f'r instance, Mr. Crammond?"

This was getting perilously near a difficult subject, and Crammond avoided McAlister's eye. He made some noncommittal answer, and Wall laughed outright.

"All right, gentlemen," he said, rising. "You needn't worry about bein' left to the mercy of Mr. Crammond. I command here, by Jehoshaphat, and in command I'll stay."

In Crammond's cabin afterward the three—McAlister, Pochin and Crammond himself—faced one another.

"Well?" said Pochin.

"Well?" Crammond shook his head. "After that little exhibition I don't think we need waste any more time. The man's crazy. But that doesn't alter things much. He's not crazy enough to lock up."

"Na," McAlister agreed joylessly. "Thot's just it. The auld deil's buckie's eneuch sense to see it, too. Ye'll een hae to wait a chance, Muster Crammond—an' guid luck t'ye in waitin'."

With which philosophic observation he departed to his steam ridden pandemonium below, and the mates returned to duty with what grace they might under the excoriating tongue of Captain Wall.

THE *Highlander* bucked her asthmatical way across the Bay of Biscay, sighted Finisterre far off to port, and began to lollop down the Portuguese coast in fine blue and gold weather. She was due to touch at Cadiz, discharge a part of her miscellaneous freight there, and then proceed down the African coast to Accra and Lagos. Crammond, knowing from experience the possibilities of that trip in heat, sickness and general conditions, wondered not without a spice of eagerness whether the frail little captain would see it through, or whether events might not arise that would shove him over the hairline that seemed now and then to divide him from sheer lunacy.

Then his own chance would come, said Crammond to himself. He visualized himself bringing the *Highlander* triumphantly home, his first command, while Wall, poor old chap, retired to the institution for aged mariners where he was already so long overdue. The prospect was a pleasant one to the red headed mate.

But meanwhile matters on board went from bad to atrocious. Captain Wall increased hourly in venom, and it was far from being McAlister alone who felt

the lash of his bitter tongue. As to his seamanly qualities there were no two arguments, however; in whatever school he had learned his trade, they had made no mistake in imbuing him with its essentials. Even Crammond confessed grudgingly that Wall knew his work. But his manner was a nightmare.

Crammond watched him one afternoon blackguarding Pochin and the watch on deck over a little business of a wire hawser. The thing was old and frayed, and the men tugged at it with ripped and blistered hands while the Second directed operations with what encouragement he might. It was a plain case for jockeying the workers rather than driving them; but such was not the view of Captain Wall.

He had descended from above and now stood with his hands in his pockets as usual, his little chin beard jerking actively as he poured contumely on the men. He was in good fighting trim after prolonged hazing of his officers, and with the crew he was under no inhibitions whatever. There might be ultimate limits to what a certificated man would put up with; but the wretched stuff that lived a dog's existence in the kennel of the *Highlander's* forecastle were a different matter entirely, and none knew it better than the enthusiastic disciple of Bully Hayes.

"Yes," he was saying acridly, "hard work, ain't it? Twiddlin' a bit o' wire about—that's what you lady's maids call tough doin's these times, by James! Pack o' slowbellied sons o' sin! Mr. Pochin, knock hell out of 'em. Or if you're too much of a flunky to do it, I will. Yes, by Judas!"

He took a couple of steps closer to the sweating hands and singled on one of them, a dark faced fellow who had presumed to cast a half scowl in his direction.

"What's that?" he snarled in his high old voice. "Look old fashioned at me, would you? Mr. Pochin, what's this man's name? Leach? All right for you, Leach—you let me have any more o' that sort o' dumb insolence and I'll get you six months in the jug. You hear me? Six dozen's what you want, but I can't give you that these milk-and-water times."

Leach was ill advised enough to mutter something under his breath, and Wall was at him again in an instant. Thrusting Pochin aside, he snatched a belaying pin from its rack and rushed at his victim, for once almost inarticulate with fury.

Leach, after a second's hesitation, dodged him. He was, of all the *Highlander's* crew, possibly the only one to whom the epithet dangerous might have been applied—a long, sallow, ill conditioned man with a permanent squint; but there was something in Wall's grim faced attack that shook his nerve. He turned and ran with the little master hot on his heels, the rest of the ship's company looking on open mouthed.

From hatchway to forecastle door the chase went, and from there back again aft. Leach was cursing as he went by now, and that seemed to put the finishing touches to Wall's ire. He halted abruptly and his hand went back over his shoulder to hurl the belaying pin.

At that precise instant Leach leaped for the bulwarks, clutching at a stay. He missed it, slipped, lay teetering for an instant across the top of the rail and then vanished overside into the Atlantic.

Several things happened immediately. Crammond, with a "Hard-aport!" over his shoulder to the wheelsman, tore a lifebuoy from its chocks and whirled it clear of the vessel's side. Pochin picked up his watch in half a dozen rapped orders and rushed for a boat. But it was the skipper who moved first. He flung the belaying pin down, whipped off his coat, was on the rail like an ancient stag and after Leach into the sea.

Heeling over from full wheel, the *Highlander* swung on her tracks. In ten minutes' time Pochin's boat was in the water making for the lifebuoy perfectly visible on the heaving waves; and

in fifteen the two men were back aboard, neither of them apparently a particle the worse for their wetting.

Sea water had small effect on Captain Wall's humor. He strode up to the dripping Leach and shook a no less dripping fist in his face.

"Clumsy dog!" he spluttered. "I'll settle you. Get for'd and change, and then come aft to me. Cook!" he shouted at the galley. "See this man here has a drink o' cocoa, and don't let it be next week either. Send me up one, too. Well, what is it? What are you gentlemen gawpin' at? Never see a man overside before? Get on with it. Mr. Crammond, put her back on course again. I'm goin' to change."

He ran up the ladder, his thin shanks more spindly than ever under his wet trousers. Pochin and Crammond looked at each other.

"Well, I'm damned!" said the former. "And what d'you think of that?"

"H'm!" said Crammond. "For a dodderer that ought to be in a home that wasn't so bad. He's got guts anyway—even if he is crazy."

He went back to his post, and the *Highlander* turned south once more. Ten minutes later the boatswain brought Leach to the bridge. Wall was in the chartroom.

"Send that fellow in here!" he called.

Leach, still scowling, went. Crammond put his arms on the rail and looked at the cloud flecked coast in the distance, his mind on the possibility of the Old Man behind him sometime making a mistake. At that age, he reflected, one would be enough.

He was suddenly aroused by a furious outbreak from the chartroom, in tones unmistakably not Wall's. A spring took him to the door and he stood for an instant side by side with the scandalized boatswain.

Wall was sitting behind the table as usual, his old eyes glittering like stones. In front of him the gangling Leach had seized the first weapon that came handy—a heavy paperweight of lead—and was threatening to dash it into the skipper's face. As Crammond and the boatswain started forward Wall spoke, without shifting his eyes from the man before him.

"Stand back!" he said imperiously. "Drop that, you! Drop it, I say!"

For a dozen breaths there was a clash of wills in that chartroom, the cold eyed skipper and the sullen, smoldering Leach confronting each other. Then Leach's glance wavered and dropped; he put the weight back on the table with an inarticulate growl and remained staring at the floor. The boatswain made to grasp him, but Wall intervened.

"That's enough," he said. "Leach, you're nothin' but a plain fool. All of you hands are—and you're not the only ones."

A glance flicked at Crammond and the boatswain.

"What in tarnation d'ye think'd happen to you if you touched me with that thing, Leach? Clink, you great lummox. That's what, eh? Now, I'm not goin' to say any more about this. You're just out of the water, and not responsible, maybe. Get out now, and don't let's have any more o' this nonsense. All right, Bosun, take this fellow away."

He swung round to Crammond when the others had gone.

"And I suppose you're wonderin', Mr. Crammond," he said sarcastically, "whether I've gone clean loony at last. Oh, yes, you are; you needn't tell me. I know all about you. I've had the handlin' of plenty of you in my time. There aren't many things you think of I'm not fly to, my boy. Now, I suppose you'd have had that man in irons, eh? Threatenin' an officer, huh? Dignity o' that ticket you're so proud of, huh? Well, just you think over what I did to him, and you'll learn a bit about dealin' with a man that's not himself."

He went into his cabin and shut the door. Crammond looked about him a trifle wildly. This old man was a problem.

CADIZ was past, and the *Highlander* was standing out into the sea lanes well clear of the African shore. Captain Wall had resumed his normal impossibility, and the Leach occurrence seemed to have been forgotten, except by Leach himself, who had black looks for the skipper's back but carefully avoided anything to his face that might have been construed into insubordination.

The third morning out Crammond entered the chartroom to find Pochin tapping the glass, a serious expression on his face.

"See that?" he said.

Crammond looked at it and whistled.

"Whew!" he said. "Looks like business, eh?"

"What looks like business?" A strident pipe behind him made him turn. Wall had come in; he went up to the barometer and studied it. "Well, what's all the fuss about? Never seen a glass drop before, eh? Like to turn back, Mr. Crammond?"

He left his questions unanswered and went to the door, where he stood scanning the horizon. There was nothing to be seen there out of the ordinary; but the sunshine had a peculiar tinny brilliance about it, and the line where sky met sea was sharp and hard as if drawn by a ruler. The skipper sniffed.

"Wind comin'," was all he said and departed on his morning rounds of the ship, looking for trouble and finding it.

He was right. Wind was coming and by evening it had arrived, with every prospect of remaining. With darkness the sea began to get up, and by dawn of the next day the *Highlander* was slogging her way into a serried army of rollers, wet as a half tide rock and groaning in every rivet of her antiquated frame. More, the glass was still falling, and unless experience went for nothing there would be real dirt before night.

Wall sat in the chartroom drawing quietly at his pipe and listening to the myriad noises of the storm. Crammond was on the bridge in front of him, glistening in oilskins and sou'wester, the blown spume dripping from the end of his incisive nose and his hard eyes screwed up as he peered forward into the gray-green welter. The *Highlander* was laboring heavily, and every once in awhile she would stick her rusty nose through a sea instead of rising to it; Crammond frowned at the sight, tapping the deck impatiently with his foot.

Another member of Wall's complement was also taking notice, apparently, for there was a sudden whistle from the engine room. Wall went to the pipe.

"Well?" he inquired. "What's the matter, Mr. McAlister?"

Judging by the aggrieved tone of the communication that floated upward from the engineer's private purgatory, a good many things were. Wall listened carefully until the complaint, or request —or both—ended; then he as carefully replaced the whistle at his own end, grunted as if in satisfaction at a good deed well done and resumed his seat. The whistle sounded again, but he did not stir. Nor did he during the subsequent fantasia that continued for some time at intervals of approximately ten seconds. Only a slight relaxation of his iron hard cheeks showed that he even heard it.

Finally McAlister gave up whistling, and a few minutes later his foxy, crimson face—crimson with more than exposure—appeared in haste at the top of the ladder. He entered the chartroom without knocking.

"Sirr," he said, "I dinna ken if ye consider't verra humorous for tae shut doon on yer engineer when he's askin' for instructions—"

Wall turned to him with a great show of surprise.

"Why, Mr. McAlister," he said. "Thought that was you sayin' your prayers. Wasn't it?"

McAlister choked.

"Ye ken fine whut it was I was sayin', Coptain," he said. "We'll hae to reduce. She's rackin' herself to pieces."

Wall lighted his pipe with much care

and disposed the match on the edge of the table.

"Oh?" he said, as if to himself. "So that's it, eh? Want to reduce, do you? Well, Mr. McAlister, the door's yonder. Your place is in the engine room, obeyin' my orders. When I want to reduce, you'll be informed. Good mornin' to you."

"Man—" the Scot began. Wall stopped him.

"Yes, yes, I know all about it. I'm crazy, that's it, eh? But crazy or no, McAlister, I'm master of this vessel, and I think you've heard that before. You don't drop a revolution until I tell you."

"There'll be trouble, sirr—"

"There'll be worse if we slow. She's got bare steerage way now. Anything less and she'll broach."

"She's makin' five knots, sirr."

"Barely four. Slacken and she'll be down to three or less. A couple of these seas and we'll never get her back."

"Ye'll not reduce, then?"

"No. That's my business. And that's enough, McAlister. Get out o' this. I'm busy."

"Ye'll droon the lot of us."

"Good riddance, then. Parcel o' ninnies. Outside, now. I'll not tell you again."

"Ye dom sanctimonious auld caterpillar—!"

McAlister flung out of the chartroom, and Crammond heard the wicked stuff whistling from him as he passed. The *Highlander* continued her toilsome way and Wall sat on in his chair, watchful and silent, not to be approached.

IT WAS noon when he rose and came out on to the bridge. By this time the wind was blowing in earnest, and from the rail the *Highlander's* forward decks were a spectacle of creamy foam and clouds of flying drift as she bored and burrowed her way into the seas. Wall, peeping unconcernedly over the dodger, laughed.

"Bit of a dustin'," he said to Crammond. "Good Western Ocean weather. I like it. Hear what that Glasgow mule we've got below wanted me to do a bit back? Reduce, if you please. Me—reduce for this!"

Crammond, feeling the Old Man's eye on him, forebore to comment. Wall went on.

"Here's the sort of stuff you want, Mister, to shake a vessel down. Show what she's made of. What her people are made of, too. Good for everybody." He snuffed the roaring wind with an air of appreciation. "Think we'll see what kind o' cattle the crimps ashore sent us this trip, Mister. You and Mr. Pochin drop down and turn out all hands. I'll carry on here for half an hour. Find 'em something to do about the decks—"

Crammond stared at him.

"In this, sir?" he asked automatically.

"Yes—and why not?" Wall demanded. "Afraid of gettin' the men's feet wet, Mister? I see. You're one o' these kid glove and lavender officers, I can see. Well, we'll put it as an order. Tumble out all hands, Mister Mate, and put 'em to work cleanin' ship. Start down in that," he pointed to the deluged foredecks, "and keep 'em at it for an hour. Take Mr. Pochin as well. Now, jump to it, Mister."

Crammond for an instant suspected that his hour was come, and that Wall had finally taken leave of his senses. The order was ludicrous—impossible; beyond all reason. He was about to tell the master so and thus precipitate the conflict he had been dreaming of for days, when he caught Wall looking at him with a bright twinkle—a speculative, grimly humorous flicker that said as plainly as words that the skipper was reading his thoughts. At any rate, it was sane; superlatively sane, and Mr. Crammond altered his mind abruptly about that scene. He moved to obey and Wall's twinkle grew into a sardonic chuckle.

"Yes, you'd better, Mr. Mate," he said.

Crammond called Pochin and in a few

adhesive words explained the state of affairs. The little Second blasphemed vigorously, but the sight of Wall's beady gray eye cocked at him through the window caused him to subside, shrugging; and the two fought their way forward.

Crammond hammered on the forecastle door.

"All hands!" he called, as it was opened a crack.

There was no reply, and he forced the door wider apart. As he did so a green sea thundered on the forepeak and raced aft, deluging him from above and swirling kneedeep about him. Gallons poured into the forecastle, to the accompaniment of hearty growls from within.

"All hands! Tumble out there!" Crammond called again. "Skipper's orders, men!"

A chorus of protest arose out of the smoke filled dimness.

"Can't be done, sir—not in this." "Too dirty." "Wait till she drops—"

The *Highlander's* crew did not appreciate the prospect of work under present conditions.

The boatswain, Torrens, stuck his head out.

"D'ye mean it, sir?" he asked in tones of astonishment.

"Mean it?" said Crammond. "Of course I mean it. What d'ye think? Turn 'em out, there. Now then, men!"

The boatswain vanished within, and there was once again the sound of argument. Apparently he was having trouble in convincing the recalcitrants.

Crammond, in a passion, flung the door wide. He was about to enter and take strenuous steps when a figure shot past him, knocking him staggering as it went. It was Wall, and he was in a blazing rage.

"Now!" He stood in the middle of the forecastle floor, arms akimbo, chin out, his eyes shining with their old battle light. "Now, who's refusin' duty here? Out with you, the lot of you! Tumble out on that deck, or, by James, I'll have every louse of you in the jug at Las Palmas! Now, will you move, you—"

Crammond did not see the thing thrown. It came whizzing out of the darkness at the back of the forecastle —a ponderous, steel handled clasp-knife, closed but formidable. It was hurled by the man Leach, and took the skipper with a thud on the side of the skull. He staggered and collapsed in a heap on the deck.

Crammond ran forward.

"Put that man in irons!" he snapped. Then, to a couple of the staring hands, "Pick Captain Wall up," he said. "Take him to his cabin and tell the steward to see to him till I come. Now, men—" he swung to the rest of them—"there's enough of this. Stand by for a call if I want you. Mr. Pochin, you're acting first officer. Mr. Torrens—" to the boatswain—"you'll take Second. You, Slade, are boatswain. Get the cook to whack out a hot meal as soon as may be; we'll have to work double watches tonight. That's all, men. Mr. Pochin, Mr. Torrens, come with me."

He went out of the forecastle with a murmur of approval following him, and a pleasant tingling sensation pervading his being. At last—temporarily, true, but surely it would be more than that—he was in command of his ship.

He went straight to the chartroom and called McAlister. The Scot was almost incoherent with enthusiasm at his news.

"And noo I'll reduce, sir?" he asked.

"At once," said Crammond, and went down to look at Wall.

The old man lay motionless and very pale, breathing stertorously, and to the mate's unskilled eye it was clear that he had received a serious blow. It would be hours at least before he was conscious; and even then—

Crammond nodded thoughtfully to himself as he returned to the bridge.

IT WAS two bells in the afternoon watch when Captain Wall was put out of commission; and in an hour's time some of the effects of his removal were beginning to make themselves felt.

The weather was lifting a little, and a pale sun now and again showed itself through the driving clouds. In one of these intervals land appeared, high ground six or seven miles to leeward; a rocky coast, fanged with reefs that were lines of savage white in this sea. Crammond regarded it with an unfriendly eye and went in to consult the chart.

"One of the Canaries," he pronounced finally. "We're off course a bit. But we ought to be in Las Palmas tonight with luck."

"We shan't if she doesn't render better than this," said Pochin, who was watching the *Highlander's* bows.

"What d'ye mean?"

"She's steering like a cow," said the Second. "Look at the card."

Crammond did so and frowned.

"Hold her steady there!" he said to the man at the wheel.

"Aye, sir!"

The steersman was having obvious trouble, however. The *Highlander* had begun to yaw and swing, no longer driving her way ahead into the waves, but every now and then taking one askew on one bow or the other, so that she lurched increasingly widely from the direct track of the rollers. Crammond watched her for awhile, until an unusually big sea knocked her points aside. The steersman grunted, wrenching at the spokes.

"She's not taking it, sir," he said in answer to Crammond's unspoken question.

The new master bit his lip. He did not meet Pochin's eye, but all three men were uncomfortably clear that a little more of this deviation and the *Highlander* might be in a difficult fix. Broached to, with her decrepit engines, she might end in anything.

Crammond made up his mind rapidly, and swallowed the pill. He called down to McAlister.

"Mac," he said almost apologetically, "we'll have to have full speed again."

"Whut's that?" The Glasgow accents were testy.

Crammond repeated it.

"She won't steer as she is," he added.

"It canna be done, sirr." McAlister's tone was stiff. "Ye'll have somethin' carry away here."

"Must be done," said Crammond. "We're on a lee shore, anyhow. I want another two knots at least, Mr. McAlister."

"Then I'll no give ye ony guarantee whut'll come of it. It's your responnsibeelity."

"I know that. Increase speed!"

Crammond slammed the whistle home into the pipe again and muttered something un-christian under his breath. This was no very promising beginning to a first command.

Once again the *Highlander* began to tremble all over as the engines took up their bucketing. Slowly, very slowly, she began to steer better, although her bows were once more invisible half the time. Crammond, haggard eyed on a sudden, stood with Pochin. Neither of them spoke for perhaps ten minutes, while the vessel's decks quivered beneath them.

Then Crammond said, "Thank the Lord for that, anyway!" as the steersman kept the swinging card steady.

Pochin nodded.

A sudden crash from below, followed by a sound as if ten million serpents had taken up their abode in Mr. McAlister's engine room, prevented him from echoing Crammond's pæan of thanksgiving. A cloud of steam billowed from the hatch, to be instantly whirled away downwind. There was a thunderous flutter underfoot, ending in a series of gigantic hiccoughs; then the racket was abruptly stilled, and the roar of the exhaust fought with the roaring of the storm overhead.

Crammond and Pochin turned to each other, wide eyed. For an instant neither moved. Then Crammond, gulping out something unintelligible, dived recklessly down the ladder.

He met McAlister, half seen through a blinding curtain of steam, on his upper platform. The engineer was decorated

with a picturesque scald, crimson down one side of his face; two of his fingers dangled broken, and there was a man unconscious or dead on the grating at his feet. He greeted Crammond almost casually, however.

"Weel," he said. "An' thot's thot, Coptain! Dinna say I didna tell ye!"

"You go to hell, McAlister!" said Crammond irritably. "What's wrong?"

"Wrang?" The engineer sneered. "Oh, juist a steam feed blawn to ribbons, thot's all's wrang. They're made o' condemned sardine cans, as I've told ye before. There wasna onything else tae be expeckit."

"What's to be done? Can you patch it?"

"Patch it ma auntie!" McAlister laughed bitterly. "Na, there's naethin' to be done. Ye're on a lee shore, ye say, Muster Crammond—I should say, Coptain Crammond? Weel, hoo are ye at the swummin', Coptain? Ye'll be in the caller Atlantic, practisin', if thot's so."

Crammond left him strapping up his fingers and fought his way to the bridge again. The *Highlander* was already broadside on to the seas that clutched and clambered as if they were sure of their prey. For a moment he looked about him, at the wild weather, the crippled ship, and the lee shore yawning for her in plain sight and drawing inexorably nearer every minute. Then he swung to Pochin and Torrens.

"Stand by to abandon!" he said. "Get a slick of oil out, Mr. Torrens. Mr. Pochin, the boats."

Once again he went into the cabin and looked at the unconscious Wall. As he did so there was something uncommonly like tears in his hard blue eyes—tears of pure vexation and anger at fate.

THEY got the boats out, not without tribulation, into Torrens' spreading oil slick. McAlister took one with the ex-boatswain, Pochin the other; the injured engine room hand was lowered to Pochin, and McAlister received the inert Wall, gingerly let down in a cradle.

Crammond stayed on the bridge until all was ready. Then he called down to them—

"Push off!"

"Come on, then!" Pochin shouted. Crammond shook his head.

"Cam' on wi' ye, mon!" McAlister cupped his hands. "There's a chance this way. There's nane, thot!"

Once again Crammond signified a negative. McAlister ransacked the Scotch tongue for synonyms for fool, and Pochin cursed helplessly; but the red headed man was obstinate. At least there was this to be done as master of the *Highlander*.

A mighty comber lifted the ship like a feather, threatening to dash her down on the two boats. There was a chorus of frightened yelps from the crew, and many oars thrust them to safety from the ship's side. Pochin rose to his feet a moment, but some one pushed him down again. The oars straddled and the boats began to pull away.

Crammond leaned on the reeling rail, watching them. Fear was absent from him; only he felt a kind of exaltation, thus left alone with the dying *Highlander* in her last hours. His own last hours as well, it might be; but that consideration merely touched on the edge of his consciousness. This was the master's place, the master's duty; to go down with the ship he had commanded. It was somehow an entirely satisfactory idea.

Upon a sudden he straightened up and peered under his hand at McAlister's boat not fifty yards from him. As it rose to the top of a wave he saw that things were happening in it. A figure—short, bearded, frail—had risen from the floor boards and was waving skinny arms about its head and fairly dancing with passion. The men had stopped rowing, and McAlister was apparently engaged in equally acrimonious argument with it. As Crammond watched, Leach, desperate, jumped to his feet as well and swung his oar at the skipper;

but Wall whipped a hand behind him and Crammond saw the tiny pale spit of flame, and the man threw up his hands and pitched overboard into the sea.

Wall scrambled over the thwarts to the stern sheets and pointed at the ship. Slowly and sulkily the boat turned, and with it turned Pochin's; the Second was erect again, driving his men with tongue and voice.

It was Wall who caught one of the dangling falls and, years or not, dragged himself aboard hand over fist, while Pochin and Torrens behind him hounded the reluctant crew up to the bulwarks one by one. It was Wall who stood at the side for a moment, pistol still in hand, yelling threats and obloquy down at them. And it was Wall who finally turned and mounted to his bridge, pale, set eyed, and with his old mouth compressed tight under the beard.

He marched straight up to Crammond.

"Mr. Mate," he said, "what the hell d'ye mean, abandonin' my ship?"

Crammond told him of the happenings of the last three hours. Wall sniffed contemptuously.

"Huh!" he said. "Just like you. Didn't I tell that pig headed animal down there he wasn't to reduce? Didn't I tell him why? And then, as soon's my back's turned, Mr. Mate, what happens? Got to try tinkerin' with things, haven't you? Might have known those engines wouldn't have stood a sudden strain like that. But no. Oh, no. You young kindergarten pups know it all, don't you? And now see what's happened."

He held up the pistol.

"That's the first time I've had to do that, Mister, in sixty years at sea. You just think that over, and see what comes of tryin' to be clever."

He paused, and then went on in a slightly milder tone.

"There's one thing to be said for you," he announced. "You didn't run away yourself. You know that much about a master's place, Crammond, and I'll log you knowin' it. When you've been well boiled, there might be the makin's of a master in you yet. You can say I said so, if you like. But you've a hell of a lot to learn."

He resumed his acid, sneering tone.

"Now, Mr. Crammond," he said, "what are you standin' about there for? Jump to it, and let's get this vessel out of the pickle you've got her into."

Crammond hesitated.

"I don't see how—" he began.

Wall broke into a grating laugh.

"No," he said. "Of course you don't. That's one o' the things they don't teach at young ladies' academies, huh? Well, I'll have to teach you, that's all. Sail, Mr. Crammond—sail."

Crammond gaped at him.

"Sail!" Wall repeated, stamping his feet. "Get down now and whack that bunch o' cripples into gettin' sail on her. She carries 'em, doesn't she? Then why in hell an' damnation don't you use 'em? Get sail on her and I'll have her off this lee shore in an hour. Now, below with you, and put 'em through it; and if any of 'em looks lopsided at you, tell him I'll blow a hole in him as soon as sneeze. Off with you!"

It was, as a matter of fact, three hours later and dark before the *Highlander*, a couple of black and ragged, but none the less effective, trysails on her pair of stump masts, began to claw her way out from the reach of those grasping fangs of rock. Those three hours had taught all hands, with the exception of Wall, something of what extreme and furious toil was—also what might be accomplished by it. More, it had taught some of them the infection of a personality, for the little skipper, wan and shaken as he might be, had in the thick of it deserted his bridge, stuck his pistol in his pocket and stood over them as they fought, drenched and battered, about the boom. Even the dockside scourings from the forecastle stopped their sulky growling and labored almost with inspiration.

It was done at last, and the *Highlander*, foot by foot, but steadily, fought

her way clear of the final point of rock. Wall left Pochin on the bridge and went down into the cuddy, where the steward had just served a travesty of a meal. Crammond and McAlister were already at table, and something not readily to be explained brought them both to their feet as the old man entered.

He glared at them in his customary manner.

"Sit down!" he said. "What's all this jack-in-a-box business? This ain't Buckingham Palace. Sit down and get on with your food, the two of you."

He gulped a cup of tea, looking over the edge of it with red eyes staring out of a pallid, indomitable countenance.

"Well, Mr. Crammond," he said, setting the cup down, "d'ye still think you're a better man than I am? Still think you should be commandin' the *Highlander* if you had your rights. Eh?"

And Crammond looked him squarely in the face for a moment. Then he laughed, and there was humor in the laugh.

"No, Captain Wall, sir," he said with conviction.

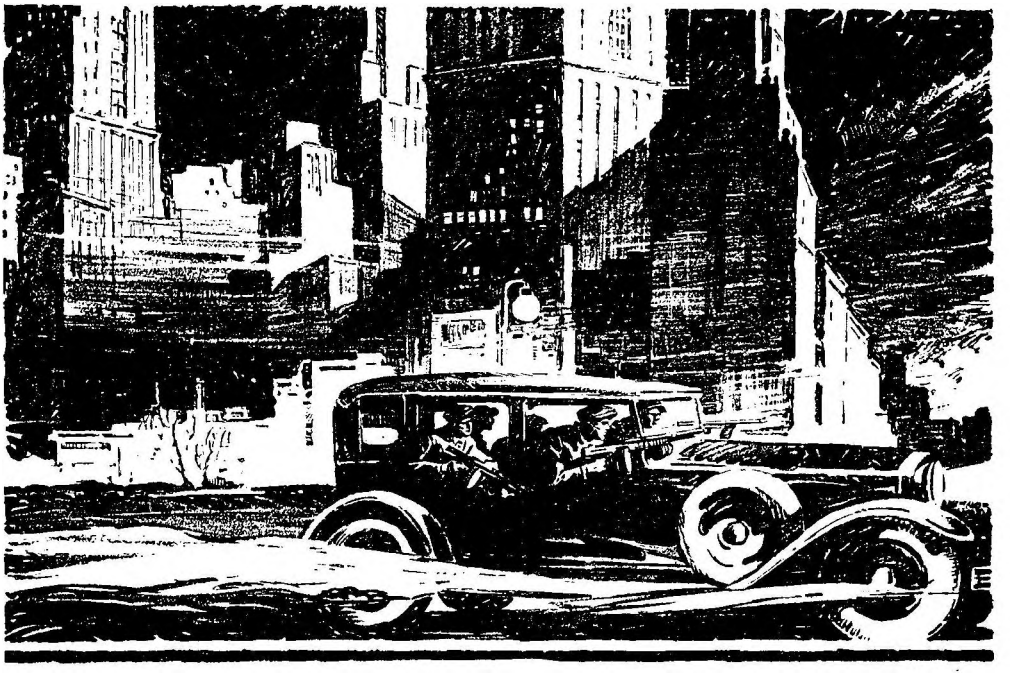
Isle Royale

By HELEN von KOLNITZ HYER

Michigan's Farthest North is a rocky island in northern Lake Superior, a wild life sanctuary, home of the largest moose herd in the world. Its ancient copper mines worked by prehistoric peoples were considered so valuable that Benjamin Franklin, settling the boundary line between Canada and the United States, refused to sign the treaty until the line was bent north to include Isle Royale in the American Territory. Most of the rich deposits were worked out about seventy years ago. There is a small Summer colony, but Winter still finds it isolated, uninhabited, and a great menace to navigation before the ice closes in.

SINKER of ships, master of man and moose,
What primal earth upheaval hurled you loose,
Set you Toll Keeper of the inland sea?
Do you hold grudge against the race of man
Who tore the raw, red copper from your cracks
Of fissured rock, for spear and battle ax,
In the forgotten past when war began?
Or do you guard some grimmer mystery,
Rock prisoned, hid beneath your pine spiked sods?

Some devastated altar secretly
Forged in the twilight of the Elder Gods?
Wind sculptured, glacier scarred, unfriendly, bleak,
You watch the ships of men with eager prows
Chisel your beach; withhold the gifts they seek;
Forever faithful to your ancient vows.
Your pines have swayed to song of voyageur;
Staccato rifle echoes ricocheted
From cliff to cliff, but they have only made
Wild, lonely silence, wilder, lonelier.
One sound there is that rises from your lake;
Even in Summer noons, sometimes, it comes,
And gallant yachts and steel keeled steamers break
Beneath the thunder of your Indian Drums.
Today no guns may wake your silences;
Man has been kinder to the ranging moose
Than you to man— No bright tongued death can loose
His ruthless hunger through your quiet trees.
Men feel your malice, but the Summers bring
Their swinging footsteps back to your dim trails,
And children's laughter, and the glint of sails;
Rock hard, you bide your time, remembering.
Toll Keeper of the inland sea, moisten your lips;
Autumn will come when all the garnered store
Of golden wheat that feeds the world must pour
Man-manned to sea in spacious hulls of ships.
Autumn will come and, with the Autumn, ice,
And fleets of ships, and flashing planes that hum . . .
The wind is rising—hear the Indian Drum!
Gird up your rocky loins for sacrifice!
Men know—and men will go, though wisdom mocks.
The ships will pass the straits thick sheathed in ice.
And Spring will come and bear their sacrifice—
Brave, frozen bodies on your cruel rocks!



THERE were eleven men in the room and they all had their eyes on a cheap alarm clock which sat on a buffet back of the bar. The clock ticked loosely and laboriously, the rhythm of its beats now and then broken as if it were gasping. Each time this happened the men shifted uneasily, then settled back to watch in sullen fascination.

It was growing late. The minute hand of the clock swung up the old face and pointed to nine; the hour hand was at twelve. When the minute hand had reached the numeral a telephone in a dilapidated booth rang sharply. The men twisted restlessly in their chairs. One of them got up and went to the booth, which was in a corner of the room. He was a man of medium height and he had a small, pinched face that was very pale. His little button-like eyes were weak and watery. As he went to the phone tears of excitement streamed from them. The others watched him closely as if a great deal depended on him.

"Hello! . . . Yeah. . . ." He spoke in a sharp, shrill voice. "O.K—we're ready." He hung up. "They're on their way," he said, and walked across the room to his seat, where he lighted a cigaret.

Some of the others, as if in vast relief, did the same. And others, with the general relief in the tension, went behind the bar and poured themselves straight whiskies. These they drank with expressions of pain and disgust and then chased the drinks a second round. One of these drinkers was a squat, heavy man with thick, splay hands and a broad, blunt face. His eyes were a dull gray. But his chief characteristic was his breath. As he inhaled and exhaled there were sounds similar to those caused by a razor as it is drawn slowly across a strop.

When they had drunk they all sat down again. There was a little light conversation. Some one told a dirty joke, but nobody laughed much.

"I wish they'd come," said the man with the heavy breath. He spoke in a hoarse, asthmatic voice. "I gotta date."

Some of them smiled at this. The

EMPIRE

A Complete Novelette

By

HENRY LACOSSITT

man with the heavy breath was known to have a weakness for all women. He was called Bat.

They were a strange lot. All of them were dressed in a very positive manner and their clothes did not suit them. The garments fairly shone. Sitting as they were, in all this finery, their blank eyes refused to look at one another. If they were not watching the alarm clock, they were watching the floor, from which they seemed to derive some comfort. It was very dirty.

The minute hand of the old clock swung on up until it covered the hour hand—it was midnight. Somebody swore in a snarling whisper, and then, at a sound which filtered in from the outside, they all edged forward in their chairs and grew tense. The sound was the pulsation of an automobile motor. The motor raced a little and then quieted. The men in the room, when it had died, set up an hysterical conversation. They found things to do. Somebody went behind the bar.

Outside, again, a door slammed. The conversation did not survive that, but paused furtively and they heard the footsteps of two men. As the footsteps came closer the conversation burst out anew, this time more hysterical than before. And then they all looked up as two men came from the outer room into the barroom. One of these men dropped behind his companion and closed the door.

He was a tall man, with sparkling brown eyes, an aquiline nose, a wide genial mouth topped by a well groomed mustache, and there was about him a poised arrogance and assurance that was in sharp contrast to the others in the room. His clothes, too, were not like those of the other men; this man's clothes had been chosen with taste and discrimination. They were like the man —arrogant, sure, exquisite. His hands, showing white against the cuffs of the dark suit he wore, were also like the man; they were carefully kept and graceful and there was in their grace the suggestion of arrogant power. This man was unusual; this was patent at a glance

and it was obvious from the attitude of the others. They deferred in posture and attitude to this man.

After he had closed the door this man turned to those seated. His companion already had been greeted.

"Hello, Spanish," they had all said to the companion.

Now they all said —

"Hello, Big Jack."

"Hello," said the man thus addressed.

The others turned suddenly to their newly found occupations. Some were playing cards. Others were reading newspapers. Others were talking among themselves.

"Let's have a drink, Spanish," went on Big Jack. "You too, Winnie," he included the man behind the bar. This was the man who had answered the telephone. He looked, now, as if he were weeping.

The man addressed as Winnie set three glasses on the bar and produced a quart bottle of whisky. He poured the glasses full. The man known as Spanish watched him with brilliant brown eyes. He was a young man and a very handsome man after an obvious fashion, and it seemed that he was always sneering.

"That's good stuff," said Big Jack.

"Yeah?" sneered Spanish. He lifted his glass.

"Heigh-ho," said Big Jack. They all drank.

The man, Winnie, then came out from behind the bar and walked across the room.

"What's this all about?" asked Spanish.

Big Jack did not answer him, but moved from the bar toward where the others sat. Spanish turned to follow, but Big Jack stopped him.

"No," he said, "you'd better stay there, Spanish."

Spanish looked quickly at Big Jack and at the men seated in the room. As he did so, his foolishly handsome face grew pale. His loose mouth, although even now it did not lose its sneer, sagged. His lips glistened as he ran a nervous tongue over them. His brilliant brown eyes stared widely.

"Good God!" cried Spanish. "Big Jack!"

"Spanish," said Big Jack in an even voice, "you ran a gag on us with Bully Malloy. You took dough for that Green Oaks Job!"

"I didn't!" screamed Spanish. "Honest to God I didn't!"

"Bat!" said Big Jack.

THE man with the noisy breath rose. He told his story hoarsely. It was to the effect that he had seen Spanish take the money from Bully Malloy after the raid by Bully Malloy's mob on the Green Oaks roadhouse, one of the properties of Big Jack. Bat told the story coldly and dispassionately. Every one of Big Jack's men had wondered why the Green Oaks had been caught with such an unusual sum on the premises . . . But for all its cold and dispassionate quality, Bat seemed to relish the story. His ugly face was scowling. And he was listened to attentively. They might smile about his weakness and vanity concerning women, but it was quite different in other matters. Bat was a man to like.

"He's a liar!" screamed Spanish. "He's a liar! I'll—"

"Spanish," said Big Jack, "Bat's not a liar. Where'd you get that dough you played with down at the Steamer the other night?"

The eyes of the accused man bulged.

"I won it!"

"Where?"

"Why—in a crap game—"

Bat growled derision at Spanish's statement.

Big Jack grinned and pulled at his long nose.

"Spanish," he said, "you're a liar." He paused and sipped at a glass of whisky. "Besides, there's thirteen of us here; it's unlucky. Well, get it over, boys."

Spanish held up his hands in a de-

fensive gesture.

"Big Jack!" he screamed. "Oh, my God!"

He didn't finish. The eleven men emptied suddenly roaring automatics in his direction. Spanish, his handsome head bowed, squirmed and staggered about, then toppled forward on the floor. For a moment there was a queer, tight silence.

The eleven men got up, strangling on the smoke from their guns. Some one opened a window. Big Jack got up.

"It don't pay," he said, "not to be on the up and up. It don't pay!"

He coughed in the thick smoke, now whirling angrily from the draft which blew through the open window. Then he walked to the door and opened it.

"Oh, hello, Buddy," he said hastily. He spoke to a young man who was coming into the outer room from a car he had just driven up in front of the place. "I was just goin' out," said Big Jack quickly. "How about a game?"

"Sure," said the young man.

He was scarcely in his twenties, but there was a hard confidence about him that made him appear older. His youthful features were marked with shrewdness beyond their years. Just now he was peering around Big Jack, but the door shut abruptly in his face. Big Jack had pulled it to.

"Why not here?" asked the young man.

"I been here all evening," said Big Jack. His face was a mask.

"Oh," said Buddy. He shrugged. "Is Spanish around?"

"No," said Big Jack. His voice was steady.

"Well, I want to get back at him," said Buddy. "He won a mess o' dough from me the other night in a crap game." The young man turned and walked toward the door.

Big Jack stood for a moment, swaying on his feet. The muscles of his jaws stood out along the dark line of his shaven beard. From within the barroom came the hoarse voice of Bat. Bat was telling them that he was on his way to a date. Big Jack shrugged his shoulders angrily and followed Buddy. Outside, they got into the car the young man drove and rolled away.

Five hours later Big Jack Bannister parted with the young man, after a poker game in which he won seven thousand dollars . . .

It was noon when Big Jack awoke. He rolled over on the pillow and looked out. It was a beautiful October day. He jumped out of bed and put on his slippers and a dressing gown. As he did so an elderly woman entered the room. She was very frail.

"Time to get up, John," she said. She walked across the room and kissed him. "Your breakfast's waiting."

"All right," said Big Jack.

He had his bath, dressed carefully and went downstairs to his meal. There he found the morning paper. Also, his mother handed him a note.

"Frank Traynor called this morning, John," she said.

Big Jack looked up quickly.

"What'd he want?"

"I've written it down."

Big Jack read what she had written in the note. It was to the effect that Frank would like to see him that afternoon at four, if he could come to Frank's office.

"That all?" asked Big Jack.

"Yes," said his mother, "that's all . . . There's a letter there from Carrie, though, that I want you to read."

Big Jack looked at the envelop. It was addressed to Mrs. John Caraway. That had been the name of Big Jack's late father. He opened the letter and read it. It was from his aunt and filled with homely little family matters which gave him a queer sort of pleasure to read. Then, opening a copy of the *Mail*, the leading paper of the town, which had a morning and evening edition, he began to read. And as he read, he smiled.

For there was no doubt about it: The *Mail* was out to get Big Jack Bannis-

ter's scalp. For three weeks, now, with the ace of its staff running a by-line over the articles, there had been a series that denounced the state of affairs existing in the city. The administration, of course, was castigated—the *Mail* had been an opposition paper—but only incidentally. It was because the administration played into the hands of Big Jack Bannister that it came in for its share of abuse. The articles were powerful.

But down at City Hall a wag, who knew more about Big Jack than he should have, said that all this hullabaloo was silly on the part of the *Mail* because if the paper won the fight it would ruin its chief source of news. And this just about revealed the attitude of every one. What, every one asked, could the *Mail*, after all, do about Big Jack Bannister?

However, let the *Mail* do what it might, the lesser fry of gangdom took heart. Over south, the long quiscent Bully Malloy, one time boss of the town, came out of retirement and started operating again. The newspapers said that the police said another bloody gang feud was brewing. But as long as Big Jack was what he was, Bully Malloy couldn't do much. Big Jack had dealt pretty thoroughly with Bully Malloy a number of years back. That had been when Big Jack was just starting, and the first instance of this dealing was a night when he was in a poker game in the Southern Hotel with four other men, all from out of town, and all big-timers. Bully had crashed that game.

"Here," Bully had said, after striding into the room and brushing aside Big Jack's lookout, "deal me in."

On the table Bully had thrown a roll that contained one hundred thousand dollars cold cash. The men at the table had looked at it and four of them had gasped. Big Jack had turned to a man who was being paid for banking that game.

"Give the gentleman," Big Jack had said, "one white chip."

The story stuck. They clashed several other times, too. And big Jack, as was his custom, won—always. But what finally sent Bully Malloy down greased skids was when he took a shot at Big Jack from cover. Big Jack met him next day in Tony Massa's saloon, slapped him, knocked him down, took his gun away from him and threw the shells in his face.

BIG JACK was boss from then on. And even now that Bully Malloy was stirring and there were rumblings of trouble, people had no doubt that Big Jack would weather the situation and the *Mail's* attacks as well. Big Jack had no doubt about it himself.

He read the article about himself and his lurid activities and then looked over the rest of the paper. And there he saw that Joe Spanish, a gangster with a police record, had been found dead on a lonely road in the country. These were no clues. Big Jack frowned a little . . .

"Isn't it awful?"

He looked up and saw his mother. She was reading over his shoulder.

"Yes," he said.

"All those night clubs of yours, John," she went on—"isn't it dangerous?" Big Jack shook his head and shrugged. "John Caraway," said his mother with mock severity, "if ever any of those awful people come around your places, I want you to come straight home!"

Big Jack laughed merrily.

"How's your side, mom?" he asked.

"The pain was worse last night," said his mother.

"Watch it," said Big Jack.

He rose from the table and kissed her. In a few minutes he had left the house.

It was just before four that afternoon when Big Jack drove up to the corner of Twelfth and Hamilton in a big roadster, locked it and got out. As he did so, he encountered the burly, uniformed figure of a policeman.

"Howdy, Mr. Bannister," said the policeman.

"Howdy," said Big Jack. He started on.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Bannister," went on the policeman, "but you've parked your bus in a 'no parking' space."

Big Jack paused and looked around at the curb. It was true; squarely between standards which bore metal signs marked No Parking, his roadster stood. He smiled. Then, reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a ten-dollar bill.

"Watch it for me," he said.

The cop's face drew into a dubious frown.

"O. K, then," said Big Jack. "Take it around the corner and put it where it ought to be." He handed the cop the keys. "The ten is for your trouble."

The cop grinned. He took the keys and got into the car.

"Thanks, Mr. Bannister," he said. He put the key into the ignition. "It's all right, this way."

Big Jack smiled.

"Wait a minute," he said. He walked over and leaned on the door of his roadster.

"How long have I had this car?" he asked.

The cop grinned again.

"Well," he said, "you were first seen drivin' it—let's see—about August 14th. It's October 2nd, now—that's nearly two months."

"Right," said Big Jack. "And you got orders to keep a lookout for it, haven't you?"

The cop stammered.

"Why—why, yeah, I guess I have," he said.

Big Jack's smile grew wider. He pulled at the end of his long nose.

"You oughta know the license number, then," he said. The cop nodded. "Then I'll bet you that ten," said Big Jack, "you can't call it off right."

The cop stared at Big Jack's smile. His broad, heavy face screwed into a thoughtful expression. Then, as if inspired, his face brightened.

"That's a bet," he said. "It's F-111657."

"Wrong," said Big Jack. "It's F-111-857. You owe me the ten."

He chuckled. The cop got out of the car and looked at the number. He found that he was wrong. Ruefully, he reached into his pocket and pulled out the bill.

"I said you owed me the ten," said Big Jack. He turned and walked across the sidewalk toward the entrance of a building which stood on the corner. "Any time—" He laughed over his shoulder and disappeared into the entrance.

Big Jack had entered the *Mail* building.

He walked across a wide, open space, on one side of which was the long marble counter of the circulation and classified advertising departments, and paid no attention at all to the sudden wagging of heads which set up at his appearance. At the rear of this space he boarded an elevator and rose to the fifteenth floor. There he got off and walked to a door. There was a frosted glass panel in the door. On the frosted glass was painted in black letters, City Room.

Big Jack went in. He gave his card to a girl who sat just within the railing that prevented visitors from going farther into the restricted editorial precints and waited, while she took the card across the room to a man who sat in his shirt sleeves at a desk by a window. The man looked at the card, glanced quickly in Big Jack's direction and nodded. The girl hurried back to the railing.

"Mr. Traynor will see you," she said.

Big Jack went through a little gate in the railing. The girl watched him with wide eyes. Inside, as he walked, a tall, splendid figure, the clatter of typewriters paused for an instant, and then renewed with increased vigor. Big Jack smiled with amusement. He looked as if he were pleased. He walked on, with an arrogant stride, between the lines of typewriters to the desk of the man to whom he had sent his card. There he stopped.

"Hello, Frank," he said to the man across the desk.

The man across the desk had been watching Big Jack's approach. He was about the same age as Big Jack, but he looked much older. His thin hair was brushed neatly across his head. He had bright, blue eyes that were cold, a long, keen nose, and a small, very red mouth.

"Hello, Jack," he said.

"Did you want to see me, Frank?"

"Yes, I did. Sit down. Your mother all right?"

"As well as could be expected, I suppose."

The man across the desk nodded and looked intently at Big Jack for a moment. Then, as if not sure of how to begin further conversation, he looked down into the busy traffic of the street. Big Jack also looked down into the street.

"You guys oughta crusade a little against traffic congestion," said Big Jack. He grinned. "It looks as if you gotta crusade about something and you might get somewhere with *that.*"

"Maybe we will," said Frank Traynor.

He ignored Big Jack's sarcasm. They both stared for awhile at the street, their eyes restless with the bustle below.

Big Jack sighed. He was thinking, then, of an editorial in the *Mail.* The editorial had said, among other things, that the city constituted Big Jack's empire. Big Jack's smile grew wider. But then he remembered that Frank Traynor, managing editor of the *Mail,* had sent for him.

"What's on your mind, Frank?" he asked.

Frank Traynor whirled in his swivel chair.

"A lot, Jack," he said.

Big Jack laughed and took off his coat and hat.

"I'll settle myself, then," he said.

"Jack," said Frank Traynor, "we were friends once. That was a long time ago, but I guess we're still friends in a way, because of that, whatever's happened."

Traynor paused. He looked very tired. Big Jack said nothing. He sat easily in his chair, far more sure of himself than the man opposite. It was true; he and Frank Traynor had been boyhood friends, but he wondered that Frank had brought it up.

"Jack," resumed Frank, "there're not many people in this town who know your real name. I'm one of those who know it. Your real name's never been in the paper. No one has ever gotten your picture. Now what would you think if I printed your real name?"

Big Jack chuckled and looked into Frank Traynor's bright blue eyes. Suddenly his smile vanished, his mouth grew grim and his brown eyes flashed angrily.

"That," said Big Jack Bannister, "would be a lousy trick. My mother's not mixed up in this and you damn well know it, Frank."

Frank Traynor shook his head.

"I know," he said. "I don't intend to print. But I just wanted you to think about it. Because I happen to know my boy *is* mixed up in it. And what I say to you now is *stay away from Buddy!*"

Frank Traynor half rose from his chair as he said that, his face drawn with emotion; his bright eyes were pleading with Big Jack. Then, noticing the rather inquisitive expressions on the faces of others in the room, the editor sat down quickly.

BIG JACK looked down in the street. People were scurrying out of the way of autos and trucks. His eyes started a little as he saw a truck turn the corner and past the *Mail* building. He smiled. It was his own truck; usually it carried beer. He lighted a cigaret.

"I can't do anything about that, Frank," he said, his eyes on the truck. "He won't stay away from me. Besides," he finished, grinning at the editor, "I guess he's old enough to know what he's doing."

Swift, quiet rage crossed Traynor's

face. When he spoke, it was between tightly clenched teeth.

"You think so? What do you know about it? He's just turned twenty-one. He's hard and wise, already, but not underneath. The point is that he's beginning to look *like you!*"

Big Jack's eyes widened with honest amazement, for in Frank Traynor's voice there was hateful resentment.

"He wants to look like you! He flashes a roll that would choke a cow! He's a born gambler, I know, but I'm trying to break him of it. And he thinks you —*you*—are the greatest guy in the world!"

Frank Traynor paused again. It was as if he had said the boy was already beyond redemption. He leaned across the desk.

"You don't need him, Jack; you don't need his money. You've got your finger in every racket in this town. You've got more power than anybody in this State. What the hell does Buddy mean to you? As it is he's killing his mother by degrees. He's putting ten years or more on my age. That's nothing to you, I know, but I'm asking you—no, by God, I'm warning you to stay away from him!"

Frank Traynor brought his fist down on the desk in a convulsive movement. In his bright blue eyes there was moisture. His small, ruddy mouth quivered.

Big Jack eyed him for a moment with amazement. Frank Traynor's rage was impressive. But then the gambler smiled in amused contempt. He shrugged and looked down into the street.

As he did so, his brown eyes started in horror. Traynor saw the expression and turned quickly.

They both saw a man, caught in the maze of traffic, try to avoid a truck—Big Jack's truck; saw him pause in bewilderment, saw the truck swerve; saw him, in his confusion, run in front of the lumbering vehicle.

They turned their heads.

Big Jack looked at the editor. His face was pale and angry.

"Anything else?" he said. His voice was hard.

"No!" said Traynor. His voice was equally hard.

They both glanced off for an instant as reporters and photographers rushed out of the office bound for the accident in the street.

Big Jack sneered.

"I'll save you guys some trouble, Frank; that was one of my trucks. Now you'll have more stuff to raise hell with me about." The editor, although he was surprised, made no comment. "I'll humor you," went on Big Jack. "If that kid o' yours comes around again, I'll tell him his papa doesn't want him to play with me any more—see?"

Still the editor said nothing. But there was in his blue eyes a cold disgust. Big Jack laughed. Then, picking up his hat and coat, he walked through the big room, glancing with savage contempt at the awed eyes of those working there. He reached the gate in the railing and turned.

"So long, Frank!" he called. "Remember what this rag o' yours said about me!"

He waved a white hand at Frank Traynor in a gesture of disdainful dismissal. Then, laughing, he strode out. But as he strode out he felt curiously ineffectual. For Frank Traynor was unmoved.

Downstairs, Big Jack ran across the street to the scene of the accident. Shouldering people aside, he made his way through the gathered crowd, and there he encountered the cop who had been left to watch his car. They were just bearing the body of the man toward an ambulance. The newspaper photographers were snapping their pictures.

"What's his name?" said Big Jack to the cop.

"Lord, Mr. Bannister, wasn't it—"

"What in hell's his name!"

Big Jack's eyes glowed from beneath his frown. The cop, caught up short by the expression and by the tone of the

gambler's voice, hastily pulled his record book from his pocket. He told the man's name. Big Jack jotted it down.

"I thought I said for you to watch my car!" snarled Big Jack. "You got a hell of a nerve comin' over here!"

"But, Mr. Bannister—" began the cop. He was bewildered.

"Ah—hell!" snapped Big Jack.

He shoved the cop out of his way and, glancing briefly at the stretcher which was disappearing into the ambulance, walked off.

That evening the *Mail* would print a story about the accident and about a man's death, and insert bitter phrases about the cost to community and humanity of Big Jack's operations. It would also say that Big Jack had escaped unscathed. For, although the truck and the others of the fleet usually carried beer, they had been empty at the time of the accident. But in the morning the *Mail* would be forced to print, with some chagrin, that the family of the man had been presented with a check for fifty thousand dollars by Big Jack Bannister.

Big Jack had planned this on his way to the scene, but now he was not thinking of it. He was angry. He entered a tall building nearby, took the elevator to the top floor, where he had an office. He entered.

"Good morning, Mr. Bannister."

"Good morning," said Big Jack.

He spoke to an elderly, mouse-like man who wore thick spectacles. He was Big Jack's secretary and clerk. Only he, of all the gambler's entourage, knew his chief's real name and where he lived.

"I have the reports in order, Mr. Bannister," said the secretary. "Would you like to hear them?"

"No!" said Big Jack.

The secretary looked surprised, but said nothing. Big Jack passed through the outer office and into his private office. He slammed the door behind him. Then he walked to a window and looked out. It was a commanding view.

Below and around him the city stretched for miles, appearing from the top floor of this, its tallest building, a vast, impersonal miniature. Bordering it on one side, the great river swung around the point on which it was built, coming out of nowhere to the north, going nowhere to the south. Across the river, rose the smoke of steel mills and a mass of other industries. From below came a faint, monotonous hum, the low voice of the city. The hum irritated Big Jack. He walked to a huge mahogany desk and sat down. From this high vantage, the city had always seemed impersonal. Now it was getting personal, and Big Jack didn't like that. The head of an empire shouldn't think of such things. But he couldn't help thinking of them.

First, there was Spanish. There was something personal about Spanish's death that was like a challenge. For he knew, now, that Bat had tricked Spanish, and he did not mean to let it go. But he had to find a motive for Bat's trickery; he had to go warily. Bat was popular . . . Then, there was Buddy. Big Jack liked the lad. Also, there was something about Buddy's father, who had been the friend of Big Jack's boyhood. He had to admit that he liked Frank Traynor and that Frank Traynor was very much in the right, and he didn't want to . . .

Then, there was his mother. Traynor had struck him in his vulnerable spot there. For years she had lived innocent of her son's real life. And Big Jack didn't want her to know about his real life. His mother was old; she was ill. What remained of her life must not be stained by himself.

"Isn't it awful?" she had said . . .

He thought again of Frank Traynor, and he felt vaguely ashamed of his conduct before the editor.

He arose and looked at the city again.

It was his, as Frank Traynor had implied. A vast, sprawling, helpless thing it was, impotent because of its complex size. A great impersonal thing to be exploited, with its dairies, laundries, bar-

ber shops, theaters, restaurants, flower shops, transportation, produce and packing businesses, tailor shops, illicit liquor, and vice. The hand of Big Jack rested heavily on it. But it must not grow personal.

Big Jack thought of Bully Malloy, and he smiled, for he suddenly felt better. Bully Malloy was distinctly in the sphere of his activities and as impersonal as a paving stone. Bully Malloy was rising against him. Big Jack wondered what they had done about reprisal for Bully's raid on the Green Oaks roadhouse . . .

The secretary appeared at the door.

"They're all here, Mr. Bannister," said the secretary.

"Let 'em in," said Big Jack.

MEMBERS of his mob filed in. They sat down. The secretary, in a mild voice, reported the receipts of September in tribute money from various businesses. Big Jack listened with satisfaction. All was in order. Then he turned to his men. Winnie was there and so was Bat. Bat's heavy breathing sounded raspingly in the room. Winnie was talking.

"Bully wasn't with 'em," he was saying shrilly, "but the Greek was. He ran that Green Oaks party. We got him."

Winnie's little eyes gleamed. He pulled his mouth back, revealing uneven teeth. He had enjoyed the afternoon's business. Winnie was an ex-lightweight pug.

Big Jack nodded.

"They'll try something, now," he said. "Keep well heeled and watch 'em."

Bat began to talk in his slow, hoarse voice. Big Jack was conscious of growing irritation and disgust at Bat's heavy breath.

"They muscled in on the Clover Dairy chain," said Bat. "They got those punks talkin' backward. Then they're runnin' the beer to the whole south side bunch."

Big Jack pursed his lips.

"Stutter the joints," he said, "and see Bully's muscle men. Tell 'em to lay off or it'll be just too bad."

They all understood their orders. That night several dairies and speakeasies would have their fronts sprayed with machine gun bullets by way of a reminder. That night, too, Bully Malloy would receive warning to lay off.

"Bat," said Big Jack, "was you in a crap game with Buddy Traynor the other night?"

Bat grinned. His asthmatic breathing grew louder.

"Yeah," he said. "I took him, too."

"You did, huh?" said Big Jack. "I took him last night in a poker game myself."

Bat laughed.

"Yeah," he said, "he paid for a fur coat I give to a dame." His laugh became loud and throaty. Big Jack felt as if he would like to clear his own throat.

Big Jack left his office and walked back to where he had parked his car. It was dark now. The streets were thinning. At the car he found the figure of the faithful cop.

"Howdy, Mr. Bannister," said the cop.

"Howdy," said Big Jack. He got into his car and started to drive off.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Bannister," said the cop. "They was a duke here awhile back who wanted to know if this was your car."

Big Jack looked around swiftly.

"Yeah?" he said.

"Yeah," said the cop. "I said it was."

"That was nice of you," said Big Jack, still looking around. The cop beamed. "What'd he look like?"

"He wasn't nothin' much," said the cop. "Ordinary lookin' guy."

"Now," said Big Jack, "I know exactly who it was."

Again he started to drive off. But he noticed the cop's expression of disappointment.

"Oh, yeah," said Big Jack, "you owe me ten dollars." The cop nodded. "Well," went on Big Jack thoughtfully,

"you been on this corner for a long time, haven't you?" The cop nodded again. "Then I'll bet you twenty dollars you can't tell me the number of stories in the *Mail* building."

The cop was eager.

" 'S a bet!" he said excitedly. "Twenty-five!"

Big Jack sighed as if he were incredulous. He shook his head.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said. "What do you know about that?"

He peeled off another ten and handed it to the cop. He barely heard the cop's profuse and triumphant thanks as he drove off. He was going home. But as he turned a corner not far from his house, he noticed a car at the curb, its curtains drawn. And Big Jack was too close to do anything about it, then.

He ducked his head. And he stepped on the accelerator. The powerful car bounded forward into high speed just as a fusillade of shots came from the parked car. Big Jack felt splinters of flying glass, heard a tire blow, heard the hollow spank of bullets against the side of the car, felt a sharp, stinging pain near his right shoulder, but kept on. The car swerved from the blown tire, but he righted it. Something warm and viscous trickled down his shoulder. Then he was around the corner. In a few minutes he was home.

Bully Malloy, evidently, was very fond of the Greek.

Big Jack put his car in the garage back of his house and sat for a moment. The wound in his shoulder was slight, a scratch, but his new car was ruined. Also, Big Jack's pride was stung. But he smiled. This business was just starting. Now, the immediate thing was to get into the house unnoticed by his mother. He had to, for he must change his clothes.

He let himself in the back door quietly and slipped upstairs. There he washed his wound, put antiseptic on it and covered it. It pained him not at all. Then, changing to tuxedo, he went downstairs again. His mother was lying down on a big divan in the living room. There was another elderly lady with her.

"Good evening, Mr. Caraway," said the lady. Big Jack recognized his mother's closest friend.

"Good evening, Mrs. Lake," said Big Jack. He went over and kissed his mother. "How is it this evening, mom?"

"I'm very tired, son," said Mrs. Caraway. "The pain is growing worse."

Big Jack frowned.

"Tomorrow," he said, "if you're not better, we're going back to the South Side hospital."

Mrs. Caraway smiled.

"All right, son," she said. She looked up at him with affectionate pride. Big Jack was a splendid figure.

He left in a taxi. And he took no precaution. The others, he knew, had shot their bolts for this night at least. The taxi sped through the residence district, across the business district to the river, where a brightly lighted steamboat, an immense affair and a hangover from the days when a river packet meant something, stood at the old wharf. Big Jack got out there and dismissed the taxi.

He stood for a moment, looking at the steamboat. This was the Steamer. He walked, then, toward the gangplank and went aboard.

The Steamer was the most famous of Big Jack's properties. He had salvaged it some years before from a wrecking company which had bought it for junk. And he had renovated it to a point where it shone with all its former splendor.

For the Steamer had been, in the days when the river was a commercial artery and means of travel, a famous packet. Inside, its cabins were resplendent with Victorian woodwork and rococo gilt scroll. And in these cabins Big Jack Bannister had installed devices which made the Steamer the most famous gambling place in the United States. Also on one of its upper decks he had built a ballroom, where, nightly, a jazz band played, and where a cabaret entertained,

and where better liquor than most was served. The band was now going strong, for it was the dinner hour, and already, as Big Jack walked aboard, the gambling cabins were filling.

HE PASSED through one cabin, which, lately, had been the most popular. Here backgammon was played. On an immense electrical board the moves of the players and the dice combinations were registered for the patrons, with the house taking all bets and offering the odds according to the doubles. The players themselves were professionals, and they alternated against the house and for it. The game was said to be on the square; but you never could tell. Big Jack, at least, never went broke on it. He was cleaning up on it and the innovation of it was a tribute to his imagination.

Through this cabin he went, greeting and receiving greetings. And he passed through, in quick succession, the cabins where faro and chuck-a-luck, where dice and roulette were played, to the poker room. And, there, as he had anticipated, he found Buddy Traynor. Buddy was watching a table where Winnie, his watery eyes nervous and streaming, was taking a beating from some out-of-town gamblers.

Big Jack spoke to the gamblers and to Buddy. He watched a couple of hands. The game was seven-card stud.

"Better play 'em close to your vest, Winnie," said Big Jack. "Buddy," he went on, "can I talk to you a moment?"

Buddy looked up.

"Sure," he said. "When do I get a crack at you for last night?"

Big Jack smiled. He led Buddy to a bar just off the ballroom and ordered two whiskies.

"Have you eaten yet?" asked Big Jack.

"No," said Buddy.

"Come on, then," said Big Jack. "On me."

They went, after their drinks, into the ballroom and sat down in a corner. Their conversation was about anything, but Big Jack's thoughts were not on the conversation. He was watching Buddy Traynor. Buddy Traynor was his father's son, all right, with reservations. Buddy Traynor, Big Jack noticed, didn't have his father's force. But he was sufficiently like his father to bring to Big Jack's mind, reminded by the conversation that afternoon, many incidents of Frank Traynor's youth. He frowned. He was thinking of Frank Traynor's words.

"Buddy," he said abruptly, after a long silence, "how much did you lose to Spanish the other night?"

"Something over a couple o' grand," said Buddy.

"Lose anything to Bat?"

"Yeah," said Buddy. He looked up sharply. "What's the point?"

"Just curious," said Big Jack.

They ate on in another silence.

"That jolt you gave me last night," said Buddy, "was the worst I ever got."

Big Jack smiled.

"Tough," he said. He took a drink of water.

"Yeah," said Buddy, "and now I'll never get a chance at that couple o' grand Spanish won from me."

"No," said Big Jack. "They got him." He took another drink of water.

"Well," said Buddy, "it isn't anything to me, except that couple o' grand. Spanish blew his mouth too much."

"Did he?" asked Big Jack.

"He sure did," said Buddy. He was very much his twenty-one years now. "He liked to talk about his women, that guy."

"I guess he had 'em," said Big Jack.

"Yeah," said Buddy owlishly, "and he had other men's women, too."

Big Jack was silent. He looked with very little expression at the dancers.

"I guess Bat isn't sorry Spanish got it," went on Buddy.

"Why, they were good friends," said Big Jack.

"Like hell!" said Buddy. He appeared, now, rather superior to Big Jack. It was

as if he thought Big Jack didn't know much about men and methods. "Why damn it," he went on, "they were always raising hell about their women. The night we had that game Bat accused Spanish o' cutting in on a moll o' his and Spanish admitted it. You should 'a' seen 'em. I thought Bat was gonna give Spanish the works right there."

Big Jack laughed.

"Bat wouldn't do anything like that," he said. "Bat's a good guy. The boys all like him."

"Maybe," said Buddy.

A paper boy came through the ballroom selling the street editions of the morning papers.

Big Jack took another drink of water.

"Buddy—" he began, but he was interrupted.

Somebody came over to the table to talk. They finished their meal before this man left. He was no one in particular, but he stayed there. Big Jack and Buddy walked into the bar and to a room behind the bar, where Big Jack had an office.

"Sit down, Buddy," he said. "I got something to say to you—"

"What—" began Buddy, but Big Jack held up his hand.

"Wait a minute," said Big Jack. He sent for Winnie and Winnie brought Bat and the others of the mob.

"Say," said Buddy, rising, "what the hell is this about?" His youthful face had become ashen.

Big Jack took from his pocket a roll of bills and counted out nine thousand, five hundred dollars. This he handed to the astonished Buddy.

"Buddy," said Big Jack, "there's the dough you lost to me and Spanish. I'm giving it to you now because you can't play with me or in any o' my houses again."

Buddy stared at the money. The others in the room glanced at each other and then at Big Jack. Buddy looked up from the money to the others in the room and then at Big Jack. Nobody said anything. From the ballroom came the faint strains of jazz. Big Jack lighted a cigaret.

"Remember that, boys," said Big Jack.

Big Jack's voice seemed to release something in Buddy.

"Listen—" he began.

"That's all there is to it, Buddy," said Big Jack. He pulled at his long nose.

"The hell it is!" shouted Buddy. "What the hell you think I am—a baby?"

"Yeah," said Big Jack, "I think just that. You'd better stay away from this business altogether."

He looked at Buddy Traynor and smiled. The others in the room smiled.

Buddy flared again.

"You big punk," he screamed. The others in the room started. Big Jack among them. Their faces grew hard. "You dirty—" Buddy used unpardonable epithets. Big Jack arose. The others in the room watched him narrowly.

"Buddy," he said calmly, "maybe you've had too much to drink. Go on home and sober up. Then maybe you won't want to call me that."

"Ah—nuts!" said Buddy. He looked around the room and stopped at Bat. "What you gonna do about that grand and a half you won the other night?"

Bat breathed heavily. He ran a hairy hand across his mouth.

"You heard Big Jack, didn't you?"

Buddy snarled.

"You dirty welshin' pup!"

Bat started for Buddy.

"Bat!"

The man stopped midway to Buddy. Big Jack glared at him. Perhaps there was more in the glare than a warning. Bat wagged his head sullenly. He turned and went out of the room.

"Here!" said Big Jack to Buddy. He handed the boy the amount Bat had won from him.

BUDDY took the money and stared at it for a moment. Then he looked at Big Jack with snarling rage. He drew back the hand that held the money and struck Big Jack across the face with the

bills. The bills scattered over the floor like leaves.

"To hell with you!" shouted Buddy. "What I said to Bat goes for you too!"

The others in the room gasped. They looked questioningly at Big Jack. Buddy turned on his heel and stalked out of the room.

"What the hell, Big Jack?" That was Winnie.

"None o' your damned business!" That was Big Jack.

He sat down. The rest shifted uneasily, glancing at one another questioningly. In his chair Big Jack shook his head angrily.

"Chief," said Winnie, "we stuttered those joints."

Big Jack nodded. There was a long silence.

"Winnie," said Big Jack finally, "the Malloy mob tried to get me tonight." They all looked up, startled. Big Jack recited his experience. "That's curtains for Bully."

He looked from one to the other of them, as if challenging them. But they agreed with him. They had no stomach for Bully Malloy. To tell the truth, they were becoming a little nervous because of Bully Malloy. The raid on the Green Oaks, Spanish, now this attempt on Big Jack himself—and they all nursed feelings surprised and raw from Buddy Traynor's defiance. They responded to Big Jack's mood.

"In the morning," went on Big Jack, "Bully leaves that cheap joint o' his over south. That'll be the time. Glom somebody's car, so they can't trace you. Winnie, you handle it. That's all."

They filed out and left him. Big Jack sat for a moment. He passed one of his white, graceful hands across his face where Buddy had slapped him with the money. He frowned. He was wondering why he had not told Buddy the reason for the scene.

The night wore on; the Steamer became gayer. The backgammon room was jammed; the roulette wheel clicked busily; the dice rolled merrily on the tucked green baize; the chuck-a-luck cage swung constantly. In the ballroom a vast throng jammed the tables; in the bar men and women with glazed eyes hung on the mahogany, roistering and noisy. Big Jack, wandering about, took on those who wanted to bet with him, sipped drinks with those who wanted to drink with him and talked to those who simply wanted to bask a little in his prominence. He had a hard time with three society matrons.

At eleven o'clock, bothered by the society matrons who were alcoholically coy, he slipped into his office. Into the office the paper boy, who had come to his table earlier, brought the State editions of the morning papers. Big Jack bought them absently, but he did not look at them. He was thinking of Buddy Traynor. Also, he was thinking of his mother.

He was aroused from this quietude by a shouting that came from the ballroom, from the bar, from, in fact, all over the Steamer. Mildly interested, he went to the door and listened. It was no raid; he was sure of that. They might raid other places, but not the Steamer; the personnel of the city administration was most always on hand. He wondered, and then his brows lifted in mild surprise. They were shouting his name. Nearby, some one caught sight of him in the door and dragged him out. It was a man and he was pretty drunk.

"Hooray f'r Big Jack!" yelled the man.

Big Jack disengaged himself. He was annoyed.

"Hooray f'r Big Jack!" yelled the man. "F'r Big Jack the ph'lanth'p'st!"

The man tripped on the word, but the crowd took it up. Big Jack was about to say something when the man shoved a paper in front of his face. It was not the *Mail;* it was an esteemed contemporary of the *Mail.*

Big Jack stared so hard at the paper that tears came to his straining eyes. For on the front page of the paper he saw, prominent in the layout of news, an unmistakable picture of himself,

which accompanied the story of his gift to the family of the man killed by his truck.

He stared for a full minute at the picture and then, shoving the paper back in the man's hands, made for his office.

Big Jack shut the door and locked it. Hastily he grabbed the other two morning papers, one of which was the *Mail*. He tore through the *Mail* angrily, a hateful fear choking him, but he found no picture. He looked at the other paper; there was a picture there, and it differed slightly from the first. It was, however, as unmistakable as the first. He searched his mind. Then he remembered the camera man at the accident that afternoon. In snapping the crowd they must have got him. The *Mail* photographer, too, must have got him, but Frank Traynor was managing editor of the *Mail*, and Frank Traynor was a man of his word.

Big Jack swore savagely. He pounded a fist against the desk. For at home he took each of those papers, and his mother read the papers thoroughly.

For the first time in his life Big Jack Bannister felt himself cornered. And he hadn't the slightest idea what he could do about it. Because, even if he called the papers and canceled the subscriptions, others would see it. Mrs. Caraway would be reminded of the striking similarity between Big Jack Bannister, master gangster, and her son, John Caraway. And Mrs. Caraway would know. Big Jack's curses came like furious sobs. He walked about the little office frantically. He stopped and looked out a porthole at the dark river, but closed the port in a hurry and drew the curtain. The river was depressing. For a long time he walked about that little room, and then, goaded, rushed out.

Outside, the crowd was noisier, gayer, drunker, plunging heavily in the gaming rooms, dancing in a locked and swaying jam on the floor. Big Jack walked from one room to the other, paying no attention until he came to the bar. There he gulped three double whiskies in such a hurry the bartenders looked at each other apprehensively. They had never seen Big Jack that way.

Big Jack, in fact, had never seen himself that way. But he realized—was more frantic because of his realization—how futile his efforts to conceal his identity from his mother had been. He realized how foolish they had been. And he remembered how, deep in his consciousness, he had always feared this moment as being inevitable. He remembered his disturbed feelings of that afternoon.

"We got a car."

Big Jack turned. Winnie, eyes brimming, was standing there.

"O.K," said Big Jack.

Winnie looked curiously at his chief and then turned away. Big Jack stood, pounding the bar softly.

THE early morning grew; the Steamer's gaiety grew apace, as frenzied as Big Jack's mood. The crowd had reached an hysterical pitch. Big Jack, his head aching, his body wet with clammy perspiration, left the scene again and retired to his office.

But still he saw no solution. He held his aching head in his hands; he put his hands over his ears to shut out the irritating bedlam that came from the crowd, a bedlam that he had set going himself, and as callous as his own attitude ever had been.

They wouldn't care; they wouldn't care even if they knew the half of it. They'd laugh if they heard that always he had been a loving and dutiful son, if they heard that always he had respected his mother and sheltered her. Big Jack, they would say, was the type of man who never had a mother. Nobody in the immense scope of his acquaintance would know or understand, except maybe Frank Traynor. Big Jack thought of Buddy Traynor and the slap across the face with the money . . .

At four o'clock the gaiety began to subside, and at four o'clock Big Jack still sat in his office. But he was no

nearer solution than before. He was further, in fact, for his reasoning had become juvenile. He was thinking, strangely, of childhood deceptions, of the times when, as a boy, he had employed little subterfuges to get out of mischief. And he felt pathetically and ridiculously as he had, when, as a boy, his mother caught him in some mischief. There was again the hopeless sinking at his stomach.

Some one knocked at the door.

"Come in!" said Big Jack.

Winnie stuck his pale face and wet eyes in the door.

"We're on our way," he said.

Big Jack clenched his teeth, but it was in an effort to control his feelings.

"Do it right," he said.

Winnie left. Big Jack sat on, thinking and thinking. Outside, the hilarity died. From the cobbled wharf came the continuous faint noise of automobiles starting and leaving. Big Jack looked at his watch. It was 4:30. He felt vaguely annoyed that people should stay up that late.

About to go out and see the departure of his patrons—he was restless again—he stopped abruptly at the door. His phone was ringing. It startled him, caused him to turn quickly; then he strode across the room and answered it savagely.

"Hello!" he snarled into the mouthpiece. "Who? . . . Why—yes." Big Jack's voice became gentler. It trembled a little. "How'd you know where to find me, Mrs. Lake?"

Mrs. Lake's plain voice sounded harshly over the phone.

"I called Mr. Traynor," she said, "and he said you'd be at this number."

"Oh," said Big Jack.

"Your mother's worse, Mr. Caraway," said Mrs. Lake. "I've been trying to get you all evening. She's in awful pain."

Big Jack groaned.

"My God!" he said. "I'll call an ambulance. Thanks, Mrs. Lake. I'll send her to the South Side hospital. I'll send a car for you and come as soon as I can. Tell her not to worry. Goodby, Mrs. Lake."

He slammed up the receiver. Then, lifting it again, he worked the hook furiously until he got central. He called the hospital for the ambulance. Also, he ordered a car for Mrs. Lake.

He sat, then, staring at nothing. Outside there was not much noise now. Only a few had stayed to play. The orchestra had gone home. Big Jack leaped suddenly to his feet and rushed out. He shot a few orders at his employees, got into his coat, jammed on his hat and ran downstairs to the gangplank.

The early morning coolness was welcome there after the closeness of the Steamer; he paused an instant to enjoy it, breathing great drafts of the fresh air. It smelled of the river, which, for all the filth of the city on its banks, had not lost the odor of clean woods and mountains. Up above bright stars in a deep sky shone restlessly. Big Jack hurried across the cobbles to a high powered roadster, the first of a string of cars parked there—they belonged to him and his men—jumped in and sped away.

He drove recklessly, but it made no difference; the streets were deserted in the early morning. And there was something lonely and ominous about those streets. There was something deadly in the blank fronts of the darkened buildings and houses. They were coldly impersonal and indifferent. Big Jack shivered in spite of himself.

He forgot, in these racing minutes, that he had just sent a car to do a man to death; he forgot that he had been attacked early in the evening, that he had been slapped by Buddy Traynor. He forgot everything except his mother and her pain. The indifferent streets mocked him and, curiously, he did not think, as he drove along them, that this very indifference and impersonality was that which he had hitherto desired.

He reached the hospital. It stood, huge and rambling and, as always, he felt a certain awe at sight of it. And, as always too, it seemed to him as if the

very materials of its construction were strange. So many things went on within its wood and mortar and stone; so many things that were beyond control, beyond power such as his, or indeed, any human being's. He was a little surprised that, with all the change, the suffering, the miraculous events that took place in that great building, the building itself remained immutable. It surprised him and it frightened him; he felt weak.

He parked his car quietly, under the spell of the place. Then, walking carefully, as if he did not want to be seen or heard, he went to the entrance and ascended the steps. Within, he paused at the office and took off his hat. A woman in the white uniform of a nurse approached the counter. There was about her a solemn cheer. She was smiling.

"Good morning," she said in a whisper.

"Good morning," said Big Jack. His voice was subdued. "Has Mrs. Caraway arrived yet?"

The woman's eyes widened. She looked at Big Jack searchingly.

"Mrs. Caraway?" she said. Then, "Why, yes, but—"

"Never mind," said Big Jack. "I won't disturb her. Is the woman who followed her here?"

"Yes," said the woman behind the counter. "Yes, she's here."

"Where'll I find her?" asked Big Jack.

"Why—" the woman hesitated. She seemed as if she were thinking hard. Big Jack felt a little annoyed. "Why," she went on, "she's on the second floor—room 253 . . . Who are you?"

"I'm Mrs. Caraway's son," said Big Jack.

"Oh," said the woman. She stared at Big Jack. "Go on up."

Big Jack looked curiously at the woman. Then he turned and walked down the hall. He found the steps and went upstairs. There he passed on tiptoe doors which had been opened a little and secured to admit air, and within which dim lights were burning. Now and then he heard a moan. Other than that and a curious, throaty sound at the other end of the hall, the hospital was quiet. He heard the clang of an ambulance bell far off.

BIG JACK came nearer to the throaty sound. He rounded a screen at the other end of the hall and stopped short in his tracks. For, seated on a bench, there was Mrs. Lake. And Mrs. Lake was crying. Her face was buried in her handkerchief, her old body shaking feebly with her sobs. Big Jack stared at her an instant and then walked up to her. He put a white hand on her shoulder. Mrs. Lake started painfully and looked up. Her old eyes, filled with tears and with her glasses removed, seemed defenseless. Big Jack felt a queer tightening in his throat.

"Oh, John!" said Mrs. Lake.

"It's all right," said Big Jack. "Everything's all right, now. We'll have her out in a little while."

Mrs. Lake glanced up at Big Jack, her tears staunched for a moment. She stared at him.

Big Jack frowned.

"What is it, Mrs. Lake?" he asked. His subdued voice was a little shrill.

"Oh, John!" cried Mrs. Lake. She arose and buried her head against his chest. Big Jack's shirt became damp and warm. "John!" she said, her voice muffled. "She's gone!"

Big Jack's embrace tightened convulsively about Mrs. Lake. The old woman, despite her sorrow and agitation, pulled away from his painful grip.

"Gone!" said Big Jack.

He was staring out the window at the end of the hall. It was a dark oblong. He could see nothing there. Even had it been daylight he could have seen nothing there.

"Gone!" said Big Jack again.

"Yes," said Mrs. Lake. "There was an accident—"

Big Jack released Mrs. Lake and rushed into his mother's room. Just within, he stopped.

His mother lay on the bed, her eyes closed by the doctor's hand, her old face white and still. But on the gray hair there was blood, and for all the arrangement of her body, he could see that one of the arms lay queerly. A man in a white coat was just turning away from her. He glanced up at Big Jack.

"Mr. Caraway?"

Big Jack heard, as in a dream, and as in a dream he nodded.

"I'm sorry — smashup — ambulance hit broadside. Hit and run driver. Ambulance men severely injured—your mother's skull fractured—internal injuries. Died a few minutes after we got her here . . ."

Big Jack heard all this in disconnected sentences. He nodded again. His arrogant, imperious face was set in a terrible mask. He walked slowly across the room, saying nothing to the man in the white coat. The man in the white coat vanished. Big Jack stood above his mother and looked at her.

How long he stood there he couldn't have told; what ran through his mind as he stood there he couldn't have told; that is, he couldn't have told except for one thing, and this stood out, would always stand out. There ran through his whirling brain the thought that his mother would not see his picture in the papers . . .

Big Jack Bannister drove Mrs. Lake, his mother's oldest and best friend, home. He said nothing. And he did not drive rapidly. The car moved as if it were, like its driver, bemused. It turned at the right corners and rolled down the right streets, but it was as if, at its slow rate of speed, its driver were following the trails of instinct. Which, indeed, was so. Big Jack never could remember that drive. He reached Mrs. Lake's house. The old woman got out laboriously. Her efforts aroused Big Jack a little. He got out of the car and helped her up to her door.

"Poor John," said Mrs. Lake. "Be brave. You must trust in God."

Big Jack smiled.

"Thank you, Mrs. Lake," he said, "for all you did."

"It wasn't anything, John," she said. "Oh," she went on, as if everything came back on a sudden wave of realization, now that this son of her old friend stood there. "Poor Ella!"

Big Jack turned away abruptly and strode to his car. Once more he drove listlessly through the streets. But he did not go home. The house, empty save for the two servants he had there, was no place for him. Rather the loneliness of the streets than the loneliness of his house. And curiously, just as dawn, an early Autumn dawn, with a touch of frost in the air, came out of the smoke haze across the river, he found himself back at the Steamer.

Those aboard—the charwomen, the porters, a few sleepy housemen—paused and watched him. They greeted him, but he did not answer. And they looked fearfully at each other. Big Jack's face was terrible to behold; it was drawn tight across its frame and yet it was crossed by deep lines. His brown eyes were set in a burning stare. He walked past them and up to his office.

Bat and Winnie were there. Winnie's face was strained with excitement. Bat's stertorous breathing filled the room. They both looked up with apprehension at their chief, who said nothing to either, and then they looked at each other with raised brows. Big Jack sat down and faced them. They cringed a little.

"Don't blame us, Chief," said Winnie. "We tried."

"We sure did," said Bat.

Big Jack looked from one to the other. They were both uneasy.

"Honest to God, Big Jack," said Winnie. "How the hell was we to know Bully wasn't in that car. We got three of his mob at that—"

"Did you?" said Big Jack. He went over his face with his hand as if trying to massage the lines away.

"Yeah," said Bat, "an' we damn near got killed!"

"We sure did!" said Winnie.

"Anybody get shot?" asked Big Jack.

"Nah—hell no!" said Bat. He laughed. "Them guys didn't know what happened until they couldn't know, but we hit a car when we lammed!"

Big Jack gripped the arms of his chair. His body shook with terror.

"Yeh," said Winnie, "an' there was hell to pay. It wrecked that bus we had, but it smashed the other all to hell! It was a dead wagon from the South Side."

Winnie paused. He had seen something in Big Jack's face. So had Bat. They both looked as if they were afraid.

"Tough," said Big Jack softly. "Who was driving?"

"I was," breathed Bat. He put up his splay hands for Big Jack to see. His hands were cut and skinned. "An' I gotta date, too!"

Big Jack nodded.

"I'll see you later," he said.

They hesitated, stared at him for an instant and then rose. They went through the door and for some reason closed it softly.

BIG JACK looked at the door. Then he turned and looked at the porthole. He opened the port. Outside the river was gray in the early morning light. The sun had not yet pierced the smoke haze. The water lapped with a gentle slapping sound against the hull of the Steamer. He stared out at the gray expanse. It eddied restlessly. Its surging flow gave him a feeling of abnormal motion. He became dizzy. He became violently sick in a wastebasket by his desk . . .

After that Big Jack Bannister stumbled through weeks of his life that he was hardly aware of. But an organization, whether it be an empire, a business, or a human being, must move. If it does not, it stagnates and atrophies. And Big Jack's organization, oblivious of its chief's feelings, therefore moved. The Steamer continued to operate at immense profit; the roadhouses and speakeasies and smaller gambling joints continued to operate at good profit. The dairies, the laundries, the theaters, the transportation men, the produce and packing businesses, the tailor shops, the automobile racket—they all continued to pay tribute to Big Jack. The illicit liquor trade and vice continued to pour money into the coffers of Big Jack and his organization. Bully Malloy and his outfit continued to be fought, with Bully still elusive.

Big Jack, stumbling, groping inwardly, sick in his soul, kept his hand at the helm. And if the city once had threatened to become personal, if once he had been irritated and uneasy lest those who composed it come too close to him, it was not so now. And if he had been afraid, as in that early morning ride to the hospital, of its cold indifference and impersonality, this, too, was over. Big Jack Bannister was bearing down on his empire.

One morning just as Big Jack was preparing to leave after a night at the Steamer, he heard a knock on his office door. It was a pronounced, determined knock. He looked up from the papers on his desk.

"Come in!" he said.

He felt tired. Not at all did he want to see any one. And he was surprised when, followed by others of his mob, Winnie and Bat walked in.

"Hello!" he said sullenly. There was a challenging tone in his greeting.

"Hello!" they all said.

Big Jack was surprised. There was a little defiance in their tones. He sat back in his chair and looked them over. Under his steady scrutiny they quailed a bit. He looked at Bat and felt disgusted; Bat's breathing got on his nerves more than ever now. He looked at Winnie and also felt disgust. He wanted to hand Winnie a handkerchief . . . Bat, breathing more heavily than usual, stepped a little to the front of the group and said—

"I see Buddy Traynor tonight."

Big Jack made no comment. He eyed Bat steadily.

"I see him in a speakie over south. He was stiff as a goat." Bat paused.

He looked as if he didn't like Big Jack's level gaze. The others, too, seemed as if they didn't like Big Jack's level gaze. They shifted as they stood.

"Well?" said Big Jack.

"He gimme hell," went on Bat. "He called me names again; said I was a welsher, said you was a welsher, said the whole mob was welshers. Said he'd say so every time he seen us." Bat paused again. He took a deep and noisy breath. "Now what I—what we want to know is: How long do we have to take that rat's lip?"

Bat thrust out his jaw angrily. The rest of them seemed as if there was a load off their chests. They relaxed a bit in the general rearrangement of their postures. But it was only momentary. Big Jack continued his silence. He looked at each of them deliberately until he came to Winnie. He looked at Winnie longer than he had at the rest, and then he came to Bat. He looked at Bat longer than he had looked at Winnie; so long that they all grew nervous again. Under Big Jack's quiet brown gaze. Bat swayed from side to side, his breathing growing louder. His thick lips pouted ridiculously.

"Well, what—" he began.

"You'll take it," said Big Jack, his eyes flashing, "as long as I say for you to take it!"

"But—" Winnie began.

"You heard me!" said Big Jack. A dark scowl crossed his face. And if his tone were not enough, that, together with his tone, was. None of them said anything. But they glared at him. "I said that nobody'd play with that kid, didn't I? Well, I meant it! An' if he shoots off his mouth a little, what of it? He don't amount to much."

"He's runnin' with the Malloy mob!" said Winnie. He was sullen.

Big Jack's little gasp of surprise was scarcely perceptible.

"Yeah?" he said. "Let him. What of that?" He hesitated, but there was no answer. Then he turned to Bat. "Besides," he went on, and his expression became ominous, "there's something I want to talk to you about sometime, Bat. It's something to do with a girl." He stopped for a full quarter of a minute. "Something to do with a girl—and Spanish!"

Bat gave a little start. His rasping breath came in great gusts. And on his broad, dark face, there was a frown. It was of fear.

"Well," said Winnie, looking from his chief to Bat with a puzzled expression in his eyes, "we just thought we'd let you know." His loose mouth smiled weakly.

"That's fine," said Big Jack. "Anything else?"

There wasn't, it appeared, anything else. Big Jack also smiled. But there was contempt and disgust in his smile. They turned a moment later to leave, and Bat was the last of them. At the door he hesitated as if he were about to say something, but he encountered Big Jack's smile. Also he encountered Big Jack's hard eyes. He choked whatever he was going to say, coughed and went after the others.

In his office Big Jack continued to smile with contempt and disgust. But the smile faded. His face became weary. He put away the papers and left. He drove home in the morning twilight. It was a long time before he fell asleep.

AS HE slept through the early hours of the day, the city stirred and went about its business. But it went about its business thoughtfully. People were excited. They clustered in knots on the corners downtown and talked; they paused in their day's business and talked; they conversed earnestly over their luncheon tables. For the *Mail* and the other morning papers of the town carried frightful news.

The papers told how, in the dawn of

that day, a band of men in a highpowered touring car swept down on the Green Oaks roadhouse, carried in a machine gun, riddled the proprietors, who were closing up, set fire to the place and escaped. The *Mail* and the others said the police said it was reprisal by the Bully Malloy faction for the alleged murder eight weeks before of three Bully Malloy men by the Bannister faction.

The Bannister mob, said the papers, was said to own the Green Oaks. The papers repeated rather monotonously that it was probably the signal for another bloody gang feud to break out. Likewise, there were statements from the police commissioner, the district attorney and the mayor. They all said they were going to put a stop to the crime wave right away.

"Crime is on its way out!" the district attorney was reported to have said.

At one o'clock that day Big Jack was awakened by the insistent ringing of a telephone that stood by his bed. He answered.

"Hello! Who? . . . What's that! . . . When?" Big Jack said nothing for a long time. He was frowning as if he were in pain. "All right," he said finally. "I'll see them later."

He had been talking to the clerk in his office downtown. The clerk had much to say. He said, too, that Winnie and Bat and the others were waiting there.

Big Jack saw them later. And he listened to an angry recital on the part of Winnie, Bat and the others. He was about to say something in return when the clerk came to the door. The clerk's eyes were staring with amazement. It was as if he had just seen something supernatural. Big Jack looked at the clerk. He saw the amazed stare.

"What the hell you want?" he said.

The clerk was ludicrous in his amazement. The others in the room turned.

"The D. A," said the clerk. "The D. A. and six preachers are outside."

Big Jack, Winnie, Bat—none of them said anything at all. They merely reflected the clerk's stare. Then they looked at one another. They looked back at the clerk. It was as if he, perhaps, had a solution.

"They're waiting," said the clerk.

"Let 'em wait," said Big Jack suddenly. "No," he went on, "don't do that. Bring 'em in." He turned to his men. They seemed frightened. "Sit down, you guys, and take off your hats." Big Jack was smiling.

The clerk still stood in the door. Big Jack looked up abruptly.

"I said to show 'em in."

The clerk disappeared. Winnie, Bat and the others took seats around the room and removed their hats. In a moment the clerk appeared in the doorway. He stepped aside. Past him filed the D. A. and the six ministers. One of the ministers seemed vaguely familiar to Big Jack.

Big Jack was already on his feet. He stood behind his desk.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," he said.

"Good afternoon," the visitors said.

They looked curiously at Big Jack and then at the assortment of his men around the room. They seemed particularly interested in the heavily breathing Bat and in Winnie, who, they probably thought, was weeping. At least, when they saw him there were puzzled expressions on their faces. Some of them even seemed a little sorry for him.

"Will you bring chairs for the gentlemen?" asked Big Jack of the clerk.

The clerk, with the assistance of two of the men, brought chairs. The district attorney and the six ministers sat down.

"I was just in conference with my assistants," said Big Jack, indicating those who sat around the room. He was looking intently at the vaguely familiar minister. "What can I do for you gentlemen?"

The district attorney arose. Big Jack, like a toastmaster, sat down. The district attorney began to talk. He was a middle aged man with gentle eyes and a kindly face. He had the

brow and head of a scholar. His hands —small hands—shook slightly.

"Mr. Bannister," said the district attorney, "we have come to warn you that the decent citizens of this community have suffered long enough . . ."

There was a general shifting on the part of Big Jack's men. In the short silences between the district attorney's sentences, Bat's rasping breathing sounded with irritating regularity. Big Jack darted a disgusted glance at Bat.

The district attorney went on to review the situation, ending with a reference to the Green Oaks massacre.

"And in conclusion," he said, "we appeal to your sense of decency to stop this bloodshed and horror, because you can if you will; and, if you take no heed of that, we warn you again that we will not be imposed upon further. These ministers of the gospel represent the churches of our city; I represent the law. It is a powerful combination, Mr. Bannister. Crime is on its way out!"

The district attorney sat down. He reminded Big Jack of a teacher he once had known in high school. Big Jack looked at the vaguely familiar minister and found the man staring at him. The district attorney was looking steadily at Big Jack. But nobody said anything. The silence became embarrassing. Bat yawned and made a lot of noise. Winnie was sniffling. Big Jack finally arose.

"I am honored," he said—and he meant it, for he was thinking of what the *Mail* had said about him—"that you gentlemen have come to me. But I must protest that you have made a mistake. I am sure I never sought bloodshed and never in my life have I been arrested for a crime. I—"

The district attorney got to his feet angrily. He was trembling.

"Phrases!" he shouted. "Words!" He turned to the ministers. "We're wasting our time!" He turned and started for the door.

"You sure are!"

It was a whisper, but it was plain enough. Big Jack glared at Bat. But the rest of his men, as if this had been growing on them, laughed softly.

The ministers, looking calmly about them, filed out. But the last hesitated. He turned. He was the one Big Jack had been trying to place. Now, as the man stood there, Big Jack knew.

"I preached a funeral about eight weeks ago, Mr. Bannister," said this man. "You may recall it. If you do, I urge you to think on it." The minister paused. "You are an incredible man!" he finished.

He looked at Big Jack and shook his head sadly. Big Jack merely stared. The man left.

"Now what in hell," said Winnie, "did he mean by that?"

Big Jack shook his head. He sat down and smiled.

"I don't know," he said slowly. Then, suddenly active, he turned to his men. He gave them his plans.

They were thorough plans.

For days the city awakened to new terror. The war between Big Jack Bannister and Bully Malloy flamed fiercely. Over south the speakeasies and joints of the Malloy mob were fired upon almost nightly. In the outskirts and throughout the vast, sprawling city, the resorts owned by Big Jack were attacked. There was a raid on the Steamer. There were murders and there was destruction. And through it all the district attorney and the six righteous men who had come to Big Jack thundered in futility. The *Mail,* long aware of its futility, nevertheless doggedly continued the fight. But the city's forces seemed powerless.

And then the city read with relief that the war seemed about to end. The reason, the papers quoted the police as saying, was that the Malloy faction was losing badly. It was said that there would be a truce between the two and a new agreement. The *Mail,* bitter, despairing, said editorially that Big Jack had won again. The editorial was headed "Civil War", and likened the

feud to a rebellion against the head of an empire.

"And now," the editorial concluded, "the emperor has put down the revolt . . ."

IT WAS true—there was to be a truce. For three days inactivity possessed the gangs. And on the day of the meeting Bat went out with three others to meet Bully Malloy. It would not do for Big Jack to go. He was too high up for those things.

The meeting was to take place in the evening, and in his office aboard the Steamer Big Jack awaited the outcome.

In these days of action and strain he had ceased to stumble. Almost, the wound on his soul was closed. And tonight he felt better than he had since before his mother's death. His spirits rose. They soared to new heights as he thought of the truce. This night marked the greatest triumph of Big Jack's life and he felt it.

He was affable to those who sought him, for those who sought him were deferential. It was almost as if they were in the presence of royalty. He left his office and circulated about the Steamer. At the backgammon board he paused.

This was his pride. And it was, of late, his most lucrative device. In the exuberance of the occasion he bet; he bet on the side that was certain to lose and he was doubled the limit. The game went to its obvious conclusion. Big Jack's side was gammoned. There was laughter at his gesture and his own was as loud as any. Somebody bought him a drink of consolation. This he drained, after a toast, at a gulp, paid his debt and walked away, smiling. He heard somebody say that he was certainly a good fellow—

"Chief!"

Big Jack turned. It was one of the housemen.

"Yeah?" said Big Jack.

"Winnie's on the phone."

Big Jack nodded. Winnie had not gone to the conference. But he had been posted nearby. Big Jack went into his office with a buoyant step and picked up the phone.

"Hello!"

"It was a cross, Chief! It was a cross!" Big Jack became rigid. "They got Bat! They got Hymie and Hugo! They put three slugs in Red, but he got one of 'em an' lammed! He's here now, but he ain't gonna last!"

Big Jack swore into the phone savagely.

"An' you know who got Bat?" Winnie went on. "It was that rat Buddy Traynor! What the hell do you think o' that? So we ain't to do anything with Buddy Traynor, are we? Well, by God, you'll see!"

"Listen—" began Big Jack, but Winnie was gone. He had slammed up the receiver in Big Jack's face.

Big Jack tried to call back. But there was no answer. He turned from the phone and stared at the floor. In the confusion of the moment many things ran through his furious mind, not the least of which was a certain idea of relief. He did not quite understand it nor was he fully aware of it, but it seemed to him as if a hateful sound was stilled. The sound had been a disgusting, rasping sound that had been with him for years . . .

He thought of Winnie's defiance. But he shrugged. He couldn't hold them. If Buddy Traynor had done that, he deserved what he would get. And, he asked himself, what call had he to protect Buddy Traynor now? He had warned Buddy Traynor. Yet he felt strangely troubled. In the confusion of the moment he felt curiously attached to Buddy Traynor. Before his mind's eye there passed constantly the figure of Frank Traynor. He shrugged with annoyance. Then, restless with his thoughts, he rose to go out of his office once more. But he did not go. He sat back in his chair with a gasp.

For the door had flown open and through it rushed Buddy Traynor.

"Jack!" screamed Buddy. "Big Jack!"

The boy was in a frenzy of terror. His youthful face was not at all hard or worldly wise now. It was livid with his fear. He threw himself across the room at Big Jack and grabbed the gambler's shoulders.

"They're after me, Jack!"

Big Jack put his hand under the boy's chin and jerked Buddy Traynor's head back.

"You got Bat!" he snarled.

"I didn't!" Buddy was frantic.

Big Jack pushed the boy away from him and went across the room. He closed the door.

"I didn't!" Buddy screamed it over and over again. "Honest to God I didn't! It was Bully! I just happened along—I didn't know!"

The boy began to sob. Big Jack looked at him for a long moment and shook his head. The gesture was due in part to annoyance.

"You sure you didn't know?" he said. His voice was calm.

"No! No—I didn't know!"

Big Jack went over and opened the porthole. Through it a fresh breeze blew. He ran his hand across his forehead. Then he turned back to the trembling boy.

"Shut up!" said Big Jack. His voice was harsh. Its quality sobered Buddy Traynor. His sobs began to subside. "I told you a long time ago to stay away from this business—but you didn't listen. Now you're in a jam."

He paused and looked at the boy. In the boy Big Jack could see now a great many things he had never noticed before. He didn't want particularly to see them. They wouldn't make any difference anyway, but he did pause to wonder how it was that Buddy Traynor, at such a time, had come to him.

Big Jack swore softly. He sat down and opened a drawer in the desk. From it he took a strong box, and from the box he took a sheaf of bills.

"How much money you got?" he asked.

"A few hundred."

"Here's a few thousand. Do they know where you are?"

"I don't know!" said Buddy Traynor.

He seemed as if he were about to break out anew. He turned and looked at the closed door fearfully.

"Well," said Big Jack, "you'd better get going. Stay away a long, long time. I'll tell your father."

"My father?" Buddy's hysteria was, for an instant, surprised out of him. But Big Jack said nothing. "Thanks—" Buddy began again.

"Get the hell out of here."

Big Jack shoved him roughly toward the door. Buddy, with one backward glance of apprehension, went out the door and slammed it.

Big Jack sat down again. From the other parts of the Steamer came sounds of revelry. Big Jack turned and looked out of the porthole. From somewhere in the murk over the river came the bray of a Government steamer. He wondered again what had caused Buddy Traynor to come to him for protection.

HE SAT for an hour, wondering. And then something that he had expected momentarily occurred. The door opened—without a knock. Through it came Winnie, his pale eyes gleaming and wet, and others of Big Jack's mob. They glared at him sullenly. Big Jack was conscious of something absent in the air of the room. There was no rasping sound to disgust him.

"Well?" he said.

"Traynor was here," said Winnie. "They told us outside."

"What of it?"

"Plenty. Where'd he go?"

"I don't know." Big Jack got up from his chair. "What else you want to know?"

"We want," said Winnie, "to know what the hell you let him go for."

"That," said Big Jack, "is none o' your damned business. He didn't get Bat. He didn't get anybody." Their

eyes widened with surprised stares. Winnie smiled his weak smile. "And listen to this," went on Big Jack. His voice rose. "*Bat crossed Spanish!*" The men looked at one another and then back at their chief. "Spanish wasn't on that first Green Oaks job. Bat crossed him because of a dame. Besides—"

He caught himself just in time. He had been about to say something concerning the wrecked ambulance. He caught himself, but it cost him something. It was as if he were holding something from them. He saw that they sensed this, but he eyed them sneeringly.

"How do you know that, Big Jack?" That was Winnie again.

Big Jack looked at his aide angrily. "I know—that's all!"

"Yeah?" That was several of them.

Big Jack's brown eyes glowed with sudden fury. He walked across and struck viciously at one of those who had spoken. The man staggered back to the wall, shaking his head, dazed. Big Jack looked them all over again.

"I said I knew!" he shouted. "That's enough for you guys! Now get the hell out of here!"

They hesitated, cowed.

"Get out, I said—"

They obeyed sullenly. Only Winnie remained. He looked steadily at his chief.

"It don't do," he said, "not to be on the up and up, does it, Chief?" To Big Jack's disgust and irritation he wiped away the moisture from his eyes. "I remember you sayin' that. So Bat crossed Spanish, huh?" Winnie smiled and shook his head. "O.K, Chief."

Winnie turned and walked out of the office.

Big Jack turned and picked up the telephone. He called Frank Traynor. He informed Frank Traynor of what had happened. And he was surprised; all he heard over the wire was a throaty sound and the sharp click of the receiver.

The next day dawned in a cloud of Indian Summer haze. There was no frost in the air. It was a gentle day, with a late November sun shining warmly. There was an air of lazy peace over the city.

But the papers screamed of murder. They told of Bat's death and of the death of the others. Bat's death was important. With the possible exception of Winnie, and the certain exceptions of Big Jack and Bully Malloy, there was none of the company of powerful criminals identified with the city who was so prominent. The papers printed speculations as to what would happen now; the police commissioner, the district attorney, the mayor—all promised speedy solution.

"Crime is on its way out," the district attorney was reported to have said.

Big Jack read the speculations and the news and the announcements and he promised speedy solution also. But, although the events of the night before occupied his mind, he felt the appeal of the day. He felt, in the warmth of that day, as if he would like to play hookey from all his business.

Therefore, when one of his servants announced a visitor, he had a curious idea, at the name, that he might sneak off with this visitor and wander in the Autumn woods. They had done it before.

The visitor was Frank Traynor.

He came into Big Jack's dining room, hat in hand, and stood eyeing his old friend. Big Jack noticed that he had aged in the weeks since their interview. He noticed, too, that Frank Traynor seemed haggard and worn, as if he had not slept for days. In the editor's eyes, the bright blue eyes Big Jack had seen express so many things, there was a strange look of stony resignation. It disturbed the gambler. It intruded upon his mood of the moment before.

"Hello, Frank," said Big Jack.

Frank Traynor spoke and sat down. Big Jack drank his coffee under the stony gaze of Frank Traynor's blue eyes. He grew nervous under that gaze.

"Well," he said, "what is it now, Frank?"

The editor drew a long breath.

"I don't know why I'm doing this, Jack," he said. "God knows I've got no reason to. But I've come to tell you you'd better get out of town."

Big Jack put down his coffee cup and stared at Frank Traynor in amazement. He laughed.

"Is that all?" he asked.

He seemed highly amused. He shook his head as if he scarcely believed his ears.

"No, Jack," said the editor, "it isn't all." There was a curious calm about Frank Traynor's voice. "You're through, Jack!"

Big Jack's eyes blazed for only an instant. Then he laughed again.

"My God!" he said. "You sound like the mayor."

He laughed heartily at his quip. Frank Traynor merely smiled.

"Do I?" said the editor. "Maybe. Anyway, you'll listen to my talk."

Big Jack frowned.

"I don't like your talk, Frank," he said.

"I don't give a damn what you like. You're through! Get that?" Frank Traynor got up from his chair and looked down at Big Jack. "Your mob's run out on you!"

Big Jack's frown deepened. His brown eyes became hard.

"Listen, Frank—"

"No," said Frank Traynor, "you'll listen. Your mob's run out on you—" Frank Traynor hesitated an instant—"because you let Buddy get away last night!"

Big Jack lighted a cigaret, then looked calmly at his old friend.

"How do you know that, Frank?" he said.

"That doesn't matter," said the editor. "We know some things even the police don't know; some things—" he smiled ironically—"even you don't know."

"Well," said Big Jack. "So what?"

"Just this: They ran out on you, but they're not through. They're looking for you!"

Big Jack dropped his eyes. He stared into the litter of breakfast things on the table. Thoughtfully he drew on his cigaret and inhaled deeply.

"They're nuts," he muttered. Then, as if stung by his attitude toward Traynor's news, he flared. "You're crazy," he snarled. "Those guys—say, what you trying to run on me, Frank?"

Traynor's smile was wistful.

"I'm not trying to run anything on you, Jack. I'm just giving you a break."

"Why?"

Traynor shook his head.

"I'm not sure," he said slowly, "but I suppose it's because I want to do as much for you as you did for Buddy last night." He hesitated. "But what you did for him won't do him any good; he's through, too, that boy; through—" Traynor's blue eyes gleamed terribly—"because of you! You got him into that. Maybe not directly, but you got him into it anyway. He followed you like a dog. He thought you were the greatest guy in the world. You made him a gambler and a crook. Maybe—" Frank Traynor's voice broke a little—"he'd just as well have got his last night."

Big Jack shook his head angrily.

"Then what the hell you coming here for?"

"To do as much for you, I said, as you did for Buddy. I don't want to owe you anything, Jack." Frank Traynor frowned wearily. "Maybe, too," he went on slowly, "it was because of the day."

Big Jack opened his mouth in a little gasp. He stared up at Frank Traynor with troubled brown eyes.

"The day," he said softly. "I was thinking about that, too."

Frank Traynor picked up his hat.

"That's all, Jack," he said.

He turned his back and walked out of the room. He said nothing. Neither did Big Jack. The front door slammed softly. The engine of a car out front raced as it was started, then died away in the welter of the city's sounds.

FOR a moment Big Jack sat motionless. Then he went swiftly across the room to where a telephone sat on a stand. He picked up the phone and called a number. Impatiently, his feet tapping restlessly against the floor, he waited for an answer. In a moment the soft, tactful voice of the clerk in his office came over the wire.

"Hello," said the clerk.

"Hello! This is Mr. Bannister. Is Winnie there?"

"No," said the clerk.

"Well, tell him to call—" Big Jack stopped. "Never mind," he finished.

He hung up. He called the Steamer, but there was no one there either. And then he called Winnie's apartment. No answer. Big Jack slammed the phone angrily and went upstairs, where he dressed. When he came down the servant told him some one was on the phone. It was the clerk again.

"Winnie just called," said the clerk.

"What'd he say?"

"He said—" the clerk seemed embarrassed—"to tell you that you could get him at Bully Malloy's joint over south—"

"He what?"

The clerk repeated the message. Big Jack hung up without a word. Then he called Bully Malloy's joint and asked for Winnie. In a moment Winnie came to the phone.

"Hello, Winnie," said Big Jack. "Visiting?"

"Yeh," said Winnie. "I just come over to see my friend, Bully."

"That's fine," said Big Jack. "How is he?"

"Well," said Winnie, "they's one thing—he's on the up and up."

Big Jack snarled into the phone:

"You dirty rat! What—"

"Lay off," said Winnie. "You got a call comin' to you anyway!"

"Why, you—" Big Jack cursed viciously into the phone. "I'll send you to hell!"

Winnie laughed.

"You gotta send the rest o' the boys too, then," he said. "They're all here with me. We—"

Winnie cut off suddenly. Another voice came over the phone.

"Hello, Jack," said this voice. "This is Bully. You got one white chip left—and you'd better use it quick!"

The receiver at the other end was hung up before Big Jack could answer. And he thought he heard, just before the metallic click of the broken connection, a laugh of contempt. Slowly, scowling angrily, he dropped the receiver on its hook. For awhile he sat, his forehead wrinkled with his thoughts. Then he arose, went out to the garage and got a car. He drove downtown.

Through familiar streets he went, and yet he had a peculiar feeling that they were strange. He felt, in fact, as he had felt on the night of his mother's death when he drove to the hospital. He came to the tall building in which his office was housed and parked his car. From somewhere out of the noise around him came the staccato clatter of a rivet hammer. The hammer sounded again. Big Jack shivered. It resembled strongly a sound Big Jack often had heard before. He had heard that sound first in France; he had heard it many times since . . .

He went up to his office. The clerk was there, but he looked at Big Jack uneasily. Big Jack went in and sat down at his big desk. The clerk came in.

"Mr. Bannister," he said, "I've got to go out of town for a few days. Is it all right with you?" The clerk winced under Big Jack's steady scrutiny. "It's important, Mr. Bannister."

Big Jack's lip drew back over his upper teeth.

"Yeah?" he snarled. "So you're—" But he checked himself. The snarl spread slowly into a smile. "Sure," he said, "go on."

"Thank you, Mr Bannister," said the clerk. "Can I go now?"

Big Jack laughed aloud.

"Yeah," he said, "you can go now."

The clerk turned and went into the

outer office. In a moment he reappeared with his hat and coat on.

"Well," he said, "goodby, Mr. Bannister, and thank you."

"Goodby," said Big Jack.

He smiled. The clerk, embarrassed, started to say something, thought better of it because of Big Jack's smile, and turned. In a moment Big Jack heard the outer door close.

He sat on at his desk, smoking one cigaret after another, as the afternoon passed and as late shadows darkened the office. He sat and wondered. The shadows deepened into dusk, the noises of the city became subdued and, outside in the thinning streets, he heard familiar things. He heard the blast of a traffic policeman's whistle; he heard the long, raucous insistence of a klaxon; he heard the hawking of newsboys; he heard all the little, indefinable, yet vital sounds of people and life.

He heard: and perhaps for the first time in his life, he listened.

A street car, its bell clanging, passed by, the bell whining away in the distance. Big Jack suddenly got up and looked about his office in the twilight. There was about it a peculiar emptiness; there was about it a strange indifference.

He looked at his wristwatch. Six o'clock. He went outside and got into his car. His face was set, but it was not time, yet, for what he intended. He drove far out in the fringes of the city and stopped on a rise. There he looked back and up. The night was beautiful. Moonless, the sky gleamed with the tiny, restless fires of the stars. He contemplated the stars as if for the first time in years he had realized that they were there. They seemed fresh and new to him. And then something caught his eye. It was a swinging searchlight atop the *Mail* Building.

Big Jack, muttering, turned his car around and drove back toward town.

This time he did not drive slowly. He raced along the streets at high speed, his car matching his mood, for it was now time. He was going to the Steamer. When he reached the wharf he parked the car behind a string of others and got out cautiously. But nobody seemed around. Nobody was waiting for him—on the wharf.

He paused and listened. The Steamer, at least, was as usual. From it came sounds of music and laughter. There was nothing strange about the Steamer. It was familiar and friendly, and Big Jack felt a rush of energy and confidence. He laughed to himself. He felt, then, as if he had been very silly.

HE LEFT his car and started across the wharf. But he stopped and ducked. In the long abandoned pilot house atop the Steamer there were flashes. The sharp reports of gunfire sounded above the gaiety of the Steamer. About Big Jack there was a sudden, fearful storm of bullets.

Running, he reached his car. The line of other automobiles in front of him protected him. He started the car and, backing cautiously, keeping covered, turned around. The business was slow; those in the pilot house might have time to run around and reach him. Big Jack felt a little tremor of panic. He drew from a side pocket of his car the automatic he never used.

He had turned the car around; now, staking everything, he threw it into second and gave it the gas. High powered, it bounded forward. He was slumped down until he could barely see over the dash and through the windshield. And as the car moved rapidly across the wharf and toward the haven of the streets, splintered glass powdered his face and little holes appeared in the windshield.

He reached the streets. He drove madly across the business district and toward the outskirts. He was going to his other places. But at one he was shot at; another, he found deserted. At still another, the place where Spanish had been killed, he turned hurriedly as a car, parked out in front with the cur-

tains drawn, started toward him. He shook it off with reckless speed and driving.

But at each place there grew in Big Jack Bannister's heart a gnawing, unfamiliar fear.

Once more he roamed the streets—streets filled with danger now. At each corner, despite the fact that it was impossible for his hunters to be in so many places at once, his heart caught and he gasped. He did not, either, know exactly where he was going. He simply drove. It never occurred to him that he might drive his car to the open roads beyond the city. For Big Jack had lived too long in the city; the city bounded his vision.

He drove in his flight through hundreds of streets, aimlessly, almost, seeking some haven. But at even the meanest speakeasies he was received coldly. The proprietors, at his entrance, became uneasy; the patrons, sensing the tension, left. Big Jack Bannister, in the early hours of morning, after visiting a score of places where he once would have been welcomed and deferred to, found himself still on the streets. And still he had no place to go.

So he drove on, afraid now with a fear not so much of the obvious danger that threatened him as the unfamiliarity of it and his own strange inability to do anything about it. Big Jack for the first time in his life felt powerless.

He drove on until dawn began to seep between the buildings, until the vast, impersonal miniature moved, like a sleepy giant, and stretched itself. Milk wagons, the owners of which paid tribute to Big Jack Bannister, creaked along the streets; little grocery stores and delicatessens. that bowed to his ruthless power, lighted their interiors; trucks that could not run without the payment by their owners to Big Jack Bannister for that privilege, passed him, bearing goods and produce for the day's trade.

The subjects of Big Jack's empire were at work, but he paid no attention.

The sun came up and hung in the smoke haze sullenly. In its light, the little things, the ordinary things, his car, even himself, suddenly became unreal, parts of a strange fantasy. His situation became unreal—but in the windshield the little perforations were like malicious eyes leering at him. He rolled on until the aimlessness of his actions occurred to him, and then, with a modicum of his old sense of confidence and power returning, he made for his house. There, at least, he might figure this out.

He turned at a corner and entered the street in which his house stood. And he applied the brakes so sharply the tires dragged. For in front of the house there was an automobile, its curtains drawn, waiting. Immediately his car came in view, this automobile moved. And, moving, there came a shower of shots from it.

Big Jack could not even go home.

He backed hurriedly around the corner, narrowly missing another automobile, and fled down the cross street. And this time the other car was in close pursuit. Those of the night before he had shaken off before they had had time to give chase.

He drove frantically, and at the next block found himself abruptly in contact with a second car, which also closed in on him. This car kept him in the street he was traveling.

Panicky now, his face haggard and drawn—he had neither slept nor eaten for twenty-four hours—he plunged on in flight. He passed cars, trucks, wagons, at terrific speed, only averting accidents by inches, on his way. And his way led toward the heart of the city.

But behind him, hanging on doggedly, came his pursuers. He drove on through the thickening traffic until he reached the busiest part of the city and there new panic struck at him. For he heard, replacing the steady beats of his powerful engine, a sickening, whistling cough as the gasoline ran out.

Coasting then, hardly aware of what

he did, he ran into a parking place. He jumped out.

"Howdy, Mr. Bannister," he heard.

He turned, startled, his hand seeking his pocket. But all he saw was the friendly bulk of a cop. It was the cop who had watched his car the day he had gone to see Frank Traynor.

Big Jack looked up. He found himself at the corner of Twelfth and Hamilton. Above him the building in which he had his office reared itself. He looked back at the cop. The man was staring, as if he were puzzled at something he saw in Big Jack. And something about this cop brought back a flash of the Big Jack that had been.

"Howdy," he said, glancing up the street. Blocks away, he made out the pursuing cars. "Want to watch my car?"

"Sure," said the cop. He was grinning now. "That's a new crate you got there, ain't it?"

"Yeah," said Big Jack.

"Well," said the cop, "I'll betcha I can call the license number right. I'll betcha ten dollars—"

Big Jack grinned too.

"Make it twenty-five," he said.

The cop's eyes widened. It was a lot of money, but he was dogged.

"O.K," he said. "It's a bet. The number's F-333259."

"Right," said Big Jack. He peeled off the bills and added another one. It was a fifty. "That's for watching my car," he said.

The cop began to stammer, but Big Jack didn't wait. The pursuing cars were close now. He hurried into the entrance of the building.

For awhile, he knew, he was safe. They wouldn't come after him. All of his experience told him that. It wasn't their way. They'd wait, and he decided to let them do that. He also could wait. He went on back to the elevator and rose to his office.

He opened the door, but he did not walk in; he stood, motionless, his hand on the knob. For, seated at the desk in the outer office, fumbling with papers, was his secretary. The secretary was staring through his thick spectacles at the door. He started as the gambler appeared.

Big Jack closed the door behind him.

"You got back pretty quick," he said.

The secretary continued to stare. He only nodded. He looked at Big Jack as if he could not believe his eyes. There was a morbid fascination in his stare. But Big Jack didn't notice.

There surged over him suddenly a flood of confidence. The secretary was familiar. His place at that desk was in the usual scheme of things. And to Big Jack there came a feeling that the usual scheme of things still maintained. Unconsciously, he squared his shoulders.

"I thought you were like the other rats," he said. "I thought you had run out, too." He walked over and laid his hand on the man's shoulder. He smiled. He shook him affectionately. "Good guy," he went on.

Still smiling, he turned to go into his office. There, he could think this thing out. With the secretary in the usual place it was easier to think; it was as if everything had become simple. Behind him the secretary turned abruptly. He looked as if he craved to say something. But Big Jack did not see how brilliant were his faded eyes behind his thick spectacles, did not see his mouth fly open. He did not see how violently he trembled.

"Good guy," Big Jack repeated absently.

He opened the door. His smile froze.

There was a fearful, blasting roar. There was a terrific, jarring impact. Big Jack crumpled slowly, his hand still on the knob. Then darkness enveloped him.

A Story of the Mexican Border

By CHARLES L. CLIFFORD

The DECOY

WHY is it the more seasoned and heartless the practical joker, the more sensitive and outraged he becomes at the mere hint of a plot against his own vanity?

We had one, the most renowned in the Army without a doubt, back there at Bliss. One by one he got us all. And though there wasn't a gayer or better natured gang of bachelors along the Border, they finally got enough. They stood at bay, shoulder to shoulder; and the married officers gave them what support they could contrive. For the ladies of the post were all on Jeff's side. They thought it was side splitting to see a gray haired lieutenant-colonel wrestling with a piece of rubber gum. (Yes, he'd put a flapper up to that; and it had been a glorious success at a Saturday night hop.)

I made one feeble effort at retaliation myself. At one time or other everybody had, of course. But it was the usual dismal failure. He was as alert to sense danger as a mother tiger. My attempt was crude—an insult to the intelligence of such an expert of refined humor.

We had just finished dinner and, as usual, before the business of the evening separated us, we smoked awhile be-

fore the big fire in the mess. He was wisecracking as was normal with him. And he was in great fettle because he had dined even better than was his wont, if such a thing were possible.

As he came out of the dining room I was waiting; oh, very casually, by the little cigar stand Willie, the steward, had arranged as a convenience for us. I knew what he was going to say; and he said it. He stretched and threw out his too ample—for a Cavalryman—stomach.

"Well, who's going to buy me a Corona? Don't bruise me in the rush—"

Of course it was just his formula. It always occurred after a meal. His "repletion" line I called it.

He'd selected his cigar and was signing the chit when I got his attention. I held out my prepared offering. It really looked quite good; and the band I had carefully affixed stared him boldly in the face. The others were walking up to the fireplace now. Of course they knew. I had crowed quite a bit in advance; and that is always fatal. So they walked by, pretending not to notice.

Jeff went right on lighting his own purchase and walking toward the hearth. We had a visiting quartermaster there that night at mess. He'd come in from an outlying station and seemed so glad to see more than two white men at once that we'd made a special effort to be nice to him. He'd laughed steadily throughout the meal at all Jeff's age-old smart cracks. Absolutely fascinated, he stood near us now, impatient for Jeff to go on.

Jeff looked across the first puff of smoke at me with pitying eyes. He made no move to take the toothsome bait.

"Since when have you been carrying cigars?"

I knew right then I had failed. I explained that I had pocketed it at a banquet in El Paso—which was true, as far as the band went. I still maintained my air of carelessness; but it was no go. He read me like a book.

He looked at his admirer, the little old Q.M. officer. He shook his head sadly.

"Always trying to kid me," he said mournfully.

Everything he said now was hilariously funny to the Q.M. The little noncombatant had become emboldened by Jeff's familiarity; by the gay informality of the dinner table. He held his hand out toward the spurned offering.

"How about a little turn about? Service for the staff, eh?"

Jeff's eyes glowed with pure delight. I handed the cigar over. Had to, as the little fellow was so childishly eager.

"Ah," Jeff said. "Service for the line as usual."

I might explain here that this last is the slogan of the Quartermaster Corps; and very fine as slogans go . . .

Well, when that cigar exploded in the terrified face of the little Q.M. officer I was about washed up on Jeff. Damned inhospitable of us I thought; and so did the others. Only Jeff roared. And that night when he left the fire, the rest of us stayed on talking very seriously as to what must be done. Plan after plan was offered; but from what we knew of him we instinctively realized almost at once their vulnerable spots.

We had a young major-doctor there in the mess who had already become quite famous as a psychiatrist. He had been at Walter Reed Hospital for a three-year tour and had attracted considerable attention among civilian experts. Some of his papers had created something of a stir in medical circles.

I said, in the midst of a jumble of feeble suggestions:

"It seems to me that this thing has graduated out of the class of schoolroom pranks. Mechanical jokers and all that. If we got him on one of those it would only be momentary; and I doubt if there's a joke contraption on the market he isn't familiar with. We've got to get down to the fundamentals. Human nature stuff."

Doc Reeves shot me a shrewdly ap-

preciative glance.

"Now you're talking," he said.

"It ought to be something he'll never forget. Something soul searing."

This pleased them. They roared with laughter.

"Old Pot's right. Something like that Ku Klux thing."

They were referring to the anonymous letter I had gotten back at Guadalupe. It had been most threatening in tone and purported to have come from the local Knights of the Invisible Empire. These knights warned me in no uncertain terms immediately to discontinue my attentions to a local widow, and to be out of town in ten days. Those had been ten tough days for me.

"In a case like this," Doc Reeves said, "there is a rule, odd as that may seem to you leatherseats. Seek for the particular vanity. We all have it."

We were all eager now. We saw the light. And in a single breath we chorused the joker Jeff Johnson's most pronounced foible. It was significant that the word hit us with impulsive unanimity.

The Doc, as befitted his scientific experience, was put in charge. He selected a committee and swore them to secrecy. He explained to me that I was too close a friend of Jeff's and my desire for retaliation too pronounced and recent to be of practical assistance. Cold blooded impersonality was what was wanted here. It was because of the other thing that so far all our efforts at revenge had been impromptu and abortive.

So that's how the whole thing started; and it's certain that none of us sitting there had the faintest premonition that it would get so horribly out of hand.

DAYS passed; and personally I had forgotten the whole thing. Or if I thought of it at all in vagrant fashion it was only to smile. These indignation meetings had happened before, and nothing ever came of them.

One night at dinner (I remember it was very cold and you could hear the wind from the mountains whining about the windows) the telephone rang loudly and insistently. It was one of those old fashioned Signal Corps affairs which you had to wind up like a clock before you got any attention. And it hung on the wall just inside the door. A poor place for a phone in a bachelor mess.

Most embarrassing at times. Because if you were unlucky enough to have a call from a lady while those hyenas were at table—well, you know how it would be. They'd all stop eating and talking and listen brazenly. They'd call to you in falsetto, making it difficult to hear. They'd give you all sorts of embarrassing advice.

This night they were very decent. The talk went on as usual and not even an eyebrow was raised as Willie, the steward, called Jeff to the phone. He bounded out of his chair and when he got to the instrument he turned his back on us. We all did that; but he had one of those peculiar voices that can be toned down to a mere whisper but can still be heard clearly at the other end of the wire. I shamelessly tried to catch what he was saying; for by this time it was tacitly agreed that he had forfeited any privacy, even the little afforded by an Army bachelor's mess.

He came back to the table presently and I noticed a significant gleam in his eyes. A woman—only a woman put that look into his usually shrewd, watchful eyes. They kidded him a little—just the usual stuff. But he didn't come back at them in his usually robust style. Just a few stock rejoinders.

"A beautiful Russian princess just hit town . . . You'll get fat kidding me, soldier . . ."

He finished his meal quickly, abandoned his dessert and excused himself to the senior officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Roberts.

Roberts looked from Jeff's retreating back to the untouched apple dumpling. The sauce was beginning to melt.

"He must be ill—or perhaps his

mother is dying."

A sudden loud, raucous laugh went up from the major-doctor . . .

My quarters were across the hall from Jeff's; and when I went up directly after dinner—I had forgotten my pipe—he was whistling at a great rate in his front room. He heard me and called out. I went over. He was standing in his underwear before a crazily tilted mirror rubbing some foul smelling lotion into his face. His hair had already been anointed (he habitually used some slicking preparation which had always annoyed me intensely) and gleamed like jade in the light from the rose shaded lamp above the dresser. I could see that he was literally shaking with excitement.

"What goes on?"

"Big things," he said.

His cigar was burning the wood of the dresser. I moved it into a nearby ash tray.

"What things?" I said.

He spun about. His face was positively shining with suppressed emotion.

"I can trust you, Pot?"

I thought of those ten awful days back there at Guadalupe.

"You know that," I said.

He reached for the cigar and took a gulp at it. His hand was shaking.

"Remember the one—the queen in the mink coat—I told you about the other night?"

"The one who was flirting with you in the Paso del Norte lobby? Or so you say."

"No; not flirting. She isn't that kind, Pot. But she did look interested. She's the most beautiful woman I ever saw."

He sat down on the bed and stared at me as if still seeing this vision of beauty. I looked at his red face, still wet from the cream or whatever it was that he had been rubbing on it. And I looked at his flattened nose that a high headed horse had smashed. There was a broken tooth, too, where a polo ball had come to a stunning finish. I wanted to burst into a roar of wild laughter, but I said cautiously—

"Mm-huh?"

"Well, she called me tonight; down there at dinner."

"No woman who looked like that would call you," I said.

"She said she'd found out my name; watched me play polo and was crazy to meet me."

"That could have been arranged less furtively," I said.

"You don't understand," he said as if pleading with a thick headed child to take treatment for snake bite. "She's got a husband, and he's just left town. A civilian. They don't know a soul in the post."

"Funny," I said. "A woman that looks like that."

He was eager to correct my obviously flippant statement, so he added a brief explanation:

"Just here on a visit. I'm to meet her on the corner in front of Bane's drugstore at eight."

I almost burst out laughing in his red face. Here was the plot and he was stepping right into the trap. Could it be possible he was falling for a thing as crude as this? But I controlled that wild desire to roar. Here was my revenge for that Ku Klux note. Here was an end to his fun at my expense. Never again would I have to nose and feel everything I touched for fear it would erupt or poison me. I had my cue and my heartfelt thanks went out to Doc and his committee of revenge.

"Why am I honored with all this?" I asked cautiously.

After all, this might be one of his own brand. The next thing might be an innocent request that I meet her in his place. Ah, no!

He looked a little hurt.

"You're my best friend, Pot."

"Oh—" I said, pretending to be mollified.

"And I'm a little broke. I'll have to take her over to Juarez. To the Central. She'll like that. I'll hand it right back to you on payday."

I NEVER was more eager to do a favor. I gave him every cent I had. I helped brush his clothes and even rubbed his boots up a bit. He kept watching the big nickel alarm clock on the mantel and kept up that infernal, nervous whistling of his. He borrowed my malacca crop and surveyed himself as best he could in the dresser mirror, tilting it down so that he could see how my silver spurs looked. Well, I didn't mind. Even if he never paid me back.

At 7:45 he stepped into my coupé (he said his flivver would be too cold even if she did have a mink coat) and looked lovingly at the empty seat beside him.

"Oh, boy!" he said, and he slammed the door and went whirring off.

When I got back to the fire they had all gone. Well, why not?

I took his flivver, carefully closed the dirty curtains about it and drove like mad after him to the town.

Bane's drugstore is right at the end of a block. Then comes a narrow street, and next to it the small city park. The park is dark on Winter nights; or just a few perfunctory lights at best. Right by the park was an ideal place from which to watch. I could see the front of Bane's plainly and yet I was in the shadow. There were lots of other cars by the curb and a curtained flivver more or less would hardly draw his attention, especially at a romantic moment like this.

There seemed to me an unwonted crush of cars along that block. I wondered. Was everybody in on it? And were they all delightedly watching his every move? Some of the parked cars seemed familiar to me.

I got in place just in time. There he was, unostentatiously standing as if caught momentarily by a display of electric irons in the window. I was so close that I could see him surreptitiously unroll a mint from a package in his hand and slip it into his ugly mouth. Though not close enough to hear, I knew he was whistling that same infernal tune.

I looked at my watch. Eight o'clock. I began to laugh; and then it dawned on me that the thing wasn't so good after all. He'd simply stand there like an ass for half an hour or so and wear out my crop, hitting it against his boot. Then the annoying truth would come home to him. Or more likely, with his facile suspicions, he would only wait a quarter of an hour. Then he'd figure it out that he had been sold.

The more I thought about it the less respect I had for Doc Reeves and his science. What would this prove? He would merely laugh it off. Wouldn't any man take the chance of a frame-up on the off chance of a queen like that turning up? He'd make a play on the chivalry gag. Oh, he'd have a comeback, all right. The only fun we'd get would be the big laugh from those parked cars—if they were from the post—as he walked away from the trysting place. And it would be damned undignified at that.

It was 8:10. He'd slipped another mint into his mouth and was tapping my crop a little faster. It was cold. I was beginning to think that at least a part of the laugh was on us. Then, as if coming right up from out of the sidewalk, there suddenly appeared one of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen. The front of the store was deserted at the time and the thing was most dramatic. She stood there, mink coat and all, and the light from the store window lighted up her face. She wore a tight little black hat and there was thick, gold hair curling out around the edge of it. It struck me that no matter what happened now, he was away ahead of the game. Even if they'd got some girl to play up to him, still there he was right with her. And believe me she was something to be with.

I leaned recklessly out of the flivver, straining to hear. He was facing outward and I could see his homely face break into a fatuous grin. He said something to her; and I really expected the next instant to see him take her by

the arm and lead her to my nice warm car.

But suddenly she turned abruptly—just as a stranger might do who was being annoyed by a masher. She threw back her head, and I saw that she was smiling faintly. My high hopes were dashed. She made a little movement with her head that plainly said he was to follow her. I could almost see the gleam in his eyes. She walked away, moving rapidly right toward me; and he followed for all the world like a trained seal after a bit of herring. Yes, that was the way he walked.

She came on, her head held high. The whole thing was clear to me now. Better for them to meet in the gloom of the park. Too public for first confidences in front of this lighted store.

Well, he had put it over again. No joke to this. By some incredible quirk of the female mind this beautiful creature had undoubtedly fallen for his doubtful charms.

She crossed the narrow street and as she came to the park she walked slower. She passed me and I got a faint wisp of delightful scent.

He came on like a cat after a ball of yarn. But my eyes never left that seductively moving mink coat.

Then I became aware of a movement just ahead of her—as if some one had stepped out from the park hedge. There was a man there; he stood on the inner side of the walk and seemed to be watching her, too. It would be just Jeff's luck if he spoke to her. Just what he'd love. He was a tough baby with his hands; and, if only for the effect, he would have made it rough for any interloper now.

Jeff came abreast of the girl and fell into step with her. I could hear him laugh softly, for they were only a few feet from where I sat crouched in the flivver.

Then I heard the man's voice speak up clearly and coldly. Addressing the girl, he said—

"Is this man annoying you, miss?"

SHE fell back and stood beside the man. In the faint light I could see her white face. Her voice was very low, but I could hear every word of it plainly.

"He's been following me," she said. "Trying to talk to me. I never saw him before in my life."

I caught the gleam of metal then on the man's chest. I saw that he was in uniform.

He took Jeff by the arm.

"You'll have to come with me, Captain," he said. "No trouble, now."

And before I came to my senses the walk before me was deserted. No girl, no cop—and no Jeff. After a time I got the cold flivver going and drove as fast as I could to the city jail. But there I was met with chilling politeness and told that unless I was his lawyer I could see no Captain Jefferson Johnson this night. And there'd be no bail.

I went solemnly out into the night. Poor old Jeff. Bad as he was, this was too strong. Even his worst enemy wouldn't have wished him this disgrace. For it was clear to me that the general would have to know; and that meant a general court; or, for the sake of decency, at best a forced resignation. An awful guilt settled over me. If I had only warned him that I thought it just a frame-up, he wouldn't have gone. What the woman's idea in meeting him was, I couldn't for the life of me figure. I'd asked at the desk for her name and address, with some vague idea of paying her off; but there was nothing doing.

So I cranked up the flivver and went across the bridge to the Central, where I drank gloomily and totally unaware of the music and dancing about me. All I had was a little loose change in my pocket and the waiter didn't know me. So Louie, the manager, came over and we had a little chat. Louie had once been a mess sergeant at the post and he liked officers. He cashed a check for me and we had a tequila daisy together. I was so worried that I was considering appealing to Louie for ad-

vice when he said—

"Heard the news, Captain?"

"Plenty," I said.

"This is bad," he said earnestly. "Sanchez's men have taken Chihuahua. They've got the railroad an' all."

"The same old blah," I said. "I've got something real to worry about."

But Louie wasn't listening to me. He said gloomily:

"An' after I went an' built up such a good business here. God knows what they'll do to the places. Last time they raised holy—"

"Licked already, are you? There's a good garrison here. Del Pilar knows his stuff."

Louie looked sadly upon my innocence.

"Hell, they've got him bought up. He'll be in El Paso by the first shot."

Somebody called to Louie and he left me hurriedly. I poured out another drink. All this trouble at once, I thought bitterly. These spicks at it again. Another comic opera battle at our doorsteps. That meant out of the warm mess and riding along this infernal river in the stinging mountain winds. Sleeping in a tent that shook and banged like loose sails in a gale. And all the time nothing happening except a few spicks getting shot up for no apparent reason.

The thing happened periodically—as regular as leap year. Juarez was a most desirable billet. Customs duties were collected there, and there was the graft from cantinas, gambling and the countless seraglios. To say nothing of the good strong banks in El Paso, just across the river, where the loot could be safely laid up. But what I couldn't understand was why they didn't do the business sensibly; just change over quietly without all this "hurrah-boys" and wild shooting. Most of the people hit were Americans who watched the fun from the roofs of high buildings in El Paso.

Yes, they had the fun with their picnic on the roofs; and we had the dirty work. We rode that line; and all because a few miserable spicks might make their way to our side with arms in their hands. It was our job to corral them up, disarm them, then provide them with free board and lodging, the like of which they had never had in their peon lives.

Louie came back. He sat down, refused a drink and looked furtively about the big room with the air of a conspirator. I noticed that although it was not yet midnight the dancers were hastily paying their checks and getting their wraps.

"Just got news," Louie said, wetting his fat lips. He pushed a bulging manila envelop toward me. "I want you to take this to the Farmers & Drovers. Checks and cash."

This meant business. I knew that when Louie shoved real money around in this random fashion trouble was in the air. In the suppressed excitement of the place I forgot all about Jeff and his fix.

"They're actually coming, then?"

"Carloads—from Chihuahua. Cavalry's in contact outside now. No sign of Pilar. He's beat it across, all right," Louie said bitterly. "We're here to take the rap."

"You can come across. There's plenty of time," I said, putting the envelop into my coat pocket and feeling like an amateur actor in a rotten play.

Louie sighed.

"Not a chance. I got an interest here. Every nickel I got 's tied up in this joint."

I whistled; I liked Louie, and I knew his type. He'd been awarded a Certificate of Merit when he'd been in the 6th Cavalry in Jolo in the old days.

A faint look of hope softened his grim mouth.

"They say Sanchez ain't so bad. Not if you play his way. An' he's got to have the joints runnin', ain't he? He's in it like the rest of them for the kale."

I felt sorry for Louie; but I knew he was going to stick. So I said:

"He won't bother an American.

You've got a good rep over here, Louie. But you better keep away from the trenches till it's over. Stick right here behind the thickest wall you've got."

"Yeah; in the cellar. An' we'll bury most of the stuff. Things'll be over in twenty-four hours. Then I'll come up like a groundhog an' pray it'll be Spring. Well, so long, Captain."

I shook Louie's hand heartily. I hoped indeed that it would soon be Spring and that we'd drink many more tequila daisies. Then I drove through the crowded streets, hoping there'd be no trouble at the bridge.

Soldiers had already been detailed to assist the city police, and the exodus of tourists and pleasure seekers from across the bridge was expedited with good order. Our military guards on the El Paso side were grinning good naturedly. After weeks of monotony they were once again going to see the martial comedy enacted, and later, in barracks, have material for many humorous lies.

THERE was a jam just ahead, and the impatient fugitives began a wild, discordant blowing of horns. Nothing annoys me as much as this. It has always struck me as the indelible mark of a selfish, petty counter-jumper. I jumped out of the flivver and made my way through the press. A big provost sergeant and an equally large Mexican were the center of the imbroglio. The sergeant I knew well; he was from Jeff's troop and had only lately been put on this bridge detail. The Mexican was Colonel del Pilar. I also knew Pilar. He fancied himself a polo player and had got up quite a good team among his officers. They had come across and played us several times at the post; and we had all dined and drunk together afterward. Once Pilar had put on a great fiesta at his quarters in Juarez in compliment to all the regimental teams. He beamed at me now.

"This man does not like to let me pass, Captain."

With Louie's words still fresh in my mind my greeting was not overwarm.

"From what I hear you'd be better off back there, Colonel," I said.

He moved up close to me. He dropped his voice so that no one in the mob about could hear.

"It is just that. I must get to the telephone—long distance. Agua Prieta; you understand?"

I knew there was a considerable garrison of Federal troops at that place. And also that long distance calls from Juarez had been stopped by the telephone company lately. Still it occurred to me somebody else . . .

He must have read my hesitancy.

"Nobody else can do this. Valdes there, he knows my voice. He will rush troops. The revolutionists have cut the wires on our side."

This was reasonable. And I had always liked Pilar. So I spoke to the sergeant in charge. He grinned.

"O.K, Captain. Oney he gotta leave them cannons here." He held up two Luger pistols hung to a heavy cartridge belt. "And he can't take that there car. 'Gainst orders."

Pilar looked mournfully at his shiny car that had been wheeled to the side of the road just off the bridge. He shrugged.

"You can come with me," I said, and with the help of the guard we got clear of the mess and were soon rattling through the outskirts of El Paso.

From behind us, across the river, we saw rockets swish up against the black sky, shake out into plumes of colored light, then spatter toward the earth in a maze of scattered sparks. Then came the faint sound of firing. I looked at Pilar out of the corner of my eye. He sat there gazing steadily forward. He said not a word. I began to wonder just how he felt. Was his heart leaping with satisfaction at an escape just in the nick of time? Was he gloating over the harvest of years, now safely stowed in an El Paso bank? Or had he the burning fervor of a patriot, madly eager

to get this detached detail done, get back to his fighting troops and drive the enemies of his country back into the desert whence they had come?

I could not tell. He sat there rigid and silent; and, after his first estimating glance back, never once turning. We came on to a well lighted street. People were raising windows and running from doorways. Above the rattling of the ancient flivver we could hear them calling, telling the news. Battle in Juarez! Big show! People rushing for high windows that faced the south; hurrying up stairs and into elevators to get to the roofs. Same old game.

And now we were down by the square. Near the park where (it seemed hours ago to me) poor Jeff had met the vision in the mink coat. Pilar's eyes began to dart about. The lighted streets and the excited crowds seemed to bewilder him. He touched my arm and said hoarsely—

"I can not go to the hotel—to a public place like that."

We were bouncing along the car tracks of the main street. It was bright as day under the arc lights. I looked at him and had to laugh, serious as the whole thing was. There he was dressed in his most showy uniform—gay befrogged blouse, epaulets, ribbons and all. At such a moment he would indeed make a stir were he to enter a public telephone booth. He was well known on our side of the line; and the least that could happen to him would be damning criticism for absenting himself from his command at such a time as this. And then El Paso swarmed with Mexican revolutionists. Pilar would make a grand target.

"You can phone from my quarters," I said, and I swung the car by the park and stepped on the gas.

The post was surprisingly quiet. Then I remembered happily that the new general was something of a character. He knew the Border well; and had done his share of riding that beastly line as a troop officer. He had been quoted as a humorist in regard to Mexican heroics. He was a great man for a laugh. And in his younger days was said to have been as notorious as Jeff had come to be for practical jokes. The chances were that he intended to laugh the whole thing off. That made me feel better as we drove up to the darkened bachelors' mess.

Willie was still up and he told me that most of the officers were over at the water tank. Grandstand seats there. And the news was that no troops would be called out. Let the spicks have their fun. Captain Johnson was in his quarters, he said, lowering his voice. He had been asking for me all night—or since he had come in, several hours ago.

"He's in arrest in quarters by the general's orders, sir. I'm worried sick. I've known him ten years now. There's nothing I wouldn't do for Captain Johnson, sir."

Willie was positively sobbing. For a brief, unworthy moment I thought back to the time Jeff had hidden the skunk in old Willie's room; but it didn't make me smile.

"Come on," I said to Pilar; and we hurried up the dimly lighted stairs and went into my quarters. Willie had kept a fire going and it was pleasantly warm.

There was some tequila on the table and I pointed it out to the colonel.

"There's the phone. Tell central it is I speaking. It may take some time, but they'll put you through."

He thanked me and rushed to the instrument. I crossed the hall and knocked on Jeff's door.

AS LONG as I live I shall never forget that face. He was standing by the mantel, the fire almost dead at his feet. He had on a pair of old slacks and a tattered polo jersey. No gay slickum on his hair now; it was in wild disorder. But that face! As far as I could remember I had never seen him without at least a cheerful look on that round ugly mug. Even when he got a com-

pound fracture on the rim rock at Fort Riley, he was wisecracking right into the ambulance. But this time it was different. He looked ages older. His eyes were red rimmed, bloodshot and sunk deep into his head. His mouth hung loose; and his fingers kept moving, twisting and clutching.

I didn't say anything. I went up to him and put my hand across his shoulders and pushed him into a big leather chair. Then I poured two stiff drinks of Canadian Club and handed him the larger.

"Light this, Jeff."

I handed him a cigar Louie had given me. Funny I should think of that right off.

He took it; and his hands shook so he couldn't keep the match to it. I lighted it for him.

"We'll fix this up, Jeff. I saw it all. I'm going to the general."

He had swallowed his drink at a gulp.

"I didn't want to drink alone. I didn't dare to," he said. "Lord, I'm glad to see you, Pot."

"That's all right," I said.

"I asked for you. Willie said you were in town. Then I asked for any of the others. Nobody came. It's tough when you're in trouble. But you know who your friends are then. You wouldn't think just a few kid tricks would get them down on you," he said.

He was almost sobbing.

"They're not down on you. There's a row on in Juarez. Sanchez is moving in on the town. They're all out watching it. They'll be around when they hear."

His face brightened a little.

"So that's it! Lord, I've felt lonely."

He got up and began pacing the room, his eyes never leaving mine.

"You know, Pot—I've considered shooting myself. I couldn't, quite. But if you hadn't come—" His eyes strayed from mine, and I saw them rest on a Service pistol which lay on the table under the field belt hanging from a hook in the wall. So I said quickly:

"It's not that bad, Jeff. Here, take another drink and tell me everything."

The drink seemed to steady him. And my being there cheered him unquestionably. Suddenly he began to talk.

"I saw everything up to the arrest," I interrupted.

He gave me a quick look; but he was so immersed in his thoughts that he raced on.

"They put me in a dirty cell—with a tramp. Half nutty bird who kept raving. First he was going to hang himself with a pair of red suspenders. Then he began to write out a petition on an old piece of paper. I was to sign it and add my word. It was all about the rotten condition of the jail and the poor management. We were going to send it to the President of the United States."

He laughed here; and I couldn't help thinking what a wonderful thing a sense of humor is.

"It seemed hours," he went on. "I begged them to let me phone. Not a chance. I saw the chief of police and he said he had called the post. Notified the general. I knew it was all up then. Of course I told them my story; but they said the woman had lodged a complaint."

He finished his drink and looked sadly at the floor.

"I should have known that a woman that looked like that wouldn't have been all steamed up about an ugly mug like me."

"What did the general do?" I asked kindly.

"Sent that damned fresh aide down. Lambert. He brought me out here in his car. Told me I was under arrest in quarters. That charges would be preferred tomorrow. Not a chance to put in my resignation."

He moaned and dropped his head in his hands. When he looked up there were tears of misery in his eyes.

"Think of it, Pot! To be dismissed from the Army for a thing like that.

Annoying a woman on the street! In uniform. What will the Old Man think!"

The Old Man was a retired colonel of the old school who had a splendid record in the Service.

"It will kill my mother . . ."

I didn't know what to tell him, so I gave him another drink. He swallowed it quickly and the ghost of his old smile came into his face.

"I might as well get drunk, at that. Just another specification, that's all."

AND actually before my eyes he seemed to have gotten drunk. He began to pace the room with a new energy. Color had come back into his face. I sat thinking. I could stretch my story a little on the stand. I would swear that the woman smiled at him; gave him encouragement. That would help. But still, the main fact was starkly incontrovertible. His intentions had been to meet an unknown woman on the main streets of El Paso. In uniform. Not the proper thing for an officer to do under any circumstances. And in spite of his humor loving disposition, the general was noted as a severe disciplinarian.

The cop would be a credible eye witness; had caught him in the act as it were. The woman, for some reason or other, was determined. Otherwise by this time she would have relented. Civilians in El Paso were familiar enough with military manners to know how serious such a thing as this could be. No; obviously she intended to press the matter to the bitter end. That meant taking the stand and swearing that Jeff had accosted her on the street.

"Will you be my counsel, Pot?"

"Sure thing," I said. "Colonel Roberts would be better, though."

"That potted plant I sent him, collect, last Christmas," Jeff reminded me. "No; he'd get me hung!"

I laughed in spite of myself.

"There goes your phone," Jeff said.

I started to get up. Then I remembered.

"It's for Pilar," I said, and I told Jeff about the doings on the other side. I thought it would take his mind off his own trouble. I was surprised by the eagerness he exhibited.

"Let's go over," he said, making for the door.

I moved toward the door too; and for a moment we listened. Jeff never had been able to remember more than a couple words of Spanish. He said—

"What's all the bellyaching about?"

I had heard Pilar say:

"You know that means the end here. . . . So you betrayed me, then, for Sanchez's gold with blood on it."

"He's kidding his pal up at Agua Prieta," I said to Jeff.

"I wish to God we were there now," Jeff said. "Sitting in that sunny window, talking to Maurice."

Maurice was the bartender of the Café Moderno.

Somehow that made me think of my car. I suppose because I had driven it so often to Maurice's hospitable door.

"I suppose my bus is still in front of Bane's?" I said.

He stopped in the middle of the hall, halfway across to my quarters. He looked at me, startled.

"Gee, I'm sorry, Pot. I'll send Connor—"

Connor was his striker, and I knew him of old. If such a thing were possible he was not going to experiment with my hard earned—when paid for—little car.

"No. I'll be taking Pilar back. Sheridan forty miles away, and so on. Connor can bring your flivver back. He's already done his worst on that."

Jeff laughed—almost his old-time laugh—and we walked in on Del Pilar. The Mexican was in the act of tossing off a stiff shot of raw tequila. He had the air of one who is taking at least his second in swift succession. His gay dress coat was torn open half down the front. His usually neat black hair was

bedraggled, hanging wet and clownishly down into his eyes. His face was white as a saddle cloth before parade. Even if I hadn't heard I would have known at first glance that it was bad luck—very, very bad.

"Want to start back?" I asked, trying hard to keep my voice cheerful.

It was a strain in the spot I was forked into, here between the two of them. I felt as if I were hobnobbing with Napoleon and Maximilian, assuming the two debacles had occurred at once.

Pilar didn't look straight at me. He fussed with the tequila bottle. I felt sorry as the devil for him; for though I sensed he was a weakling, and utterly unfit to defend a forlorn hope, still he had always been friendly and helpful to us when we were on his side of the river.

"No bad news?" I said casually.

He looked up then and smiled. I saw that he was going to play the Latin to the end.

"Everything's fine," he said. "Valdes has some mounted troops near Palomas. He's trying to get in touch with them. I'll have to wait for a call from him."

As he talked his eyes moved toward the window. He had evidently raised it after I had left. You could see the place that earlier had been brightly lighted Juarez, and see the flash of the guns. Their dull echo came to us clearly in that quiet room. They fitfully lighted the dark beleaguered town.

Jeff shook hands with Pilar. They had knocked around a lot in Juarez, and Pilar used to roar at Jeff's crazy stories. He'd egg him on in front of Mexican girls and then translate the yarns, always with an added risqué angle. I could see that Jeff was tremendously excited as he peered out the window. Even at the time it seemed a little strange, because he had seen a dozen similar shows.

There was a moment of tense silence as we watched. Then Jeff said breathlessly:

"Lord! How I'd like to be in that!"

Pilar gave him a quick look. Then he said brightly—

"Let's all have a drink."

We had one; then Jeff said to me:

"You really ought to get that car. There'll be hell popping all over town tonight. Unless—" he grinned faintly—"it's insured for over ten dollars."

"It's not," I said.

Pilar looked at me quickly and then at Jeff. Jeff returned the look with a strained grin, almost it seemed of suppressed eagerness. It was as if a sudden understanding had flared between them, as if they wanted me to go.

Pilar said:

"If the others go to the water tank—Of course, Captain, you want a view of the fight. You must not stay here on account of me. Friend Jeff, here—" he wagged his head at Jeff as at a delinquent schoolboy—"he is bad boy. He keep me company."

"Then I'll go after that car of mine," I said, and I left them pouring out another drink.

CONNOR was on duty as waiter that week and he slept in a room downstairs. With some of the other men he was watching the battle from a side porch. But he was delighted to go with me. It got him nearer the fight. We drove off in Jeff's flivver that Connor was to bring back. Like master like man, I thought, as he kept up a steady stream of excited talk all the way down the hill. But somehow, as we drove out of the post into the dimly lighted street that leads toward the town, a dark premonition took hold of me. This was the second time I had walked out on Jeff tonight. He had seemed cheerful enough. Still . . .

Police reserves had cleared the streets in El Paso, and many of them were closed to traffic. It was a necessary precaution to keep curious motorists and crowds from the exposed districts. For even as we drove by the outer edge of

the town we could see stray shrapnel bursting on this side of the river.

But on plea of official business they let us through. It took time, though. Over an hour had passed before I drove the now historic coupé into the garage behind the mess. And I had decided, fight or no fight, I was going to turn in. For there'd be drill as usual in the morning.

Jeff's door was closed when I went by. And my own room, though lighted as I had left it, was empty. I listened for a moment, thinking I might hear Pilar and Jeff in his quarters. But everything was quiet. Pilar gone, I guessed. Probably called up and got a car from the town. And Jeff, the poor devil, worn out at last; and, by the look of my tequila bottle, full to boot. I decided to turn in without disturbing him. And if the truth were told, my own nerves were pretty ragged. I'd heard enough of other men's troubles for one night.

As I undressed a gleam caught my eye. Weighting down a sheet of penciled paper on the table by the bed was a heap of gold coins. The note read:

Muchas gracias, amigo. Adios
—DEL PILAR

Well, he'd paid his phone bill anyway. I drank the last finger in the bottle and stared for a moment out the window. Sinister lights still played about the Mexican town. And I thought, my mind on poor Pilar, *Adios, pobrecito!*

For from what I had heard the garrison stood not a dog's chance.

Connor was the first to tell me. I was just going into the dining room for breakfast when he came running after me in his white mess coat, his face almost as colorless.

"He's gone, sir!"

I followed him back up the stairs. We were the only ones about, none of the other officers being down yet.

"I checked up on his clothes, sir. One civie suit missing. An' he took his belt an' pistol."

I went into Jeff's room; and then Connor gave me the note.

Don't worry about me, Pot. I'm not running away. I want to finish it up right. Like a soldier. That's a laugh! All my stuff is yours, including the spavined mount. My clothes fit you, anyway. Best,

—JEFF

P. S. The cigar in breast pocket best O.D. blouse is phony. Let some one else smoke it; you've suffered enough.

I put the letter in my pocket.

"You don't know anything about this, Connor?"

"No, sir. Of course I don't."

"Not even that the captain isn't here."

"I understand, sir. If I'm asked, the captain is resting—sleeping."

"Right."

I sent Connor about his business and called a garage in the town.

"Is Cleve there?"

Cleve was speaking.

When we had to rent a car we usually called up Cleve. He was an ex-soldier and he was abnormally lacking in curiosity. He drove you, looking straight to the front; and not a social word out of him. And at the end of the month his bills were mild.

I asked him if he had been to the mess after midnight. He hedged at first.

"It's life or death, Cleve. Whom did you drive downtown?"

Cleve said he had taken a Mexican officer in uniform and another man in civilian clothes down to the railroad station sometime after midnight. The civilian had taken the San Antone train; must have, as that was the only one due to go through within a reasonable time. The Mexican had asked to be taken to the Juarez bridge.

"I told him I wasn't gettin' paid for duckin' slugs no more," Cleve said with mild outrage in his deep voice. "I went an' dropped him jes' this side Little Chihuahua." That was the local Mexican settlement on the south edge of town.

I thanked Cleve. I had something to go on now; and I was a bit excited.

So Jeff had run off. As far as San Antone, anyway. The money I had given him to entertain the blonde would take him that far, all right. But I knew he would make for some place farther from an Army post. Corps area headquarters was located in San Antone.

Cleve said he thought he knew Captain Johnson. But he hadn't looked closely at his fares. I knew Cleve of old. He had been a crafty witness before more than one court-martial having to do with the evening activities of his military fares. And for all he knew I might be pumping him for a bit of similar evidence. He swore stoutly that he hadn't recognized either of his passengers.

"They paid cash and that was the end of my business," Cleve finished virtuously. "I wouldn't know 'em again if they was to walk up to me."

My next performance would be even more difficult than pumping Cleve. For some unknown reason a request to absent yourself from routine drill in the Army, if you are still able to crawl, is considered just this side of treason. I risked prejudicing my entire career. I phoned the colonel. He had just finished breakfast and was in rare good humor.

I explained lamely that one of my best friends was in trouble. That I should go to town at once. A lot of cash to deposit in the bank.

"You want to see that mess in Juarez," he said. "You'll come back in a box. Where would *you* get a lot of money?"

But he let me go.

I SLIPPED out the back way. I had no desire to run into any of the others. I was praying that I would get some news of Jeff and get him back before they discovered his breach of arrest. That, added to the original charge, would finish him.

I got my car out and drove away unseen. I broke all speed laws between the post and the Juarez bridge. A sergeant I had never seen was on duty and he looked at me coldly. I put on my most official manner.

Had a Mexican officer—Colonel del Pilar—gone across last night?

"I wasn't on till after one, sir."

"Where's Mason?"

Mason was the man out of Jeff's troop.

"He stopped a wild one last night, sir. Took him to Walter Beaumont Hospital. Jest a scratch."

The sergeant spat. He was obviously disgusted with Mason and his outrageous luck.

"They was a crazy spick come by, though, Captain. He was a colonel, anyways. He had enough junk on him —maybe he was a general. He said he was in command over there. Corporal Reinicke said he come over earlier. So we give him back his pistol and a automobile was here under guard. He wasn't exactly sober, you might say."

"He had two pistols," I said.

The sergeant looked firmly back at me. I tried to keep my face straight when he said—

"He oney took one back, Captain."

I did laugh. And the sergeant laughed, and said:

"It's quiet as a dove roost over there now, sir. Was the Captain wanting to cross?"

I had no pass; and I knew I would never have been given one had I asked. I said:

"That colonel's a great friend of mine. He may be up against it."

"Wasn't the Captain with the old First at Douglas?"

"Yes," I said hopefully.

"I was a corporal in the machine gun squadron then."

"Ah! A great place, Douglas."

The sergeant's eyes wandered away. He looked toward the little guardhouse by the end of the bridge.

"I think I hears the phone in there," he said. And he left me.

I walked rapidly across the bridge,

leaving my car where I had parked it. I was stopped by the Mexican guard on the other side. They looked at me curiously, but were very polite. I was in uniform and I realized that Sanchez had given strict orders already as to the attitude of his men toward the gringos who were to be their neighbors for some years—if he were lucky.

"I must see General Sanchez at once," I said.

An officer came out of their guardhouse and smiled at me. He shook hands in a friendly way. The general was at the Cuartel Militar. Would I like a soldier guide?

I said I knew the town, handed him a cigaret and walked on. I was surprised at the signs of order and discipline about me. Fatigue parties of soldiers were busily cleaning the rubble from the street. Shop windows were open. Smart looking guards were on duty before the public buildings and the bank. Actually, save for a few shell torn walls, the town looked cleaner than I had ever seen it. Obviously, this Sanchez had come to stay. And as it would be to his interest to placate the Americans—tourist trade made Juarez rich—I anticipated no difficulty in getting to him. But I would feel my way first.

I made directly for the Central. Louie himself greeted me. He was smiling. He shook hands vigorously. It was evident that a great weight had been taken from his mind.

"Everything O.K," he said.

"Good. I want you to help me, Louie."

"You done me a favor," Louie said. "The jack's safe?"

"In the bank."

Hastily I told him the whole story. He liked Jeff and I knew that he would help in any way he could. And he had a shrewd mind. He might give me an idea.

"I thought I'd look up Pilar," I said. "He would know where Captain Johnson went to."

My words died away as I noted the deepening look of worry on the old soldier's face.

"They got him, I hear. Took him in the trenches last night. I wouldn't of believed it, honest, Captain. They say he was scrappin' like a wild man. Wouldn't quit when the others pulled out."

A thrill shot through me. Good old Pilar! So he had come back to die with his men.

"You know how it is," Louie went on lugubriously. "Him bein' a high officer and all . . . The others jest went over to Sanchez, like they always does. But this here Pilar . . ."

I knew what Louie meant. It would be the wall for the gallant colonel. That's one thing the Mexicans were stubborn about; you couldn't give grace to a captured officer. Not one of rank. He would only bide his time. Gather a group of his old men when least expected, then turn the tables.

"I must see him, Louie."

"Take him this," Louie said, and he placed in my hand a bottle of very fine brandy.

I WAS treated with almost oppressive politeness at the Cuartel. A captain told me that Sanchez was at breakfast; but that I might see my friend Pilar. He looked at me, I thought, rather strangely. He asked me how well I knew the colonel. I said quite well. He made a darting movement with his finger toward his head and shook it significantly.

"Wounded?"

"What you say?—shale shook, señor."

Shell shocked! Poor devil; no wonder.

"They'll shoot him, I suppose?"

The officer smiled gravely. He shrugged.

"Of course."

I was led into a dark corridor. I could see through the gratings of the heavy doors wan, staring faces. The place was strangely quiet. Only a groan or two from some poor wretch who was

probably torn with shell or slug.

A naked, dirty electric bulb lighted the narrow way. The guard threw open a door and pushed me gently into the cell. He muttered as he stood there, and awkwardly he made the sign of the Cross. Already the lost Pilar was becoming heroic legend.

I saw the darker figure of the prisoner against the gloomy 'dobe wall.

"Pilar—"

The white face moved, turned upward. The faint light from outside touched it. It was Jeff.

"My God!" I said.

He was filthy with dust and powder stains. His gay uniform was in rags about him. There was blood on the shirt front. But in spite of it all that ugly mug was unchanged.

He got up.

"I had to do it, Pot. He went yellow. Pleaded for a suit of cits. Offered me all kinds of gold. I gave him them. I made him help me—give me the dope. I took his uniform, of course. Only way I could work it. And in the excitement over here I got away with it."

I sank down on the dirty bench and looked at him. I couldn't say a word, but I didn't blame him. I thought I would have done the same thing if I had had the guts.

Then I said:

"They must have realized you weren't Pilar. They know him."

"I got a crack on the bean. They picked me up unconscious. It was dark. They don't give a damn anyway. I'm for the wall, all right."

"But, good God!" I said. "I can prove it. Any of them can now. I'll see Sanchez."

He stared at me wearily.

"No good, Pot. This suits me. You could prove it, yes. But it would be the same. I was taken in the act."

"We'll fix that," I said. "Sanchez is on the make. He's not putting an American officer before a firing squad no matter what he did. You were drunk, that's all."

"Don't take the virtue out of it. I felt sorry for that spick last night, Pot. He wasn't a bad guy. You know the tricks I've played on him. I'm going to even it up. I feel sorry as hell for a guy with as few guts as he has. I'm going to make a hero out of him, Pot. I couldn't shoot myself. I wouldn't want to die like a coward; and that's what it would have been. That's why I put the gun down. But I can do this. And afterward, you can tell them. I'd like them to know."

There was no use arguing with him. Shell shocked, or something, he certainly was.

I left him and went to Sanchez.

I was surprised when I met the Mexican. He looked almost like an American. I found out later that he was an American *mestizo*. He was extremely cordial. I drank a cup of very good coffee with him and told him the whole story. He was frankly incredulous. But he was too polite to argue with me. He would investigate, he said. And if this colonel was not Pilar he would take the matter up with my general. I sensed as he talked, watching his shrewd eyes, that he was glad of a chance to have a favor to perform for my general. I left him with a solemn promise that there would be no shooting until he heard from our headquarters.

On the way back I had some trouble at the bank and was somewhat delayed. I felt a little guilty about the small lie I had told Louie—the banks hadn't been open when I had first crossed—so I waited with the best patience I could muster to see the manager. He was both suspicious and loquacious; so by the time I got back to the post it was nearing noon.

They told me at headquarters that the general was at his house. I drove slowly, carefully rehearsing my story. The best thing, I figured, was to plead Jeff's excellent war record and to bear down on my own personal observations at the time of the meeting with the woman. I'd lay that on thick: Her

type and all . . .

But I was worried as I walked up those imposing steps.

Just as I was about to ring, the door opened and a dog bounded out of the house. A tall young girl stood smiling at me. She yelled after the dog; but she kept smiling at me.

"I'm Joyce Hardy," she said, and she held out her hand almost the way a man would. "I'm back from school for Christmas."

I almost forgot Jeff and all the rest of it.

"I suppose you've got a date for the Christmas Eve hop?" I said.

"That depends. Are you calling on me?"

I'd heard about this daughter of the general, and she was all they had said of her. She had on riding clothes and she certainly was something to look at. But I heard the general's booming voice—

"Who left that door open!"

"Whoopee!" the girl said, and she pulled me into the big hall.

THE general was standing there and he glared at me. But his sour face twisted into a grin as his daughter went up to him and put her arm about him.

"I like every one of them I've seen so far," she said.

I tried to tell the general that I wanted to see him about something very important.

"You're good if you can talk business around this place," he said, and he grinned down at his daughter's bobbed head. "Come into the library."

The girl followed us shamelessly.

"Joyce!" the general said—but there was no fervor in it.

"I won't make a sound," she said. "I won't even listen."

A field marshal can't argue with that type of woman. The general sighed and motioned me to a chair before the cheerful open fire.

I launched forth on my tale. And as I talked I was aware of those fervent blue eyes upon me; and probably for that reason I expanded the thing into a veritable saga.

But I hadn't got far before the general interrupted me with a fierce growl.

"What's all this rot? I never ordered Captain Johnson into arrest!"

"What, sir?" I said stupidly.

"But go on," the general said grimly. "This damned practical joking has about reached the limit in this command. By the Lord, I'll make an example of whoever put this job up."

I went on. He listened, his face growing ever redder. The girl had got to her feet and stood looking down at me, her eyes actually dancing.

"What was the woman like?" she demanded.

"Some tough personage. They probably paid her a couple of dollars for the job," I said indignantly.

I was outraged now; for aside from the mess they'd got Jeff into, I felt bitterly hurt that they had left me out of the fun.

Suddenly Joyce Hardy went into shrieks of laughter. It was too much even for her father. He got to his feet and struck his boots wickedly with a riding whip.

"Leave the room, Joyce! There's nothing funny about disgracing the uniform on a public street!"

But she shook and choked, and tears of pure joy ran down her face.

"Two dollars! Two dollars! Oh, my sainted aunt!"

The general moved toward her purposefully.

"They never paid me a cent," she wailed. "Not a centavo! I'd pay a hundred dollars to do it again. They gave the chief a cigar."

"Joyce! What are you talking about!"

She emitted a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"Don't be a dope, pop," she said. "Just nice, clean fun, that's all it was. Major Reeves and Franc took me to dinner at the Del Norte that night; and I saw him. I said, 'Who's that beautiful,

ugly man?' And he saw me later in the lobby when I was talking to Celeste Moore. I thought his eyes would pop out of his head. So I told them and they put me up to it. We were going to run up to his quarters and surprise him when the scare had sunk in. But the fight started and it got late and so today—"

I thought the general's face would explode. It looked exactly like a very red child's balloon, swollen beyond the wildest limits of elasticity. All he could say was—

"So you—my daughter—you were going to the bachelors' quarters at night!"

That fact seemed to stun him more than all the rest.

"Well, wouldn't you have wanted to see his face?" she asked reasonably. "I was going to kiss him!"

The general reached for the phone. I felt sorry for young Lambert, his aide. In just one minute the grinning Franc would be doing troop duty once again.

So I spoke up and told the rest.

"He's over there now," I finished. "And they're going to shoot him."

I said this last with real bitterness, and not to the general but to Joyce Hardy. She let out a little cry. She came close to me and grabbed me by the arm.

"No!" she said. "You're just making that up. You're just sore at me."

"Call Sanchez," I said. "The phones are working."

She jumped toward the instrument. The Old Man pushed her away.

"You go to your room!" he said.

But she stood there beside him, glaring defiance at me.

The general got Sanchez almost at once. He spoke sharply, his angry eyes fixed on mine as he talked. He only talked a few seconds; but I had visions of the whole division getting under arms within the hour. Then he banged the thing down. His face relaxed a little.

"They're sending him over," he growled. "He'll report here. Both of you remain."

He got up and paced the room. Then he reached savagely for a cigar box on the desk. There was only one cigar in it and in his banging about he tore that. But he lighted it and blew vicious clouds of smoke toward the fire. I felt extremely uncomfortable. Now that Jeff was safe, I saw no sport in sitting here between a father and daughter who glared at each other like two enraged deaf mutes.

POSITIVELY I don't think one intelligible word was spoken during what seemed to me at least two hours. Actually I suppose the horror lasted less than one. Then we heard a car drive up in front of the house.

At that sound the girl actually whipped a compact from somewhere and began a perfect ritual of face making. The general heaved the frayed butt of his cigar into the fire. He arose with great dignity. Even in his present trepidation he remembered that he was in command of the famous Cavalry division, so he couldn't actually go to meet Jeff at the door.

But she could—and did.

I stood in the library doorway beside the general. If by this time I hadn't become so inured to strange actions and sights, I suppose I would have been a bit startled at the scene before me. Jeff, for instance, was not the ragged creature I had seen in the cell back there in Juarez. He had shaved; and he was dressed in his newest uniform. His boots and his Sam Browne gleamed from Connor's recent attention. The sleepless nights and the worry that went with it had drawn his normally beefy face. He was positively esthetic looking; a damnably romantic figure, even I would have had to admit.

He stood just inside the door, staring at her. Naturally, I expected that first dazed look. And I knew him so well I could guess that this would be followed by a sheepish grin. Then he'd wisecrack.

But I was wrong. He just stood there with that first look on his face, and not a word came from him.

No matter what she did I wouldn't have been surprised; so when she threw her arms about his neck and lifted her face up and kissed him, I simply coughed and turned away. I was afraid that balloon-like face of the general's would burst.

She turned back toward us with her right arm still about Jeff. The Old Man stared, fascinated. Not a word from him, either. Jeff moved beside her like a sleep walker. The tears in her eyes began to run down her face. But she kept laughing.

"He said they should have paid me two dollars," she said. "Oh, Jeff, they didn't hurt you, did they?"

"What's your name?" Jeff said. "Your first name."

"I called your quarters all morning," she said. "That Connor said you were asleep—Joyce."

"I wasn't, though," Jeff said.

His eyes never left her. Here he was reporting to the division commander and he kept staring at some girl who had played a dirty trick on him. It was positive lese-majesty.

"Captain Johnson!"

For a brief second Jeff looked at the general.

The girl said:

"Oh, pop, let him alone. I want to talk to him."

The Old Man let out a deep sigh. Or maybe it was a gasp. I edged nearer the door. Like a blind man the general reached toward his cigar box. His eyes remained, fascinated, upon his daughter. He was, of course, speechless. He muttered something at last. All I got was the word "cigar". It was evident that in times of crisis the weed was his balance wheel.

Automatically—I am positive of this —Jeff's fingers fumbled at the breast pocket of his uniform blouse. There was always a cigar there. Joyce Hardy pushed his fumbling fingers gently aside. She it was who freed the flap and pulled out the only cigar the pocket contained. She smiled sweetly at her father.

"Here, you old grouch! Go on out and leave us alone."

She passed the cigar to her father. A faint smile lighted his weatherbeaten face. Well, after all . . .

I suppose I should have spoken up. I almost did. But I was so close to the door and nobody was even thinking of me. As the general applied the match, and his smile began to broaden, I slipped away.

As I softly closed the front door I heard the explosion; much louder, it seemed to me. than the usual run.

Junktown

By JAMES W. BENNETT

THE Chinese are a gregarious people, and nowhere in the Land of Chin is this more noticeable than in those huge boat anchorages in the various river and coast ports, called Junktown. Here literally millions of men and women and thousands of craft are collected. So thickly do they cluster that a person can walk dryshod for miles, stepping from gunwale to gunwale.

These inhabitants of Junktown live an existence almost wholly disassociated from that of shore dwellers. Each colony elects its headman, some venerable old patriarch who has seen the last of his active days on the rivers and canals. His word becomes law. Yet he usually possesses that hard Chinese practicality which causes him to make his rules and judge his disputes without too great a show of autocracy. In this respect a junktown is precisely like a Chinese village. Since time immemorial it has been thus governed, permitting little interference from any distant central government.

Many of the inhabitants of Junktown will not put foot on land from one year to the next. Other junks bring them the necessities of life. A boat, piled high with green vegetables, patiently pokes its way through their massed ranks. A butcher's junk will offer them duck, bits of slaughtered beef, fish of many hues, even such delicacies as bird's nest soup and bêche-de-mer.

For the women, a silk junk will be poled near their craft. Hours will be spent in chaffering over a scrap of peach-blow from the looms of Szechuan. These drapers' boats also have a stock of the more prosaic but faster selling blue cotton coolie-cloth, which is the national dress of the poor in China.

There are boats, too, that cater to the lighter side of junk life. On the decks of one will be a Chinese Punch and Judy show. The proprietor—usually an actor broken down by too much opium—will play all the parts of an ancient Pear Garden drama, skilfully changing his voice to fit each of his puppets. Clamped to his legs and feet will be an ingenious set of gongs and cymbals that will imitate the outrages of a Chinese theater orchestra. Another junk will have a circus of trained white mice; another will house a conjuror, whose patter exerts a drowsy hypnotic effect:

"Lung Tung, lung tung, ega lung tung!
Lao yeh, lao yeh, ega lao yeh!"

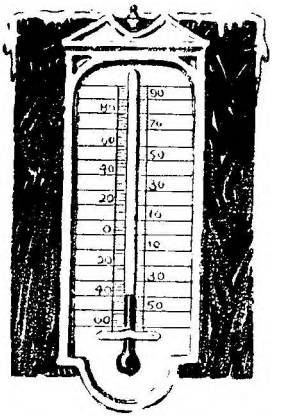
And, as he sings, he will deftly pull from beneath the skirts of his patched coolie-cloth robe a bowl of goldfish.

When a child is about to be born, a midwife's junk poles near, while a woman with calm, capable face offers her services. When a man dies, an embalmer's craft comes alongside.

It is a sight unforgetable in its queer beauty, to come upon a junk colony just at the hour of evening rice. On the deck of each craft glows a charcoal brazier over which bends a Chinese woman. A short distance forward squat her menfolk, chopsticks flying, their sun bronzed faces vaguely illumined by a single lamp—a wick floating in a dish of whale oil. About their feet romp babies, naked if the weather is warm, clad in wadded cotton during the period of Great Cold, so that they appear to be quite as round as they are tall.

Born, living and dying on the water, the dwellers of Junktown are content. Theirs is a world in microcosm.

How Cold Is COLD ?



By H. PATRICK LEE

ADVENTURE some time ago was the forum in which raged a lively controversy about cold weather and its effects on the human system. Alaskan pioneers and Yukon sourdoughs told of their experiences in temperatures as low as seventy degrees below zero. Camp-fire members who live in Montana and Minnesota—no peach orchards in mid-Winter—declared with firm conviction that parts of the Northwestern United States can be quite as bitter as a lot of places beyond the Arctic Circle.

The average person overlooks the important fact that there are different kinds of cold weather, and that the thermometer reading may have very little to do with how cold it actually is. Peary used to say that he would rather face a temperature of fifty below in still air than fifteen below with a breeze blowing. It makes a vast difference, too, whether the air is dry or damp; anyone living along a northern seaboard can testify to that. Zero weather beside the ocean frequently is harder to endure than the dry cold which makes possible temperatures of forty and fifty below in the middle of the continent.

Long distance from any body of open water accounts for the amazing Winter temperatures in Northern Siberia, where the mercury frequently drops to around ninety degrees below zero—the record, I believe, is ninety-six below—but it is doubtful whether the Siberians, accustomed to the cold and equipped for it, suffer any more than do, say, New Yorkers when a sudden northeaster sweeps through the city's downtown canyons in mid-January. Which brings up another point.

One reads quite often of howling gales at forty and fifty below. Such things don't exist, or if they do they are phenomenally rare. Wind, as soon as it begins to blow, actually raises the temperature. Friction, of course, is the answer to that. It doesn't *feel* any warmer; in fact it may feel far colder; but as a rule the mercury which has been registering, say, thirty below in calm air will rise almost to zero during a forty-mile gale.

Another common fallacy is that a blizzard can rage at forty below. It isn't true. When the temperature falls that low, snow is usually out of the question, and without snow there can't very well be a blizzard. A man may have to fight his way through snow at forty below, but it is snow that has been picked up by the wind and hurled through the air in a manner to give the impression of a blizzard.

Proof of this is seen in the fact that the coldest months in the Far North are the months in which there is hardly any snow. On Ellesmere Island, where I once spent two Winters, the coldest

month was March, with an average daily temperature of thirty-five below zero. And during March there was no snow. Nor did the winds blow with the extraordinary ferocity of April and November. It was simply too cold for either high wind or snow.

Although Ellesmere is the land mass nearest the Pole—Peary began his great sled trip from Cape Columbia, its northern apex—the temperature probably never drops much lower than sixty degrees below, which is mild compared with the frightful Siberian records. But Ellesmere is an island, and the warmth of the water belt about its 76,000 square miles, even though that belt is covered with ten-foot ice in Winter, has such an effect that the thermometer never goes as low as it does in parts of the wooded Yukon, hundreds of miles farther south. The Yukon gets vastly more sunlight than Ellesmere does in Winter, and far more snow, though in the case of the latter snow in August isn't phenomenal by any means.

It is rather surprising, until one checks up one's elementary astronomy, to know that March, with its brilliant sunlight, is twice as cold as December, with its depressing gloom and darkness. One would think that with the return of the sun—at Craig Harbor, on Ellesmere Island, it came back about February 10th, after being absent since early November—the weather would grow warmer. The reason is that the sun actually is farther away from the northern half of the earth in March than it is in December, but at an angle which allows more sunshine to fall on the frozen roof of the world.

While we're at it, it might be as well to tackle another rather common belief—that Eskimos can stand the cold better than white men. The reverse is probably nearer the truth. White men, on the average, stand cold weather quite as well as the Eskimo, but frequently suffer because they lack the native's knowledge of how to keep warm.

I recall a case in point. Some years ago a friend of mine, Constable Butler, was caught in a blizzard some miles from his post at Port Burwell, in Ungava. It was not even Winter, but in the Fall of the year, and Butler and his companion, an Eskimo halfbreed, were practically within hailing distance of the post when the storm came on, but unable to cross the narrow inlet which separated them from the village. Both men crawled into a snow bank. In the morning, when a rescue party found them, the halfbreed was dead. Butler's feet were badly frozen and several of his toes had to be amputated, but the fact that he survived at all proved him to be hardier than the unfortunate Eskimo halfbreed who had spent his entire life in the country.

Fur clothing is imperative in the Arctic, as white men who rely on woolens find to their cost. Wind penetrates the best of woolens and it is the wind one fears in the Far North, not the cold. Skin clothing keeps out the wind and enables the body to retain its natural warmth; and the Eskimo, clothed in a thin sealskin *koolitang,* is better off than a white man wearing the best mackinaw ever made.

The Eskimo has a whole bagful of tricks he and his ancestors have learned from centuries of experience. An instance in point is the wooden stick, shaped almost like a snow knife, which he invariably includes in his Winter traveling outfit. With it he beats all loose snow from his furs the moment he enters an igloo. That prevents him from getting damp when the powdery flakes melt and so saves his furs from the danger of freezing.

The Eskimo's sealskin boots are the only footgear worth a hang on the Arctic coast. Moccasins are all very well inland, but once they get wet they are worthless—one's feet might just as well be encased in sandals of ice—whereas the Eskimo's boots are waterproof, reach to the knee and yet are as durable and as comfortable as the best elk moccasins.

THAT isn't all. The native wears fur socks, while the white man, even after adopting the native boot, often will wear thick stockings made of duffle, or just ordinary trade socks, three or four pairs of them at a time. His cumbersome socks don't give his feet half the warmth of the native's long fur stockings, made of caribou skin, or of that finest of all material, the skin of the Arctic hare.

Long experience has taught the Eskimo the value of placing a pad of coarse hair inside his boots. Its purpose is to absorb the perspiration from his feet as well as to allow the air to circulate. Thus he achieves crude but very effective insulation, the value of which is apparent when one has to stand motionless for any length of time on the ice. The long black hair of the musk-ox is the best for the purpose, but caribou hair is commonly used; and even a pad of dried grass serves the purpose.

The Eskimo takes care to avoid undue exertion in extremely cold weather, not only because quick breathing may freeze his lungs, but to prevent perspiration. There is nothing worse than to perspire freely under one's fur during a hard day's journey, only to cool off suddenly when the time comes to halt and build a snow igloo for the night. It is one of the easiest ways of catching pneumonia.

Snow igloos can be amazingly warm and comfortable when heated by means of the native seal oil lamp. I have used coal oil stoves on occasion, but too much heat causes a film of ice to form over the interior of the igloo, transforming it into an ice house instead of a snow hut. The native lamp gives out just the right amount of heat, so that there is no danger of dampness.

White men soon learn from experience that the Eskimo's most valuable piece of gear, apart from his seal oil lamp, is the wooden drying frame on which he dries his socks and mittens every night. There again the heat of the crude oil lamp is just right to absorb the moisture without injuring skin or fur, and the native starts out in the morning with dry gear, instead of thrusting his hands and feet into mittens and socks that have become as stiff as boards during the night.

In certain parts of the Arctic, particularly in Baffin Land, the Eskimo's Winter *koolitang* of caribou skin is shaped almost exactly like the white man's evening "tails", except that it pulls over the head instead of buttoning loosely in front. But in the case of the native garment, the odd looking appendage has a very definite purpose: It is designed to sit on, and it works marvelously in keeping the body warm and preventing spinal chills.

When I remarked previously that a white man can stand cold as well as an Eskimo, I meant that he probably has greater endurance and, that in a case of life and death he has an equal, if not greater chance of coming through. The Eskimo is a stoic; he accepts what appears to be the inevitable, whereas the white man will fight in face of the most hopeless odds. But where it is merely a case of discomfort, the Eskimo will laugh at what causes his white companion considerable suffering.

I recall an experience I once had with Kakto, the Pond's Inlet Eskimo who spent a year with us on Ellesmere.

We had come upon some bear tracks one day about the middle of March. The tracks were at least six hours old and normally we would have paid no attention to them, although they were of a big bitch and two year-old cubs. But we were badly in need of fresh meat at the time, and decided to follow them.

The sled was empty and we traveled at top speed. It was typical March weather, bitterly cold, but with the sun shining brilliantly in a sky that was like an inverted bowl of the most delicate blue. On the sea ice the snow was iron hard, so that the steel shod runners of the heavy sled made scarcely a mark. In places the bear tracks were hardly discernible; on patches of glare ice only

the faint scratches made by the claws were visible; but now and then the triple tracks crossed a bank of soft snow, leaving deep holes that we could see from quite some distance away.

We hoped, of course, that the bears would kill a seal and sleep, and that we would come upon them curled up in a snow bank near the scene of the feast. In mid-afternoon we did see where they had been lucky and had killed a seal. A bloody patch on the ice told the tale. The bears had eaten every scrap of their victim, bones and all, leaving nothing for the wandering foxes. But they had not slept.

When night fell we had traveled over forty miles. The freshness of the tracks indicated we were hard on the heels of the bears. With another two hours of daylight we could have caught up with them, but there was no moon and it was impossible to keep on in the darkness. The dogs were exhausted after their long day's run and, although we had no food, sleeping bags or camp gear of any kind, we decided to make camp instead of trying to find our way home in the dark.

Kakto rapidly built an igloo. It took him less than twenty minutes, but I was glad when it was finished and crawled gratefully inside. We had no lamp with which to heat the hut, and nothing but the frozen canvas sled cover to lie on, but it was a relief to be sheltered from the breeze that was blowing across the ice bound sea.

That night the thermometer at the post registered fifty-two degrees below zero and out on the open ice, twenty miles from land, it felt as though it were a hundred below. The igloo was just big enough for us to lie down, and we huddled together for warmth, heads buried deep in the hoods of our thick fur *koolitangs*.

It was too cold to sleep and we both had difficulty in keeping our feet from freezing. My thick Hudson's Bay stockings might have been cotton, for all the warmth they gave. Kakto was better off and had on his long caribou socks. He wanted to take these off and give them to me, but I knew his feet, like mine, were half frozen, and naturally refused his typically generous offer.

The night was one I shall never forget, yet to Kakto it was a commonplace experience, one that had been matched, no doubt, many times in the course of his hard, eventful life. To me it was a hardship to have to go without food after a long day's hunt in such a bitter temperature, but it was nothing to him —he who had known the pangs of hunger, off and on, since childhood.

JUDAS WORK

By HOWARD ELLIS DAVIS

IN THE big stick an' mud fireplace lightwood knots burned with a right good will, while the heavy oak logs, laid atop, hissed an' snapped, as oak logs has a way of doin'. The red glow flickered out over the room as merry as little spirits a-dancin', lightin' up the log walls, well chinked with mud, snug agin the wind outside, which was blowin' somewhat cold with a gust of rain now an' then.

Across the fire from me was my old friend, Brit Dorsey. On the arm of each of our rockin' chairs rested a tumbler of rye that had been aged in a charred keg—likker as soft an' smooth as a cat's belly.

I am a man who, through hard work, pretty good jedgmint in a trade an' the knack of never lettin' a stray dollar git by without bein' roped, has gathered to myself right considerable of this world's goods: land, cattle an' money layin' in the bank. But I have often thought that to one without kith or kin, wife or child, these here worldly goods would sometimes be like ashes in his mouth ef it was not for his friends.

Brit hadn't been so lucky as me. He was mo' squeamish an' partic'ler. Maybe he was mo' high-toned. He never would look at but one side of a deal. Then, too, he didn't have no politics at all. Said what he pleased, whenever he pleased, to whoever he pleased. I was workin' out a deal for him now. As usual, he was stubborn.

"Brit," I says, "you had the good jedgmint to put most of yo' tillable land this year into corn, 'stid of cotton. Yo' cribs is bustin' full. A round hundred of them range critters kin be bought for fifteen dollars a head. Corn crushed on the cob makes mighty good Winter feed, an' I got the crusher in my lot. In the late Winter there'll be a nice profit in fat steers. The cows, turned out in the Spring, will be in fine shape for calvin'. I don't need that fifteen hundred now. An' you kin pay it back with intrust."

"But why," he ast in his mule headed way, "should I profit by yo' fifteen hundred when you could do the same thing?"

I was 'bout to tell him I had all the critters in the woods I could say grace over, when we heard a car chug up an' stop outside. There was a tap at the do'. It opened a crack an' Gus Martin come slidin' in sideways. Gus moves sideways, mostly, like a crab.

His little eyes, set close together over a big, thin nose, was squinted in the light. Beneath his soft hat, his thick black hair hung down 'bout his face in a uneven way. I could have improved his looks with my sheep shears.

"Howdy, Gus," I says, risin' an' holdin' out my hand. "Come over to the fire an' set."

Shufflin' across the flo', his tall, loose jinted frame sort of bent over, without no grip at all he placed in my hand one that felt like a piece of cold tripe.

"Howdy, Brother Hall," he says to me. "Howdy, Brother Dorsey."

Brit didn't refuse his hand; but he only grunted. He didn't like Gus, an' Brit has a way of showin' an' sayin' what he feels. As I said befo', he ain't got no politics at all.

"Have a drap, Gus," I says, fetchin' another tumbler out the kitchen.

"Jest a drap, Brother Hall," he replies, grinnin' an' rubbin' his hands together, wringin' an' twistin' 'em like they was dish rags. "Jest a drap 'tween friends, to wet my whistle an' clear the dust from my th'oat. Only kiver the bottom of the glass."

But I noticed he drank what I poured, an' wasn't long about it, a full third of a tumbler, tiltin' the glass an' suckin' the last drap through his thin lips. For a abstainer, that was goin' some.

"I've come on business," he says, settin' on the edge of his chair, leanin' tow'ds the fire, still a-twistin' his long, limber hands. "Brit's folks tole me he was over here. I wanted to see you both. There's a chance to do good to the county, to the whole State of Alabama. An' there's money in it—good money."

Now Brit jest set there like a stump, scorn in his eyes as they rested on Gus; but at prospect of a deal of some kind I leaned forward, all ears.

"You know how many folks has gone to makin' likker out in this neck of the woods," Gus continues on.

"I ain't intrusted in no likker business," I says, disappinted. "You oughter know my views on that by now, Gus. To my way of thinkin', there ain't nothin' good 'bout it but the likker, an' some of that is damn po'. Maybe it's a man's own private business ef he wants to make likker. What I don't like is the ructions it causes—takin' pot shots at law enforcemint men; stillers gittin' shot in the back by them same men when they gits a chance; stills raided; folks bein' took off to jail. Why, only last week—"

"That's what I'm a-comin' to, Brother Hall," he interrupts me. "We're goin' to stop all them ructions."

"What you mean by that *we* stuff?" Brit ast. There was mo' on his tongue; but I stepped on his foot.

"There's a pillanthropist who's puttin' up two hundred dollars a head for every stiller who's brought to jestice. I'm his agent. I git a hundred, the feller what turns up the stiller gits a hundred. All that's got to be did is to mingle with him, gain his confidence, learn where his still is, then turn in the name an' location to me. The enforcemint men does the rest. When the still is raided an' the stiller is safe in jail, then I gits the two hundred, a hundred of which I at once turns over to the feller who has did the field work, you mought call it."

"An' you thought we'd be intrusted in a proposition of that sort, Gus?" Brit ast.

His voice was gentle an' soft as that of a mother to her child. But I knowed Brit. So agin I set my foot down on his'n, hard, an' kep' it there.

"I know you need money, Brother Dorsey. An' I know Brother Hall never lets a stray nickel go by 'thout grabbin' it. It's so simple an' easy."

"Easy as easy," I says. "It's hard to believe that anybody would be fool enough to pay all that money for jest a little information. How do you know this here pilly feller will come across when you've turned in the name an' location?"

"Why, he's done it, Brother Hall. I got Tobe Case workin' for me over on Gumbo Creek. He's turned up two."

"You mean Ole Man Lige Topper an' Arn Hooseman?" Brit ast, still in his quiet way.

"Them's the two. It cost Ole Man Lige five hundred dollars fine to git out, an' they destroyed his still. Arn is still in jail. Tobe has got his hundred apiece an' I got mine. I'm organizin' the county. Then I'm goin' into other counties. I'll do a land office business, an' them who lines up with me is goin' to share in the benefits. You two are jest the ones I need, an' I'm willin' to favor you. I want you, Brother Hall, to represent me down on the Little Catfish, an' you, Brother Dorsey, over on Big Muddy."

"What did you call this here feller who's puttin' up the money?" I ast.

"He's a pillanthropist," Gus replies.

"Don't know as I'd call a feller who's throwin' all that money my way a name like that," I says. "What does it mean?"

"Oh, he calls himself that," Gus replies. "I don't know what it means. I'm beginnin' to think, though," he continues on, grinnin' at me sly-like out the corner of his eyes, "that it means one with mo' money than sense. He's lousy with money.

"Waal," he says when he riz to go, "don't know as there's anything mo' to add. You fellers got the idee. You know where to find me when there's somebody to turn up. Thankee, Brother Hall—jest a drap . . ."

I FOLLERED him out to the car. Restin' my foot on the runnin' board as he sot at the the wheel, I told him:

"Gus, ef I was you, I wouldn't say no mo' to Brit 'bout this here deal. For some reason, it didn't seem to set well with him. But you know me, Gus. My idee is that when a man is a low-down skunk, a rotten spot on the fair fruit of his county, the place for him is in jail, where he can be helt up as a example for all decent folks to look at—'specially when there's money in it for the feller who turns him up."

Leanin' over, he patted me on the shoulder.

When I got back in the house, Brit was standin' in front of the fire a-stompin' his feet like his shoes was too tight.

"Hope you kilt him when you got him outside," he says, real vigus-like.

I couldn't meet Brit's eyes; but I tried to quiet him down.

"You must look on this here thing sensible," I says. "Seems to me Gus has got a pretty good business proposition lined out for himself."

"Oh, he has," he agrees, "till somebody puts a bullet into his damn carcass."

"He's got too much jedgmint for that," I says. "Ef anybody gits shot, it'll be the field men."

"The dirty skunk!" he busts out. "The sneakin', belly crawlin', rat tail 'possum! The idee of his thinkin' we'd jine up with him in this here Judas work. Ef you hadn't kep' steppin' on my foot, I'd have choked the gizzard out of him where he set."

"You never did have no politics," I told him.

"Bah! Every time he calls me 'brother' it puts a bad taste in my mouth. Ever been in his house?"

"I was there a year ago to his wife's funeral."

"Ef ever a po' little woman critter was murdered by slow degrees in cold blood by mean treatmint, it was her. An' his daughter, who's keepin' house for him now, will go the same way."

"His family affairs ain't none of my business," I replied.

"He's been makin' likker for years himself an' sendin' it out by his son-in-law," Brit continues on.

"Ef he does," I replies, "he's got jedgmint enough to keep it well hid."

"What makes you keep defendin' him?" he suddenly snaps at me.

"I ain't defendin' him, Brit. But Gus has sot out to git rid of the stillers. Yo' idees runs like mine on this here likker business. We've often talked 'bout it."

"I only say that a man who makes likker is a fool for takin' sich a chance for himself an' his folks."

"Even one shinin' example mought go a long way tow'ds breakin' it up," I argues. "Ef I kin pick up a piece of good money at the same time, you can't blame me, kin you?"

"Hell fire!" he blazed at me. "Hold up yo' eyes an' look at me, Zeke. You ain't thinkin' 'bout goin' in on this here Judas business, are you?"

"Don't give me away, Brit," I says, placin' my hand on his arm. "Ef folks who are makin' likker got the notion I was minglin' with 'em with the idee of turnin' 'em up, there's some wouldn't hesitate to put a bullet into me."

"Take yo' hand off me, you miserly money grubber," he says an' backed away. "I knowed you was keen after a dollar, but I didn't think you'd sell yo' soul for money. No; I won't tell folks what you're up to, kase shootin' is too good for you. But I'll let 'em know you ain't fitten for the dogs to bark at. An' ef ever you speak to me or mine in the road, I'll hunt you up an' kill you with my hands." He helt up his hands, his fingers twitchin', like they was itchin' to take holt of me then an' there. "Bah!" He turned an' spit in the fire. "To think that I called you my friend! To think that I came to yo' house an' drank yo' likker! To think that I even thought of lettin' you lend me yo' dirty money! Bah!"

Grabbin' his hat from the flo', he stomped out the house, leavin' me feelin' mighty cast down an' lonesome.

Brit got in his work 'fo' I could act. Next mornin' when I ambled over to Jule Buntley's place I could feel it soon's I went in the gate. It seemed like the very dogs sneaked back under the house. The children, 'stid of runnin' out to meet me like they always done, run in the house an' hung to their mother's skirts when she come to the do'. Peepin' around her, they looked up at me with big, wide eyes, like I mought have been a strange pedler or somethin'.

Bithy didn't even answer to my good mornin'.

"Jule's in the kitchen," she replied to my question. "But he's busy."

But Jule hearn me talkin' an' come to the do'. He stood there lookin' at me with hard eyes over his wife's head.

"Want to see me?" he ast.

"Jest thought I'd come over an' pass the time of day," I replies.

"Ef that's all, I'll say goodby," he told me, an' Bithy shet the do' in my face.

I knowed in reason that Jule was makin' likker. But I didn't know where his still was. But there sho wasn't no chance of minglin' here. It was mighty

hard lines when a man had sot out in good faith to do a good turn for his county—an' pick up a piece of money on the side—to have folks who had always been his friends an' neighbors not only not invite him in, but shet the do' in his face.

THE same greetin's was mine at two other places where I drapped in. When I come out the last one, I stood in the road an' rubbed my head. I wasn't gittin' nowhere at all. Then I thought of Ole Man Luke Brown, livin' over in the forks of the Little Catfish.

Luke lived alone with his wife, Marthy, their children havin' growed up an' strayed off. He was puny an' always had been hard put to make a livin'. An' he was as big a rapscallion as ever lived unhung; nothin' vicious—jest a ole devil. Though I had argued agin it, he had turned to makin' likker as a way to git some easy money, so he told me. But I didn't know where his still was. It sho would take some minglin' to find out.

Last Winter I had helped nurse the ole cuss through a spell of pneumony. Ever' time I went over to take my watch through the night season I'd bring a turn of rations. He an' Marthy seemed mighty grateful. So I sot out for Luke's place.

True to my hopes, Ole Luke met me at the do' with a smile.

"Come in; come in, you ole slab-sided varmint," he greeted me as usual. "Come in an' explain what this here tale means that Brit's been a-tellin' me 'bout you an' that there psalm singin' hypocrite, Gus Martin, goin' into a business deal together, an' yo' sayin' that all yo' friends an' neighbors who makes likker ought to be locked up in jail. We all knows Gus an' don't pay him no mind. But tell me Brit's lyin' 'bout you 'fo' I take a window stick an' frail you over the head."

Now sich a friendly welcome sent a warm glow all over me. Marthy patted my hand an' led me in the kitchen an' made a pot of coffee, which we set an' drank with great relish. I explained to them, as best I could, that Brit had got mad with Gus when he called at my house an' had got mad with me, kase I wouldn't let him choke his goozle out, which wouldn't be no way to treat a man under my own roof.

"Brit always was one to lose his temper," Luke agrees with me.

Talk 'bout minglin' with folks, I stayed to dinner an' spent most of the evenin', till most dark. 'Fo' I left I knowed where Luke's still was. He even taken me down on the creek an' showed it to me.

My next move was to git holt of Gus. Though folks don't know it, I'm half owner in Sam Holloway's sto' over at the cross-roads, havin' put up all the financial arrangemints. I've got my office there, which ain't nothin' but a big goods box in the feed room back of the sto', turned with the open side down an' a place cut out the side for my legs to stick through. Many's the deal I've pulled off settin' there at my office. I sent Sam's nigger with word to Gus to meet me there the next mornin'.

"Gus," I says when he come sidlin' in an' set down on the head of a empty nail keg, "I've made a start. I've mingled with a neighbor; I've gained his confidence an' he has showed me where his still is."

"Prompt action, Brother Hall," he says, grinnin' an' rubbin' his hands together. "Prompt action. Who's the neighbor?"

"Ole Man Luke Brown," I replies.

"Wust one in the whole bunch," he says. "The rest oughter be easy."

"Oughter be," I says. "But the minglin' ain't as easy as you mought think."

Takin' out a notebook, he writ down Luke's name.

"Location of still?" he then says, lookin' up at me.

"It's on the Little Catfish," I says.

"In course it is, Brother Hall. In course it is; but where 'bouts?"

"I kin show you better'n I kin tell you," I says.

"No! You ain't showin' me nothin'," he snaps.

"You don't want no confusion," I says, persuasive-like. "You don't want them law enforcemint men blunderin' round in the swamp, with the chance of gittin' a bullet put into 'em."

"Why, no, in course not. That's one of the stipilations of—of this here pillanthropist. There mustn't be no shootin'. An' it wouldn't do, Brother Hall, for men engaged in sich a noble callin' to git shot up."

"Then we'll go down tomorrow night an' lay out the land, so's there won't be no confusion."

"That's yo' end of the job," he persists.

"Now look here, Gus," I tells him. "You know I've always been pretty lucky in a deal, don't you?"

"I'll say you have. You've done well by yo'self, Brother Hall." I always did know Gus was envious of what I had.

"What I've made wasn't done by no halfway measures," I told him. "I've thought of angles in this here business that you ain't never dreamed of. An' ef you think I'm goin' to be satisfied with a measly hundred dollars for turnin' up a lowdown critter that's a stench in the nose of decent men, then you're wrong."

"Why, I thought that was pretty good pay."

"In course you did. But that's the difference 'tween you an' me. We've got to put our whole mind into this here thing."

"I've got my mind in it," he says, emphatic.

"But we got to put our bodies in it, too," I told him.

"What good is my body goin' to do me ef it's filled full of lead?" he asts.

"There ain't goin' to be no shootin'," I replied. "In minglin' with Luke, I learned all his habits. He works at his still the early part of the night. By 'leven o'clock he's in his bed 'sleep."

"You sho they ain't no danger of gittin' shot?"

"You don't think I'm one to poke my nose into the chance of gittin' shot, for no amount of money, do you?" I ast him, scorn in my eyes. An' that seemed to convince him.

"Now, Gus," I continues on, "who's this here pillthropper feller who's puttin' up the money?"

"That's my business," he blurted out.

"Gus, am I goin' to back off an' leave you with the bag to hold, or am I goin' in on this here thing? As I've told you, I ain't satisfied with a measly hundred dollars per head, an' I've figgered out angles in this here business that you ain't never even dreamed of."

"It's Mr. Roy Williams," he says, bucklin' under.

"Mought have knowed it," I thought to myself.

ROY WILLIAMS was son of Ole Man Sawdust Williams who had made big money in the sawmill business an' left it to Roy. Roy had traveled in furren parts for years an years, then come home to live in the big house overlookin' the town, full of idees of makin' this here world a better place to live in, as he named it. Several times he had found himself barkin' up the wrong tree. It didn't go agin my conscience at all to git a nice piece of money out of Roy.

After Gus had left I got Roy over the telephone, then made Sam Holloway's nigger run me into town in Sam's flivver. Me an' Ole Sawdust's boy had a long talk, an' I must say that Roy was plum' dum'founded by what I sot befo' him. But he come through with the money part all right. Me, I ain't nothin' ef I ain't a business man.

It was after ten o'clock the next night when I walked over an' met Gus at the appinted place. It was the dark of the moon; but a million stars kep' it from bein' black dark. It was cold, an' already the grass was stiff with frost.

Gus had his flivver drawed out the side of the road, an' he was settin' there at the wheel a-shiverin' an' a-jerkin'.

"Cold?" I ast.

" 'Bout to freeze," he replied as well as he could for the chatterin' of his teeth.

Gus never did have no blood in his veins. Then, too, I reckin there was somethin' besides the cold that give him the jerks.

We left the car a full half mile from Luke's house an' walked over. Luke's ole houn' dog knowed me, so I went in first an' pacified him. Then Gus come creepin' in the yard. He wanted to see with his own eyes.

Goin' 'round to the window, we peeped in. The fire had burned low, but there was plenty of light to see by. Sure enough, Luke an' Marthy was both in the bed, an' we could hear that they was sound asleep.

We crope out the back gate an' went off down a path alongside the field. Presently the path left the zig-zag rail fence an' drapped off down the hill to the run of a branch. It was mighty silent there in the swamp an' we had to go slow, for it was dark under the trees. Gus wouldn't stay from under my feet an' kep' bumpin' into me. I knowed he still had the jerks.

At last we could see a faint glow ahead of us, an' I stopped.

"There it is," I says. "He's left a fire goin' in the furnace. Mighty careless, seems to me."

"Overconfidence," he whispers back. "But we'll learn him! Go on, Br-Brother Hall an' see ef th-things is cl-clear."

"What you skeered of, Gus?" I ast. "Didn't you jest leave Luke snorin' in his bed?"

But I walked on ahead, then called to him. He come out in the little clearin' with mo' gumption, when he seen the road was clear. An' he at once begin to look about him with a eye of appreciation. The layout was small an' mostly home made; but it was a good one. Ole Luke made good likker. With the hand of a expert Gus was pintin' this all out to me, seemin' to take as much pride as ef it belonged to him. He had opened the do' of the furnace; but there wasn't much fire left, so we couldn't see any too good.

We ranged up in front of the open do' an' spread our hands to warm.

"This is the best thing we've found yit," Gus remarked, an' turned an' baked his backsides.

We went over an' inspected the mash barrels, an' when we got back to the fire I was shakin', same as Gus.

"Let's build up a fire an' thaw out," I says. "Then we better be movin'. It's gittin' late. What time is it?"

"Nigh twelve," he says, consultin' his watch. "While we're a-warmin' we'll still some of Luke's likker for him," he continues on, cacklin' an' rubbin' his hands together. "There's a charge in the kittle."

With the hand of long experience he raked the coal bed in the furnace. Turnin' to the pile of lightwood, he begin throwin' some in. 'Bout the third or fo'th piece, somethin' happened. From the nigh rim of the darkness come a voice:

"Hands up, Martin! We've got you kivered!"

GUS snapped up straight, like a spring that has been turned loose. He was so dumfounded that he jest stood there with his mouth drapped. Out into the fire glow walked three law enforcemint men, one of 'em with a sawed-off shotgun, two with pistols. Gus at once begin a-stammerin' an' a-sputterin'.

"You've made a mistake, gentlemen. This here ain't my still. I was only—"

"Oh, no, in course not," the man with the shotgun interrupted him. "You only has it borried to make yo' likker. Put the cuffs on him, Tom."

"But it ain't my still, I tell you," Gus squealed. "It's Luke Brown's still. I—I—"

The man with the shotgun laughed.

"It won't be nobody's still long. An' the one that was usin' it will soon be in jail. Tom, are you goin' to put them cuffs on him?"

Tom had to threaten to knock Gus in the head with his pistol to make him stand still enough to handcuff him.

Roy Williams, the pillanthropist, come saunterin' out in the firelight, an' when Gus seen him he gave another squeal.

"Mr. Williams will tell you who I am," he says. "He's got me hired to turn up these here stillers. I'm his agent."

"Yes," says Roy Williams, sarcastic-like, "I've had you hired, you double-crossin' polecat. An' as usual, I've been caught for a sucker. I've paid you good money to put yo' competitors out of business. I'll spend plenty mo' to see that you git the limit."

"Zeke Hall—" Gus says, turnin' to look for me.

But Ole Zeke had faded from the picture. In the outer darkness, he was lookin' on, enjoyin' the scene. For he was convinced in his mind that he had rid the fair fruit of the county of its rottenest spot.

It's funny how quick things gits noised about. In this day an' time of the auto, news as well as folks travels fast. 'Fo' dinner time the next day Brit was at my house. He had sort of a sheepish grin on his face an' he gripped my hand long an' hard. We went inside an' set by the fire.

"This here thing is all over the county," he says. "Lots has come out!"

"Sich as what?" I ast.

"It's knowed now that you give Ole Man Lige Topper's wife the money to go down an' pay his fine, an' that you was the one hired the lawyer to git Arn Hooseman out of jail."

"It's got so you can't trust nobody to keep their mouths shet," I says, disgusted. "Even yo' lifelong friends an' neighbors."

"Lot of 'em are goin' to stop makin' likker," he continues on. "They say that when a man like you has took the stand you have all the fun has gone out of it."

"Things is movin' fast, sho enough," I says.

"It was plum' liberal of you to pay Ole Man Luke Brown two hundred dollars for his still so them enforcemint men could tear it up."

"Why, Brit," I says, surprised-like. "Don't you know me better than that? Ain't you got mo' respec' for my business jedgmint than to think I'd pay good money for somethin' that's goin' to be tore up?"

"But he showed it to me," he declared. "He showed me the greenbacks you give him when you an' him made up the plan to catch Gus."

"Oh, I only advanced that," I says. "Roy Williams give me his check for two hundred when I went to see him an' promised to turn up befo' his eyes the slickest likker maker in the whole country."

As I said befo', to a man without wife or child, kith or kin, it's his friends that bring to him most of the joy of livin'. It's good to have them drap in on you of a lonely evenin'. It's good to have the children come by with choice garden stuff in time for a biled dinner. It's good to come out in the fresh dawn of early mornin' an' find on yo' do'step a jug of prime likker.

Concluding A Novel of Don Everhard

By

GORDON YOUNG

THE STORY THUS FAR:

THE Washington undercover man, J. K. James, called in Donald Richmond, alias Don Everhard, gambler and adventurer, to aid him in his fight against La Tête de Mort, an international blackmail gang whose headquarters was believed to be in Paris. Everhard agreed to go to France. James then told him that the only known member of the gang was Isobel de Nevers, a Parisian actress uncanny at disguise; and gave him the additional information that the passport of the criminal group was a death's head ring containing a miniature of the wearer.

On the boat Everhard won the friendship of a young woman who said her name was Vilette Laramie, obviously assigned to watch his movements. She confessed that she was the notorious De Nevers of La Tête de Mort, but secretly also an agent of police.

Vilette disappeared before the boat docked; but in Paris a few days later the girl sent for him to warn him against a Prince Hovenden, a pretender to the ancient House of Kasyd of Egypt, whom he had met at the Horseshoe Club. Hovenden, as a member of La Tête de Mort, would try to frame Everhard with the police so he would have to seek the blackmailers' aid.

Everhard then decided upon a bold stroke in order to win the confidence of the gang—and be accepted as one of them on his own terms. Pretending ignorance of Hovenden's powerful criminal affiliations, he extorted forty thousand francs from the man. James, who by this time had come to Paris to assist Everhard, was delighted by this coup; but made Everhard apprehensive by telling him that Vilette was suspected by

The Devil's Passport

the Death's Headers because she had purposely bungled her assignment to kill him—James—a few nights before.

Everhard got in touch with Vilette. The girl persuaded him to stick up De Rossi's, one of the largest jewelry stores in Paris. She told him it was all arranged with the police, and La Tête de Mort must surely take them into their confidence after the "robbery".

Everhard went through with his part of the bargain, only to find Monsieur Biradou of the police waiting for him outside the store. He had to call on all his poker experience to trick the police official into believing he had purchased the jewels. He went to Vilette's apartment and accused her of treachery; and she, in turn, called him a coward for not robbing the store as he had promised.

Knowing that the police would be on his trail any minute, Everhard turned to go. In vain Vilette pleaded with him to stay. At the door, his back to the girl, Everhard did not see Vilette creep up behind him, a heavy bronze elephant in her hand. As he went down into unconsciousness, his automatic, drawn instinctively, clattered to the floor.

VILETTE screamed; then, coolly and quickly, she replaced the elephant on the table. She hastily kicked the rug into lumpy wrinkles on the floor. She dropped to her knees and, bending over Everhard, thrust the automatic back into its holster. She was holding his head as the thin faced maid paused with panicky stare in the doorway, and a moment later a butler towered over the maid, his eyes bulging.

Vilette cried at them:

"He slipped and fell! Struck against

the chair. I'm afraid he's dead. The doctor! He acted drunk—unsteady. Our quarrel hurt him so. Oh, what fools we were—you, all of us!—to think he bought those jewels!"

Some hours later Everhard opened his eyes, not stirring. He saw a big faced man reading a newspaper in a chair. The paper rustled. Everhard closed his eyes. His head ached and was bandaged. He felt wretchedly drowsy and dull. There was a stinging pain inside his left arm, above the elbow, as if from the bite of an impossibly big mosquito.

The big faced man read by daylight through the curtains. Everhard was in a gauzy silky room. A woman's bedroom. He thought things over, or tried to; groping carefully, he examined the pajamas he wore. Satin. Everhard made a wry face.

Then he groaned, moved, stared blankly, looking confused. The newspaper fell to the floor and the big faced man stood up solicitously.

"How does monsieur feel?"

"Like hell."

"Monsieur had a very severe fall."

"I thought it was the ceiling that fell. Whose bedroom?"

"Mademoiselle Colbert's, monsieur." Colbert was another of Vilette's names.

"Tell her to come here."

"Ah, but she is out," the man said with a queer inflection.

Everhard studied the tone and face, but could make nothing of it; then:

"Bring my clothes. I'll leave a note thanking her."

"The doctor says monsieur is not to stir."

"And gave me a shot of dope to make sure I wouldn't, eh?" Everhard rubbed his arm.

"It was feared your skull was fractured. You tripped heavily on the rug."

"Damn wax floors anyhow." Everhard put his hands to the bandage. He didn't intend to correct the big faced man. "And who the devil are you?"

"The butler, monsieur. Hector."

"Am I wearing your pajamas?"

"I have that honor, monsieur."

Everhard grunted, closed his eyes, meditating. The butler owned silk pajamas. Vilette had said she was encircled with spies. Everhard felt miserable and dissatisfied with himself over the scene he had made with the girl. Without opening his eyes he said—

"Biradou know I'm here?"

"No, no, monsieur."

Everhard decided the fellow was lying. But aloud he asked—

"What time is it?"

"Ten o'clock, monsieur."

"Do you know how to make American coffee?"

"Oh, yes, indeed."

"Have the cook make some. About two quarts. See that she makes it right, please. And if that's this morning's paper—"

Everhard put out his hand. Hector reached out and pressed a button, then began to gather up the paper. He folded it neatly and arranged the cushions for sitting up.

"Is there anything else monsieur would like?"

"Yes—" Everhard thumped the creases out of the paper with back flips of his hand—"to be left alone."

"That can not be permitted, monsieur," said Hector apologetically.

The door opened and the maid came in. She had hot, evil eyes, but smiled sweetly, greeting Everhard with respectful cheeriness.

The butler went out, and she began daintily to pull the covers and pat the pillows.

"I'm all right. Just sit down where I can look at you. I need a pretty girl's smiles this morning."

She sat down, trying to be demure, and watched him.

He peered at the paper, his eyes naturally going to the first headlines. He did not move, gave no start, but just looked, though it was a moment or two before his eyes would clearly focus on

the small type, and so read that Nick Dodalus, the multi-millionaire tobacco merchant, had been mysteriously murdered last night at his apartment in the midst of a birthday party.

Dodalus had been called from the table and entered an adjoining room, evidently locking the door behind him. A moment later two shots were heard. Guests and servants crashed through the door. His valet crouched beside Dodalus and heard the last agonized whisper. It was thought that he had named the murderer, but the police had taken the valet away and refused to disclose the dead man's last words.

Everhard felt that he ought to say something.

"Terrible thing! I knew Dodalus well."

"And monsieur owed him money, which now he will not have to pay!" said the girl. She had a sly smile, approving of Everhard's good luck.

Everhard felt like shuddering but didn't. He thought La Tête de Mort must have the devil's own gift for picking cold, cruel people. Her eyes were passionately evil, her mouth a slit between lean jaws.

He presently read the account of the De Rossi robbery. De Rossi claimed to have lost about five million francs' worth of gems, listing unset emeralds and rubies.

"What do you know about that!" Everhard said.

The girl leaned forward eagerly. For some reason she was very anxious to be pleasing to Everhard.

"No doubt this De Rossi has been an honest man—or at least careful. That's all the honesty of most people amounts to."

She nodded approvingly.

"An honest man all his life," Everhard went on. "But this was his one big chance. Five million! The insurance companies are out of luck. And you, Angel, have probably noticed that the full amount of the loss is *never* recovered in any gem robbery? The reason being that jewelers claim a bigger loss than they had. Nice honest world. Here they make me out a bigger thief than I am."

"Monsieur is so amusing!" the maid said, delighted.

"I feel some better." He tapped the paper. "Here it is, all about how Biradou actually talked with me and De Rossi while I was in the act of kidnaping him. That'll make the old boy's dyed whiskers turn gray. De Rossi explains that he knew I would shoot. What is your name, mademoiselle?"

"Thala, monsieur."

"Never have anything to do with honest men, Thala. You can't trust 'em. Besides, fellows like Hector and me are much nicer, aren't we?"

"Oh, monsieur!" she exclaimed with slight uneasiness. "What do you know of Hector?"

"My dear, I know it is ten o'clock in the morning and that neither you nor Hector have called the police."

Thala laughed, a little taken aback; then, approvingly:

"No wonder you are lucky, monsieur. You are so clever."

"Why doesn't Biradou know I am here, Thala?"

"Ah, because last evening Mademoiselle Colbert told him you had telephoned that you were going to hide with Monsieur Kiro—"

She stopped, and a slightly startled look flashed in her eyes as if she had mentioned something she shouldn't have known.

Everhard, looking at the paper, pretended not to notice. He laid the paper aside.

"Thala, tell me, please—do you think Mademoiselle Colbert loves me?"

Thala eyed him very seriously and did not reply.

"Come, Thala. The truth if you please."

"Monsieur, she does not!" said Thala firmly.

"I've thought that too," Everhard said.

Thala leaned far forward, staringly intent, and whispered hurriedly—

"And it were best for you, monsieur, to hate her!"

"Ah! So? Why, Thala?"

She shook her head quickly and sat back comfortably in the chair, looking mysterious.

"I see," said Everhard, although frankly he did not at all see. "She loves Monsieur Biradou?"

"As to that I can not say." Thala seemed rather honest in her statements. "It is known that he loves her, and so she must not let him think he is not loved. He has great influence, that Biradou."

"She framed me to give him the credit for catching me, didn't she?"

"Yes, monsieur."

Everhard regarded her keenly and asked a pertinent question:

"Then why hasn't Monsieur Biradou been given the honor of arresting me before this, Thala?"

She arose quickly, made reckless by a sudden impulse, and, catching at Everhard's hand, bent low, whispering hurriedly:

"Monsieur will soon learn that he has friends even she must obey. Friends more powerful even than Monsieur Biradou. And, monsieur, please, when you become a great man—please, you will remember that Thala and Hector are to be trusted?"

Her evilly passionate eyes begged and promised; her thin lips were parted in readiness to tell more, but she swung her head alertly, pulled away, and calmly opened the door for Hector, who came with a tray. Hector sent her from the room.

Everhard laughed.

"You are a lucky man, Hector. She loves you. I guessed it, and she blushes so prettily!"

"She had better love me, monsieur," said Hector coolly as he put the tray on a bed table and lifted it. "I will kill her without a qualm if she tries any woman's tricks on me."

CHAPTER XIX

A GRIM INVITATION

THALA, without knocking, opened the bedroom door. Her eyes glittered with excitement. Then a withered, pale, little yellowish man peered like an expectant vulture through the door.

Balzar's cat-like eyes looked up into Hector's face as he, in silence, held out a skinny hand, showing a ring and its portrait. Hector stiffened like a soldier and bowed, then left the room, pushing the excited Thala before him.

Balzar looked at Everhard and his thin mouth moved in a slow smile. He bowed in exaggerated courtesy, keeping his yellow eyes level, then sat down close by the bed. His eyes peered from bony sockets unwinkingly as he said softly—

"I am sorry to learn that monsieur has met with an accident."

"Indeed you are!" said Everhard, sarcastic but not unfriendly. "Hovenden's money is taken from my pocket and restored to him. All the jewels De Rossi so kindly permitted me to carry away are lost. And I am your prisoner."

Balzar chuckled amiably.

"But you remain fortunate, monsieur." With cautious afterthought he added, "Perhaps."

"Now what?"

Balzar lifted a nearly lidless eye.

"Perhaps monsieur would like to know the dying words of his friend Dodalus?"

Everhard waited, showing interest, not replying.

Balzar stroked the curve of his mouth with his tongue's tip, very much as if tasting blood and liking it.

"Dodalus died naming you, monsieur, as the one who killed him!"

Everhard did not move. Not even an eyelash stirred. His gaze without a change of expression met the staring yellowish eyes.

A long interval of utter silence, except for the small gilded clock's ticking like the hurrying faint click-click of tiny

invisible feet.

Everhard smiled a little, lifting his fingertips to the bandage.

"You are right. I am lucky."

Balzar replied imperturbably—

"Yes—if the doctor, the butler, the maid, are permitted to testify."

"And Mademoiselle Colbert!"

Balzar smiled with a negative twist of his head, and the smile deepened cruelly. Then, as if her name had reminded him of something, he asked—

"Pardon, but did you, monsieur, visit the undertaker to view the body of one Joseph Kerman?"

"Yes."

"Ah! And?"

"Queer thing, that. I recognized him as a man I knew. But before I got even half a good look at him a hand fell on my shoulder. I was taken into another room and questioned. Had rather a time getting away."

"So?" said Balzar.

"Just so."

"And the dead man was?"

"A sort of relative—by marriage."

"And a friend?" Balzar suggested.

"A business associate—at times."

Balzar meditated with lips pursed and yellow eyes peering.

"Your grief was very slight. You entertained yourself by going to a circus in the evening."

"I had no reason to weep over that bird."

"You had no idea as to how he met his death?"

"He's had dealings with a lot of bad crooks. I may have been curious as to which one got him—if you call that an idea."

"Ah," Balzar murmured. "Since you had no sorrow in his death, you will perhaps have no joy in learning that he is alive."

"Alive!" Everhard bluffed his best.

Balzar sat as if listening to the tone of the word that still rang in his ears. He scrutinized Everhard's look of astonishment.

"Yes, alive. Shortly after Monsieur Kerman's simple funeral yesterday afternoon an airplane flying to Germany was forced down by motor trouble. Imagine the amazement of some persons to learn that the sole passenger was Monsieur Kerman, who had just been buried. In spite of certain efforts at secrecy, he is known to have reappeared in Paris late last night."

"Well I'll be damned!" said Everhard, feeling truthful.

"Come, come, monsieur!" Balzar coaxed impatiently. "You knew that your friend J. K. James was not dead."

"Like hell I did! I'd have poked that corpse in the ribs and asked why the customs had just nailed a half million dollars' worth of—well, never mind what. Anyhow, it nearly ruined me and another man. He wanted to save his own face. That's all! I'm sorry to hear your good news, monsieur. Damn sorry, I can tell you. That is, unless you tell me where I can find him now."

"And you would—" Balzar's voice trailed off.

"You're right I would. Or any other man that hands me the doublecross."

"*Man,* hm?" Balzar murmured significantly.

"As for women, hell! It's your own fault if you give them half a chance."

"You are forgiving?" Balzar suggested. His thin tone had a sound of sinister disapproval.

Everhard took the cue and frowned.

"Man or woman, Balzar. The doublecross ought to mark the spot where the body's found."

Balzar sucked in his wrinkled cheeks, lifted his eyes with an air of slight surprise.

"Monsieur is such a gallant man that I wondered." He smiled evilly. His eyes dropped as if to meditate, but lifted at once to surprise any unguarded look on Everhard's face. Silence. Then the murmur, "You are now wanted by the police for robbery and for murder."

"For robbery," Everhard corrected.

"And murder," Balzar insisted, mildly. "But if you wish, both can be taken care

of—indeed, I may say, perfectly."

"Yes? How?"

"As for the Dodalus affair, monsieur, that can be very simply arranged. The maid, the butler and the doctor. You understand?"

Everhard nodded, wondering whether he ought again to refer to Vilette. If they knew James lived, she then was dead. And evidently she had confessed nothing. He had a very wretched feeling over the way he had treated her after all his promises to see her through, come what might. He took the chance and said—

"You forget Mademoiselle Colbert."

"I do not forget," said Balzar, smiling enigmatically. "But it seems difficult for you to forget one who proved unworthy of your confidence!"

"Well, damn it, I loved her. You don't love women because they don't lie to you. You love them because you can't help it."

"Ah, then you still love her?"

"Yes, but I don't think that would keep me from breaking her neck."

"Ah! Ah!" Balzar sucked in his breath and the yellow eyes glowed. "Good! Good!" he said excitedly.

Everhard had no prejudice against snakes. They interested him and he could handle them. But there was something about Balzar that made Everhard want to step on him, and grind his heel as one grinds a snake's head in the dust.

He said:

"Since I had nothing to do with killing Dodalus, I can understand how that can be straightened out. But the De Rossi affair?"

"Ah." Balzar grinned. "Since you are so lucky—" He seemed to feel that luck was a definite characteristic, blessing some men. "The De Rossi affair is more difficult. But possibly Monsieur De Rossi can be persuaded to explain to the police that he misunderstood the directness of American business methods, eh? And if he refuses to prosecute, what then?" Balzar spread his hands and hunched his thin shoulders, grinning.

"And in return for these slight favors of unknown friends, I shall be expected to do just what?"

"To obey orders!" Balzar spoke with sudden sternness.

"I am more used to giving them," said Everhard at once and as sternly.

Balzar was evidently used to taking them from men who had the gift of command, for he shrank at once into a kind of Oriental humility, bowing, and murmured—

"And shall continue to give them if you prove worthy."

"Fair enough—for a man who has no choice. But how soon is it to be known whether or not I am worthy?"

Balzar's thin mouth curled up; the vulture's hairless head bobbed slowly up and down.

"By midnight, monsieur." The scrawny neck stiffened, holding the head firmly. The eyes were as steady as yellow upholstery tacks. "Monsieur, few men have been so fortunate as you. In spite of much that touches the wary suspicions of unknown friends, they nevertheless are willing to trust you implicitly—implicitly, monsieur. Providing you pass through a slight initiation without in the least flinching. It is a mere nothing—if you are worthy of our trust. No man before, never before you, monsieur, has been so honored. For then you will at once become—" Balzar paused dramatically, and his thin voice had the soft rasping sound of a sword slowly drawn from a metal sheath—"equal even with me in the confidence of La Tête de Mort!"

FOR ten minutes after Balzar had gone, backing out with humble bows as if even then in the presence of one not merely his equal but his superior, Everhard, not moving, stared at the door.

It had come—the thing he had come to Paris for; but somehow he was almost uninterested. Take the risk and go through with it—yes, he would do that . . .

"Damn airplanes!" he said angrily in the silence.

Not even Vilette could explain that one away.

He put his hands to the bandage, thinking of her, not of the headache.

It all seemed very clear to him now.

"God bless her, she wanted Biradou to nail me—then I'd have been safe in jail. The Death's Headers would have got me out somehow. She knew what she was doing. And, hell, after I had made Biradou himself think I was buying diamonds, naturally little Vilette couldn't guess the truth."

His fingers closed on the sheet as if grasping something he wanted to choke.

"You were jealous. That's all that was the matter with you. Jealous of Biradou. That's why you wouldn't forgive her, damn you! You could have been on the job and started something when they came in here to ask her about James. Why the hell did he want to come back to Paris! And she tried to warn you not to go near Dodalus. But you were in no mood to believe a mere hasty whisper. Thought she wanted you to stay near her so she could coax some more and be forgiven."

The door moved. Thala with timid eagerness looked in. Her lustful eyes burned with something like awe and the cruel slit of a mouth was parted breathlessly.

"Is there anything that can be brought to monsieur?"

Everhard scrutinized her face with a steadiness that made her whipcord body shrink slightly; but he spoke gently:

"Too bad, Thala, you didn't listen at the door. You could believe me then when I tell you the good news."

She hesitated, then nodded.

"Good," he said. "Sit down here. He put out a hand. She came readily. "Where's Hector?"

"Hector has gone to the street to look about because it is believed that the house is watched. We are very uneasy lest the police think you are here."

"Then we are alone, Thala?"

"Oh, no. Two men wait in front. They have been sent to wait."

"So, Thala, you heard everything?" His voice was encouraging.

She whispered—

"Yes, monsieur."

"And do you think I am likely to fail in the little initiation tonight?"

"Not you, monsieur!"

"And after that, those whom I choose to trust may have diamonds, servants, such an apartment as this, such fame as Vilette—Jeanne Colbert—had when she pretended to be Isobel de Nevers. You could show her how the part really ought to have been played, no?"

Thala called her vicious names, that traitress, Jeanne Colbert.

"Did they kill her here, Thala?"

"No, monsieur. Not here."

"And I shall like to trust you, Thala. You will never be false, will you?"

Thala's face brightened alertly. She whispered—

"Monsieur is kind."

"To some people." Everhard folded her fingers into a fist. He held the fist in his hand. "Thala, you heard Monsieur Balzar say that I am lucky?"

She nodded.

"Well, Thala, I'll tell you. That's mostly due to a little charm I carry. At least I always have some bad luck when I haven't the charm on me. And we want to be lucky tonight, don't we?"

"Yes indeed, monsieur."

"Then bring my gun—with the extra clip. Will you, Thala?"

"No, no, monsieur!"

"I see, Thala. You want me to remember that you are one I can trust, but you will do nothing to give me reason to remember."

"But, monsieur, if they knew they would kill me—and you too!"

"No one will know, Thala. And what harm can come to those who are lucky?"

"But a gun will do you no good, monsieur. And why do you want it when you are to be among friends? And if you tried to use it they would know you can not be trusted. No, no, no, monsieur

—please forget the gun!"

"Silly child. I am asking for a charm that has never failed me. And tonight of all nights if I don't have good luck—Hector is already jealous of you,Thala. Did you show him that ring I gave you?"

Thala dropped her head shyly, shaking it.

"Good! You were willing to keep the ring without telling him. We understood each other at a glance, did we not, Thala? So go bring the gun and the extra clip."

Everhard pushed at her encouragingly.

Thala's snake-like arm curved about his neck and her hot eyes hovered close to his face.

"Yes, monsieur—" And she ran from the room.

AFTER the visit of Monsieur Balzar it appeared all right for Everhard to be left alone unwatched. And it was seven o'clock when Hector came in humbly with a roll of bandages, towels, soap, brush and razor. He turned on more light and moved a chair, placed a hassock.

With his foot Everhard carefully shoved something that lay under the covers by his side farther down in bed before he threw back the sheets. The pajamas were short at the ankle, big at the belly, too tight at the shoulders.

"Remember, Hector, no perfume."

Everhard sat in the chair. Hector removed the bandage and pad. The hair had been shaved away from the jagged cut.

"Monsieur struck the edge of a chair in falling. The doctor took many stitches." Hector carefully, delicately, placed a fresh pad over the cut and bound it neatly with a smaller bandage.

After finishing shaving, Hector began to straighten the bed, but Everhard touched his arm.

"Just fluff up the pillows a little. I'll lie down again."

He got into bed and drew the covers firmly about him.

Hector brought in Everhard's clothes. The suit had been pressed. There was fresh linen. The shoes were shined. But the pockets had been emptied of everything except handkerchiefs. Everhard thought finding those extra passports would do something to help them believe that he was quite the proper sort of man for the Death's Head.

In the entrance hall, Hector helped Everhard into his overcoat and gave him a cap.

"My own, monsieur. The hat will not sit well over the bandage."

Thala, eager, confidential, stood before him, offering his stick.

Two taciturn men in thick overcoats with velvet collars, hats in their hands, were at the door.

"Tonight you will still be lucky, monsieur!" Thala whispered, tense, not furtively, with blessings upon him in her evil eyes. "And play for high stakes!"

"Yes, for high stakes, Thala," Everhard said with a steady look.

The door opened. The two escorts stepped aside for Everhard to pass out first. They bowed slightly as he passed. They seemed to feel that they were in the presence of one who would soon have the power of life and death over them.

No one spoke in the elevator. As soon as they left the elevator a man opened the street door, beckoning.

They moved quickly down the sidewalk to a taxi. Only one man got in with Everhard, and he kept looking back through the window.

"The cursed police agents," he said bitterly, "have been in this neighborhood all day. They drive taxis. They sell flowers. They sweep the streets. Our friends watch now to see if we are followed."

Everhard said nothing. The man peering backward through the window chuckled without humor and said confidently—

"They will be so tangled they can not follow their own noses!"

The taxi cut from the Champs Elysées

into a dark street and drove a zig-zag course, taking corners sharply. From time to time another taxi appeared far behind, frequently turning its headlights off and on with winking quickness.

After some twenty minutes the first taxi drew up to a curb, waiting; the second stopped nearby. The men got out and talked together.

"We have given them the slip."

"One can not be too sure," a voice insisted. "The police are devils for hanging on."

"But here we are, and no one has come."

Everhard's companion looked at his watch by the flame of a cigaret lighter.

"The appointment must be kept."

He reentered the taxi. The fellow continued to stare out of the rear window.

"One does not dare make mistakes," he explained.

The taxi stopped near the Palais Royal, and the man pointed to the entrance of a subterranean café.

"You are to go there, monsieur, and wait."

Everhard gave a look at the gloomy neighborhood and got out.

"Goodby, monsieur," said his companion respectfully.

"You aren't coming?"

"Another meets you here, monsieur."

Everhard had scarcely seated himself before a fellow came up insolently. It was evident that he did not know anything about the honor that was soon likely to be conferred upon Everhard. This fellow had the pinched look of a street rat who has found good clothes, some money, and at once attempts to pass among his betters for an equal.

"Monsieur will come with me," he said, half sneering.

"Why should I?" Everhard demanded.

The fellow hitched his trousers, swayed his shoulders, grinned impudently and drew a small box wrapped about with paper from his pocket. With a discourteous gesture he threw it on to the table.

"What is that?" Everhard asked, pointing disdainfully with a forefinger.

"Open it and see," said the fellow.

Everhard drew his hands back to the edge of the table.

"Open it yourself if it's something you want me to see."

The man gave him a quick look, then sullenly opened the little box.

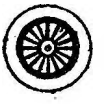
"There!" he said, holding it out. "Perhaps now you will know better than to give yourself fine airs."

Everhard took the little box, glanced at the tiny miniature of Kurlingen, then put it into his pocket and stood up.

The man led the way, sullenly slouching. They walked together; walked blocks and blocks, and at last returned near the arcade of the Palais Royal. Undoubtedly they had gone over a plotted course where watchers lurked at corners and in doorways, waiting to see who followed.

Three times the guide struck matches before he lighted his cigaret; then a shadow detached itself from a black wall and came near. The shadow and the sullen fellow spoke hurriedly in clipped argot. Then the first guide hurried off.

"Come, monsieur," said the new guide pleasantly enough, but with matter-of-fact impatience. He had a hoarse voice and rather broad shoulders.



THEY walked to a taxi that waited nearby. The taxi started up as soon as they got in, without directions being given by the guide.

The guide drew a handkerchief from his pocket and said bruskly—

"Pardon, but I must tie this about your eyes."

"Pardon, but you'll do nothing of the kind," said Everhard.

"It is required."

"You can go to the devil. I will not be tied. Neither hands, feet nor eyes."

"You do not obey, monsieur?"

"Not that I won't."

"You do not trust me when you know I have been sent by those you must

obey?" the guide insisted.

"Trust you? Yes, in that I will go with you, anywhere—but with my eyes open."

"You make it difficult, monsieur."

"I'll make it more difficult if you try that."

The fellow held the handkerchief in his hands and, with elbows on knees, meditated a long time; then he said:

"You are a brave man, monsieur. I have heard the teeth of other men chatter as if they were chewing almond hulls. No one before has ever refused the handkerchief, and that requires courage. You will make a comrade that one can trust. I am no fool, monsieur. There is always one way to tell the spy. He is so ready to please and seem a good fellow. But, please, monsieur, you will never tell any one that I did not blindfold you?"

"Never."

The taxicab took a roundabout way. Everhard knew because after a time he recognized that they were crossing the Île de la Cité; and presently he could feel cobblestones under the wheels, the tug of the engine against the upgrade. After more turnings and the bumpy skitter as the wheels rolled downgrade, the taxi stopped suddenly.

Everhard heard the hushed call of a voice. The driver answered, perhaps giving a password. There was the grating squeak as when heavy doors are opened. The taxi moved forward a little way, entering a cobblestone courtyard. There was again the grating squeak, then the heavy thud of doors closing.

"Come," said Everhard's companion. "We are here."

He got out first, and held the big blue handkerchief as if he had just taken it from Everhard's eyes.

Everhard stepped out. It was very cold, with a mist of wet air dampening the stones. The driver had dimmed the lights. Two fellows in workmen's smocks lurched up and turned a flashlight into Everhard's face. One said:

"He has the rogue's look, this fellow. So much the better for him!"

The one who had been Everhard's companion in the taxi said:

"Here I leave you, monsieur." To the others, "This one is different." To Everhard again, "You will have good luck, all right. Here is my hand to wish it!"

Everhard put out his right hand. Shaking hands with a man is one way to murder him without much of a struggle. The fellow held to Everhard's hand with a tight grip for longer than seemed friendly; but Everhard misjudged him, for, dropping the hand, the man turned almost proudly to his companions.

"Ha! His fingers are warm and do not tremble. And it is cold, this night . . . " He patted Everhard on the shoulder. "You are a man for my money, monsieur!"

One of the men led the way into the house, an old one by the smell.

He opened a door and pointed to some narrow steps that seemed to run straight down into utter darkness. Offering Everhard a small flashlight, not the one he himself was using, he said gruffly—

"You go first."

"Pardon, no."

"Pah! You are afraid!"

"Pah yourself! I know a rogue when I see him, and he does not walk at my back on stairs in the dark!"

The fellow swore grumblingly but went ahead, slowly, throwing his flashlight about.

They descended to a cellar walled with huge old stones. In the masonry was a heavy, crude door. The man tugged at it. The thing creaked open as if in great pain.

A damp, warm, musty smell came out of the blackness, and the faint sound of trickling water.

"From here you go alone," said the man, again offering the flashlight.

Everhard looked down through the door into the darkness. He had never been in the catacombs or sewers of Paris, or visited the oubliettes. For one thing, his nose was sensitive; for another, he was not morbid enough to care about

old torture chambers. He did know, having read, that the barbarous lords of the feudal ages had almost as much of a passion for burrowing underground as for raising towers and battlements; and had read also that the hills of the left bank of the Île de la Cité, clear to the Odéon, were honeycombed with subterranean passages, many unexplored and impassable.

"From here I go alone—where?" Everhard asked. His guide shook his head.

"To wherever you are going."

"Thank you. Quite explicit." Everhard bent forward. The flashlight showed that the iron ladder which led straight down was not old. "How many have gone before me?"

"Not many," said the man. "Nearly all refuse to go from here."

Something in the way he said it seemed to encourage Everhard also to refuse.

"What happened then?"

The fellow shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not know. They were taken away as they were brought. Where, I do not know."

Everhard stepped through the door, grasped the ladder and began to descend, still facing the man who held his flashlight.

"*Au revoir, monsieur,*" said Everhard, with a slight flip of his hand.

"*Adieu!*" the man answered hoarsely.

He swung the heavy door to. Dense blackness came about Everhard like a heavy cloak, and the foul smell of an old wet grave. One says *adieu* at the foot of the guillotine.

CHAPTER XX

MASTER OF THE MURDERERS' GUILD

EVERHARD groped his way blindly down the ladder and, with extended foot, made sure the slimy floor was solid before he let go of the ladder.

He found himself in a narrow passage. The floor was uneven, and oozing water trickled over it. The way was slippery. He followed the passage on and on, going slowly, for the footing was bad and he did not want to stumble into a mucky pool. He was glad for the small flashlight that had been given him.

He came to the foot of a narrow twisting stairway that wound upward in short spirals. He thought perhaps this was the remnant ruin of what had once been a dungeon, sacked in the dark ages, and half hidden hundreds of years ago by the scraping down of hills, since built over many times. All the old parts of Paris have ruins of some sort for a foundation.

The upward climb seemed unending, and in the musty air sweat came to his face. The overcoat grew noticeable. He took it off, cast it behind him and went on.

The stairs ended before a massive door. He played the flashlight over it and raised his fist to knock, but pushed instead. The door's sluggish weight gave slightly. He put a shoulder to it and the door swung noiselessly.

He entered an utterly bare, unlighted, small circular room, walled and floored with stone. There was a narrow, recessed door directly opposite. Everhard crossed to it. This also was heavy on its hinges and swung sluggishly; he peered through into a large, dimly lighted room.

He went in, stopped, and the door of its own weight swung slowly to behind him.

The room was very large. Its walls were completely hung with heavy crimson drapes—dark as old blood stains. They were spotted with brocaded arabesques that, no doubt, disguised peepholes. The floor was laid with rugs; the furniture was massive. Electric lights shed a kind of moonlight through alabaster bowls. It was a weird sort of place—airless, stifling and silent.

Everhard took off his cap and dropped it behind him. He wiped his hands carefully on a handkerchief and tossed

the crumpled linen also behind him, and looked about, studiously incurious, and not greatly impressed for the whole thing smelled of claptrap, like the fantastic initiation into some ordinary secret order. What he wanted was a glimpse of La Tête de Mort himself.

He heard a voice from behind the curtains—a deep, thick rumble, almost beast-like.

"Good!" said Everhard. "That sounds like what I've heard of the devil. You're going to like this show, Vilette," he whispered to himself, feeling somehow sure the dead girl could hear and understand.

Then he overheard another voice, and his heart bumped his ribs like the prod of an elbow that warned him to wake up. He would have recognized it anywhere. It was the voice of the mysterious artist who had appeared out of the darkness on the Parvis-Notre-Dame.

Everhard could not understand what was said. It seemed a language that he had never heard.

The curtains parted. A small figure appeared in a long robe. The vulturine head on the scrawny neck bowed slightly with uplifted eyes. Balzar said reproachfully—

"You are late."

"I was handed about like a package. Blame your postmen for that."

Balzar appeared not to know whether to be pleased or displeased. He remained near the curtain; he murmured—

"You will recall, monsieur, that we have previously spoken together of the woman Colbert?"

"I do. Yes."

"The woman Colbert betrayed you, monsieur."

"I know it."

"We have discovered that she was a spy, trying to betray those who are about to become your friends."

Balzar, saying that, paused as if expecting a reply. Everhard gave him one.

"Be like her."

"Yes. Some few days ago we discovered reason to doubt that she had remained in the sanitarium in Switzerland where she was supposed to be ill, and we became very suspicious of her. She stubbornly claimed that she had been there, and could prove it. This was just at the time of the arrival in Paris of the gentleman who chose to use the name Joseph Kerman. We gave her the chance to establish her trustworthiness, but the man James entered into a conspiracy with her to deceive us."

"Oh, so that was it?" said Everhard.

"We now believe that the friendship we permitted her to maintain with the detective Biradou was used to convey our secrets to him, rather than to secure his aid for us."

"I see."

"Yes, monsieur. And now for many reasons we suspect that you, monsieur, may have been a party to this conspiracy to destroy the great order of La Tête de Mort. You yourself, monsieur—" this with a drawling, sarcastic whine—"are a very mysterious person—"

"Rot!" said Everhard flatly.

Balzar caught his breath. He was used to seeing men tremble; he lifted his voice angrily:

"You are the friend and relative of James, our great enemy. And he is her great friend, else he would not have played a dead man's rôle. You have told me yourself that you loved her!"

"How many men don't love the wrong kind of woman?"

"We know," Balzar shrieked, "that you are either a conspirator with her to enter our society and learn our secrets, or else she meant to introduce you to us, then coax the secrets from you! Which was it? An answer is demanded!"

"That's a hell of a question for a man as smart as you to ask! If it was the one thing, I'd he. If the other, I'd know nothing about it, would I? But I'll say it was neither, since she put me up to the De Rossi job to give Biradou the credit for nailing me. You figure it out—any

way you like."

Balzar was cunning, but he had never played poker. This hard eyed man was difficult to manage. Perhaps the woman Colbert had found it out too, and so deliberately got him into trouble.

"But," Balzar cried triumphantly, "you do feel that she betrayed you?"

"I know damn well she did!"

"And, monsieur," said the sinister voice, "you told me you kill those who betray you. Look! Watch there!"

Everhard turned, following the gesture.

Curtains stirred and were slowly drawn aside.

VILETTE sat in a high backed massive chair on a dais, like a bound queen, in the make-up and costume of Isobel de Nevers. Her hair was flaming gold, and a flame-like spray of egrets swayed above her head. Breasts and hands and throat were shimmering with jewels—some of them recently out of De Rossi's; and pendants dangled beside cheeks that were as pale as if all the blood had been drained away, but her lips were stained blood-red. Her dark eyes, shadowed with lids as purple as grapes, were fastened on Everhard. Her elbows were bound to the arms of the chair.

La Tête de Mort liked the theatrical.

Balzar was giving instructions:

"Go to the table in the center of the room. A pistol lies there. Take it up and kill the woman Colbert. Then all our suspicions of you vanish!"

A hoarse, thick bubble of words came gleefully from behind the curtains, as if the Death's Head jabbered delight at the rare entertainment of seeing Everhard murder the woman he loved. Everhard turned quickly, looking toward the sound, and saw nothing but the fold of heavy drapes, hanging motionless.

Balzar cried out urgently, eager for the crime. Everhard stared at him. The yellow eyes gleamed, lustfully cruel, and his tongue darted about the withered old mouth as if licking something bitter but nevertheless subtly pleasant.

Everhard's heavy steps were noiseless on the thick rug as he went to the table.

A dueling pistol lay there, a costly thing inlaid with silver and gold filigree. He picked it up, glancing toward Balzar, but there was only a sluggish stir of the crimson hanging. Balzar had vanished. Everhard balanced the pistol, trying the feel of it. He scowled toward Vilette. Her lips were tight, as if she would not let any weakness rise up within her and cry out. The echo of James' words came to him: "Made out of iron, that family!" Silence, just silence, with watching eyes behind the curtains. He raised the pistol at arm's length above his head.

Vilette's shoulders stiffened, pushing her breast forward.

"Shoot, monsieur!" It was a command, queenly and stern.

He lowered the muzzle slowly; down, on down below her shoulder; down to where her bound arms struggled tensely to press against her side, bracing herself for the shock of the bullet. When the sight was on a level with her heart, he fired.

"Dead as hell!" said Everhard instantly, glowering at her as he tossed the gun away.

Vilette threw up her head with a loose jerk, then pitched forward against the lashings of the heavy chair and hung motionless.

A kind of laughter bubbled from behind the curtain; hoarse, brutal, idiotic chuckling—the Death's Head sound of pleasure. Everhard turned sharply. No one was there. Not even the trembling of a drape. Balzar's voice was lifted in praise from behind the curtains. No one appeared.

Everhard looked all about, then turned and started around the table toward Vilette. He knew that she could not long hold that distorted attitude with her whole weight pulling against the lashings that bound her arms to the chair.

"Monsieur!"

Everhard wheeled.

From behind the curtains and walking rapidly toward Everhard was the hunchbacked artist of the miniatures.

"Monsieur, you have done well!"

Everhard now had a better look at him. The gaunt face was pale as anything that lives in darkness. A bony, fleshless sort of face, plastered over with lifeless skin; ugly and interesting. The eyes glittered in bony sockets. Dark hair flowed back from a high white forehead. A fastidious person, delicate and graceful, but not weak. The hump loomed at his back, more noticeable now than when he wore a cloak. The long graceful hands were empty.

He peered at Everhard intently with outthrust head. Everhard met his eyes steadily and with impatience. The room was oppressive. The heavy drapes were like palls soon to be thrown over the dead. The hunchback shook his head with nervous trembling, doubtfully, and exclaimed like one who fears he has made a mistake.

"You have none of the weakness that is called mercy, but 'tis strange how you are not as I thought, now that I see you more clearly!"

There was a chuckle, hoarse and seemingly near. Everhard glanced aside and saw what he thought was as ugly a face as the devil with all hell to choose from could have put together. A sluggish beast of a creature stood half revealed between the folds of the drapes. The head was set on squat, round shoulders. A club-headed beast of a man, with a bull's neck, jaws thick as fists and fat lips. A half negroid face, with eyes no bigger than peas in sockets like black cups.

One look and Everhard knew that the brain in that club-head could not have schemed and directed La Tête de Mort.

At that moment men suddenly appeared about Vilette and, following the cry of Balzar, began yelping in an unknown language. Dark skinned little men. Some clawed at Vilette, others looked and pointed accusingly toward Everhard; and Balzar, like a screaming vulture robbed of food, ran forward with an uplifted hand. Blood was on his fingers, and in the other hand he carried a knife. He had groped for the wound and found but a slight flesh tear under Vilette's left arm.

Everhard jerked his automatic from its holster, his eyes on Balzar; with a half turn of his body and forearm across his breast, he shot. Balzar dropped face down, and the back of his hairless head looked like a shattered ostrich egg.

"You like blood!" said Everhard.

With a sweeping glance he looked at the dark skinned men, some six or seven of them, who squeaked and jabbered in frightened uncertainty, waving knives and guns. They somehow seemed to think themselves unfairly tricked by seeing a gun in the hand of one they had thought unarmed.

IN the pause, the hunchback's delicate hands instantly struck at Everhard's wrist, fastening the long fingers. He shrieked strange words that were more than a call for help. The dark skinned men leaped and howled, showing their teeth as if to bite.

Everhard swayed his arm backward and jerked, carrying the hunchback off balance. With a jerking twist Everhard broke the hold and instantly brought the automatic's barrel down on the hunchback's head. He dropped, quite as if dead. A thrown knife cut glancingly into the back of Everhard's shoulder, dangled and fell as he spun about, shooting.

There was a blaze of gunfire, small automatics rattled with thin reports, half unheard amid the explosive roar of the .45. Quick, cool, with the wisp of an unnatural smile on his mouth, Everhard shot to right and left. His taunt was unheard, but he called at them:

"Take it and like it! You like blood!"

He spun about, searching for a glimpse of the brute-like creature; but that monstrous thing had disappeared.

Everhard, with his left arm dangling loosely, lurched aside from the driving swing of a knife, shot the fellow and, without pausing to see him fall, wheeled clear around and put a bullet into the heart of a man who, too late, tried to check his rush.

Everhard felt the stab of a thrown knife click against the bone at the back of his shoulder; and, turning, killed the man who had thrown the knife and now ran head down for the shelter of the curtains. The gun clicked, empty. He pressed the release. The empty clip jumped up. He dropped on one knee to the floor, put the gun beside his foot, reached hastily with his right hand into his coat pocket, took a full clip, pressed it part way in, then struck it sharply against his heel, driving it home.

Crouching, he looked about him; then he arose, glanced toward the pale face of Vilette and turned again, walking sidewise, watching. He called to her—

"How d'you like my show, Vilette?" And began counting the dead.

"*Mon dieu!*" she gasped.

His left arm hung at his side; the other with crooked elbow held the gun level, waist high. He kicked at a knife, sending it over the run toward her, and followed. He kicked the knife again, bringing it near the dais.

Everhard stared at her for a moment.

"To look at you, Vilette, nobody'd think you would wallop a friend over the back of the head!" Then he turned, gazed searchingly over his shoulder, watching for any movement in the room; and as if to himself, "Dodalus' ghost has had a good time of it tonight, anyhow!"

Standing before her, he looked up and smiled grimly. Her lips were parted but she could not speak. Blood was trickling from the cuff of his left coat sleeve.

The drip of blood broke her muteness.

"You are hurt!" she cried, and strained against the cords that bound her arms.

"But what have they been doing to you, child?"

She closed her eyes.

"But I would tell nothing!"

The look in her dark eyes when she opened them meant that she would have bitten off her tongue rather than weaken into telling anything.

Everhard gazed at her as a queer little smile came widening out on his mouth until it even twitched in wrinkles at the corners of his eyes.

"If I get down on *my* knees will you forgive me, Vilette?"

"*Mon dieu!* They did not think you would shoot me! They meant then to torture us together and to the death!"

"I guessed that much. In just a minute I'll have you out of that chair."

He stooped and laid the automatic on the dais at her feet, reached to the floor and was picking up the knife when Vilette screamed and struck out with both gold slippered feet, striking him in the face, making him dodge as a shot was fired from across the room.

Everhard felt a tug at his side and turned the more quickly, with the .45 in his hand. He saw only the faint ripple of heavy curtains that had just been stirred.

He took one long step forward, shooting as he made the step. He laced the curtains with lead, placing shots dead center, to the right and left, rippling them head high and knee low—meaning to get the fellow, however he might stand, run or duck. The gun snapped, empty. He threw it aside.

"You are hurt again!" Vilette cried.

He did not answer but walked quickly out into the room, picked up the first small automatic he found that had fallen from some dead hand. He held it until he came to another, then dropped the first into his side coat pocket, picked up the second.

He crossed to the drapes and kicked them aside. A huddled body lay there. He lifted the drapes on the muzzle of the small gun, stooped, then let them fall.

"No good," he called to her. "I hoped that was the old devil himself."

He meant the brute-like creature; but

she, misunderstanding, cried out:

"You have killed him! The hunchback—that is the real El Kasyd. The real Head of Death."

Everhard ran back, with left arm dangling loosely, to the center of the room, and glanced about hurriedly. He came upon the body of the hunchback, still motionless, but far from where it had fallen, and stooped to watch the pale face, now blood streaked with a bruised welt high above the temple. He walked slowly around and pushed with his foot. The body yielded laxly, but one hand lay as if deliberately doubled under the back. Everhard hooked a toe under the crook of the elbow and pulled the arm. The hand came to view, empty.

EVERHARD, a little furtively, put the small gun into his pocket, stooped; and, trying to conceal the uselessness of his left arm, caught the back of the hunchback's collar and dragged him across the floor, then rolled him over, face down.

He then cautiously picked up the knife he had kicked across the room and continued to watch the hunchback as he cut at the heavy cord binding Vilette's right elbow to the chair. When it was free, he put the hilt of the knife into her hand, dipped into his side coat pocket and took out a small gun, glancing at it distrustfully.

"No shock to these things. And I'm damned thankful there isn't."

"You are badly hurt!" Vilette paused in sawing at the cord of her left arm.

"I've been caught out in the rain before. That pack of dumbells—if they'd only got behind the curtains they could have picked me off. Doubt it, though. Worst shooting I ever saw. And for the first time in their lives they got messed up with a fellow who wasn't unarmed. Didn't know what to do."

"And how could you come armed?"

"Nice little girl named Thala."

"You trusted her?"

"No woman in my life—but you. That's why I've got a bandage on my head now."

"Oh, but I knew that if you went near Dodalus last night—"

"Yes, I know—now. That pleasant gentleman, Balzar, told me. And why did they kill poor old Nick? He never hurt anybody in his life and—"

"They knew he gave money to stir up people in Egypt to want Hovenden on the throne. And the *real* El Kasyd was simply furious with jealousy."

"He's a madman anyhow. And who are all these—" Everhard motioned with the gun, indicating the dead bodies, but scarcely took his eyes off the hunchback.

"Fellahs—they speak no word of French." She rubbed at her half numb arms. "Oh, I was never so surprised in my life as to find I was not dead when you shot at me!"

"Some other people—but damn few—have said the same thing. That brute—the gorilla! What's he in the scheme of things?"

"I learned everything since they were so sure I would die tonight. They used his voice for La Tête de Mort's—it lent more terror. They used him to strangle people here, break their bones and do terribly worse things. But for you tonight, he would have tortured me while they looked on." She shuddered as if with ague.

"I think they've smelled enough blood for one night." Then with a jerk of his head at the hunchback, accompanied by the shadow of a wink, he said, "So this is the real El Kasyd, eh? Be quite a joke if that new revolution puts Hovenden on the throne, won't it?"

"Ah, yes indeed; there is a strong party that demands the last of the El Kasyds."

"And the worst of it is," Everhard went on, "that he's too big socially, has too many powerful friends, is too rich. He'll squirm out of this mess in spite of all we can do. And he stands a real chance of being put on the throne."

"That is true," said Vilette.

"And it was Hovenden who must have furnished the brains for these fellows," Everhard insisted, playing poker.

The hunchback rolled over and sat up all in one movement. He stared past the little gun Everhard leveled at his head and said humbly—

"*Va victis, monsieur!*"

Everhard, no scholar but a great reader of old histories, knew it was Latin and meant that when you've had the worst of it you have to take your medicine.

"Good guess," he said approvingly.

"Monsieur, I was dead—I was in hell. But when you spoke of him, I tore away one little hour more of life and came back. He shall not longer be the Prince El Kasyd."

"No? How are you going to stop him? And who is he, this Hovenden?"

"A gutter born mongrel dog, vain of his tall body." The hunchback rose up with slender fingertips beating a rapid tattoo on his breast. "Look at me, monsieur! My own mother was put to death for bearing me—deformed. A prince must be tall, handsome. Ha! I gave them, this stupid world, such a man. And their tongues lick his feet. You despised him, monsieur. Admiring you for that was my weakness. A mistake. That, and thinking you knew what art should be. I thought yours a kindred soul to mine."

Everhard grunted.

"What of Hovenden?"

"A natural impostor, he aped gentlemen. I gave him the training of a gentleman, pushed him forward in the world. Built up the imposture so it could not be disproved by newspapers or police. And queens have dined with him!" The hunchback laughed with a kind of pain, very much as if he howled. "He, a nameless dog, sentenced to death ten years ago for strangling an old bejeweled woman here in Paris—selling her rings to buy himself such clothes as gentlemen wear!"

"But did he know you were the real El Kasyd?" Vilette asked.

"Know? Know! That dog knows nothing! A puppet, he did as told. And told what he did to the stone walls of his room! He believed, the fool, that the devil heard him and protected him!"

"Not so far wrong, perhaps, at that," said Everhard.

"Come, monsieur—come with me. He is in his room nearby, and will never leave alive. Come, I will show you."

"Be nice to go with you and get our necks broken on the way, eh?" Then, in a serious tone, "Tell me one thing, if you can. How the hell did you—you *are* a genius—get mixed up in a mess like this?"

The hunchback looked up with glittering eyes a-slant; hate stared out of them, and tiny white bubbles of froth were on his mouth as he shrieked:

"You would flatter me still!" He felt himself betrayed. "You called me a genius! Admired my art! Bah! And would flatter now, still!"

"Call it flattery, do you, to ask why you have lived with a lot of blood-licking rats? And gave a lousy impostor your name?"

THE hunchback's head went back, as if the words were blows.

"Monsieur—" he was almost pleading, "I was born hating the world. Old Fered—the curse of a father—died thinking I had been smothered in swaddling clothes. I grew up, hidden away like a deformed monster that would terrify the world if it caught sight of me. I did love art, and hated all men. A monster—I would be a monster such as none had ever seen! La Tête de Mort! With these eyes I could look through all men's garments and see the nakedness of soul. Selfish, cruel, evil—all men! And cowards! If they do not believe in what they call God, then they are afraid of the law and its punishment—and they call that fear *honor!* Pah! If they do believe in their God, they lie to Him in prayers and beg Him to give them great rewards in heaven because they are

afraid of his punishment—and they call that religion!"

"Well," said Everhard, seeing stark lunacy in the hunchback's face, "I'm afraid you never met any really nice people. Couldn't—no more than a bedbug can. But there's more than that behind all this. What were you up to? What did you hope to get in the end?"

"Monsieur," said the hunchback with dignity, "I was cheated of my right to the throne of Egypt. I created a kingdom of my own. I drew my warriors and subjects from cowardly and evil men—the most numerous on earth. In a few more years I would have ruled France, Europe, America! There is no law but fear, and all men bow to it." His sunken eyes blazed as if filled with fire.

"Bunk!" said Everhard. "There's one that didn't bow! She made a fool out of you and had you scared stiff!"

Vilette uneasily put an imploring hand on Everhard's shoulder, but he shook off her hand.

The hunchback glared in a daze, half stupefied, his ears ringing with the sort of words and tone he had never heard before. He held his hands wrist to wrist, the fingers of his right hand secretly fingering something hidden in the left sleeve of his coat.

"All right," said Everhard. "Now, if you want to take us to Hovenden, lead the way. But one tricky move, and you're dead. Then Hovenden'll be king of Egypt."

At that the hunchback's right hand dropped quickly from his sleeve.

"Come! Come! I will show you a secret no one could learn for himself!"

"Take his arm, Vilette. Hold tight so he can't try to dodge away. And I'll have this gun at his back."

They passed near Balzar's body.

"Wait a minute," said Everhard, and poked his toe against one of Balzar's feet. "Just who was he?"

"My only friend, monsieur."

"And a bad one for any man to have!"

"He hid me away, a babe. Kept the secret all these years and—"

"And taught you a lot of wrong things about life and the world!"

"—even kept me here, as his nephew, before my own cursed father's eyes. For forty years he had lived within these walls and scarcely saw the sun. He served my father well—"

"Yes. Served up puddings made out of women's bruised flesh and men's broken bones? I understand perfectly. You like it too, don't you? Damn near every man who killed a woman, you'd drag him in among the Death's Head as a sort of brother—"

"Oh, please!" Vilette begged, shivering.

They went on, pushed through the heavy drapes that were suspended like curtains some four feet from the wall, which made the room even larger than it had appeared. The walls behind the curtains were of bare stone.

They squeezed, all three together, through an arched doorway and entered a narrow corridor. It was laid with rug runners. The walls were also of bare stone. The way was dimly lighted with dusty bulbs attached to visible wiring.

"Don't want to embarrass you, Vilette, but your wig's got crooked. Dress is all askew. Some feathers broke on the drape. At that, you look nicer than with buns!"

Vilette, imploring, said—

"Monsieur, you are impossible!" But her tone was half admiring. She laughed nervously in spite of herself. "No one will ever believe what I tell them of you."

EL KASYD warned them to make no sound, but to listen; then they passed through a noiseless door and entered a queer little dimly lighted room, heavily carpeted, with two big padded chairs facing one side of the bare stone walls; and there were odd, small holes in the stone.

A long, heavy bar stood against the wall; and a great ball of hammered iron encircled the bar some three feet above the floor. The great weight of it was

plainly designed to give the bar more leverage in the curious contrivance of iron rods, thick as a man's arm, and massive hinges half as wide as a man's breast, that were let into the wall.

Everhard, keeping his eyes steadily on the hunchback's face, stooped with an ear close to one of the cone shaped holes in the stone. He distinctly heard footsteps pacing to and fro, although the man on the other side of the wall trod a carpeted floor.

El Kasyd pointed toward the lever and breathed almost soundlessly—

"This opens an ancient door."

Everhard nodded permission.

El Kasyd rose to his tiptoes and carefully reached high up, taking hold of the lever's handle. He moved as if the slightest sound could be heard in the next room as well as from it. He gripped the handle and swayed back, swinging himself off the floor, pressing the wall with his feet, and so got a powerful leverage with the off-balance weight of the great ball of hammered iron.

There was a grating shift of what looked like solid rock. For a moment Everhard thought the desperate hunchback had trapped them so that all would be killed together. Vilette snatched at his useless arm and gasped. With the shrill rasp of old metal joints and the creak and snap of splintered wood, the ancient doorway opened outward on its ponderous hinges. Once started, it swung of its own weight, crashing with a jar like that of an earthquake through the paneling and stucco of the next room.

The unseen Hovenden shouted in amazed terror—

"My God, what's that?"

The answer came in fury from El Kasyd—

"La Mort!"

He leaped as if escaping through the doorway, jumping two feet down to the floor where Hovenden nervously paced about.

Hovenden's face turned a sickly color. He staggered back with his padded red silk robe swaying about him, and cried out an inarticulate plea as El Kasyd, without another word, whipped the concealed knife from the sleeve of his left arm and drove it hilt deep in Hovenden's breast.

Hovenden reeled sidewise with a curiously silly look of astonishment, then threw his head back as if to shout. But he was silent. He groped at the air, then dropped, squirmed and lay still, face up.

"Monsieur—" El Kasyd faced Everhard—"justice has been done!"

"But now to do it right and cut your own throat too!"

"You do wrong to reproach me!" El Kasyd shouted. "An artist may destroy his own work. And think; I chose to kill him when I might have killed you!"

"You chose carefully, too. I have a gun. He hadn't. That makes a lot of difference. Now sit down there and stay put. Vilette, what the devil are you up to?"

She was running about the room, searching and moving objects.

"I look for the telephone."

"You will give me to the police?" El Kasyd cried, and sounded outraged.

"Sit down!"

The hunchback backed into a chair. He clenched the arms of it with long fingers, shifting uneasily. His glittering eyes fell on the hilt of the knife, upright in Hovenden's breast, then his glance darted toward Everhard's face.

"Go ahead. Try it," said Everhard encouragingly, leaning against a table but hiding the weakness that came from loss of blood.

Vilette had found the telephone. She talked rapidly, for the moment merely an excited Parisienne, gesturing, her voice vibrant with inflections. Everhard could not imagine how she expected any one to understand that whirring speed of words.

Everhard glanced about the room. Hovenden, who had once murdered a foolish old bejeweled woman to help his credit at the tailor's, had a four-poster bed with a velvet canopy as big as a tent. It was so high off the floor that

velvet covered steps were needful to help him climb into it. Nymphs, unclothed and of plaster, looked down from a ceiling of gold leaf. Hovenden had evidently messed up a lot of impressions from various museums into his idea of what furnishings and decoration were suitable for a prince. Chandeliers were of twinkling crystal, but some of the wall lights were modernistic—angular and opaque. A full length mirror, bound with a carved frame of black wood and ivory, stood ready to greet him flatteringly. The furniture was either old or ingeniously antiqued—and ornate.

The lower part of the walls had been paneled with carved wood, and the opening of the ancient door had shattered and broken the paneling. Above the paneling was a frieze, mostly of gargoyle faces with mouths a-gape. Some were cut at an angle so as to show no more depth than the others, yet to conceal openings into the listening gallery where El Kasyd and Balzar—no doubt mostly Balzar—eavesdropped.

Vilette came near Everhard. She looked very happy, almost a little drunk. Her wig was askew, the egret plumes were broken and frayed as if wilted. Some of the jewels had broken loose and fallen, unregarded.

"Very soon now," she said, nodding. "Please let me fix a sling for your arm."

"Who'd you talk to?"

"Monsieur Biradou."

"You would, wouldn't you? With all Paris to choose from." Everhard smiled, trying to be pleasant.

She answered with spirit. Her dark eyes grew brighter.

"He has always trusted me, implicitly—even as you—" she smiled—"promised."

"Wait till he gets a whack over the head—from behind."

She answered:

"You are unfair! I could hate you easily. The telephone in this house has been tapped, and some one listens night and day. The one who listened tonight, because of great anxiety for me—and for you!—was Monsieur Biradou. He recognized my voice at once and spoke to me. And they come at once, the police."

"But the splendor of Isobel de Nevers—" Everhard glanced at her—"is not now quite what he has been accustomed to admire, in spite of all my diamonds you are wearing. Wash your face, Vilette, and I'll bet he wouldn't know you."

Vilette laughed, glancing aside. The laughter was wiped away. She stared in terror, reeled back and screamed. Everhard threw up the small automatic and snapped the trigger. The gun was empty. He slammed it straight across the room at the brute-like human thing that loomed in the freshly opened doorway. Then he reached quickly into his pocket for the second automatic, calling to Vilette:

"Get out— Run—go! Out of the room!"

The beast of a man was massive, and now crazed with pain. The pea-like eyes in the deep sockets seemed little balls of greenish fire. There was a reddish slaver on the mouth, and blood dropped from the face where a chance bullet had smashed the jaw. He leaped into the room with his great thick arms pushing out claw-like hands.

El Kasyd, hearing the click of the automatic, yelped mockingly as he sprang from the chair and called quick commanding words at the enraged idiot. But as Everhard drew the second automatic from his pocket, El Kasyd ran with an anxious backward look for the doorway, almost bumping the brute. A huge claw of a hand closed on the hunchback's shoulder, jerking him off his feet, dangling him. El Kasyd squealed in terror.

Everhard shot once, twice, three times; then he held his fire. The brute-body seemed to absorb the small caliber bullets as a pudding dough takes raisins.

The angered beast, trained to torture and break bodies, ran his fingers into El Kasyd's hair, raised him by hair and

thigh and drove the back of the hunchback's neck down against an uplifted knee and flung the body aside. Then he came lumbering at Everhard.

Vilette clutched Everhard to pull him back, but he stood fast with the half raised gun held like a boxer's fist. The massive creature howled and reached out. Everhard, with a boxer's quickness, drove the muzzle of the automatic squarely into the socket of the monster's right eye and pulled the trigger. He jumped back, striking against Vilette, who held a three-foot marble statue of a dancing girl high over her head, ready to throw it. The heavy statue fell from her unnerved hands and was broken into many pieces as the brute lurched forward, dropped and lay still.

Everhard looked at her, then at the small automatic.

"Vilette, just suppose there hadn't been another shell in this thing?"

"Oh!"

"We bluffed El Kasyd for the last hour with an empty gun. Can't very well see if an automatic is loaded when you've got only one hand. Wish I'd known the damn thing was empty. I'd have enjoyed it more!"

THE unbolted door swept open. Men rushed through, some in uniform, others not. Biradou was first; close behind him came the bulky James with heavy eyes hard set and anxious.

Everhard at a glance saw Biradou sweep the yielding Vilette into his arms and hold her as he looked in quick, sharp searching glances about the floor.

Then James closed on Everhard, saw the bandage on his head, the broken arm, the knife slashed clothing, the soggy blood stains and the blood drained paleness of his face; and James stared about the room.

"Made a clean sweep as usual, didn't you? My God, Don! And you are badly hurt?"

Everhard glanced past James' anxious eyes, looked at Biradou, with Vilette clinging to his neck.

"Marvelous, these detectives! Can't hide anything from 'em!" Everhard grinned at him. "You ought to've been to the real party. This was just a little sideshow affair." Then Everhard pushed at him with a friendly shove. "One side, Jimmy! Stand back and listen. She's just coaxed Biradou to forgive me for bluffing him out of the De Rossi diamonds. Here they come!"

Vilette came with head up, just as if the plume of egrets was not broken, her wig not askew, her dress not torn and dirty. Caressingly she held the arm of Monsieur Biradou; and she looked more brightly drunken than ever.

Biradou was trim, erect, quick of movement, with square-cut black beard before him like a proud insignia of rank. His keen eyes were not now clicking in rapid glances about the room. They were finally fixed steadily on Everhard's face.

Vilette reached out, forcibly pulled at Everhard's lax arm, pushed his hand into Biradou's outreaching fingers and said—

"Don, dear, Monsieur Biradou—my father!"

Everhard blinked. The look on his face was quite as if he had never in his life played poker. Vilette laughed at him silently. He said, almost with humility—

"I'll be damned!"

THE END

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

FRANCIS H. BENT, who covers the State Police section for Ask Adventure, addresses the Camp-fire on a subject which ought to be of vital interest to every law-abiding citizen in the land:

Farmingdale, New Jersey.

If the people of this nation do not now take up the challenge currently flung at them by gangdom, then the United States will be soon a very poor country in which to live. It will be a country ruled by organized crime in a far greater degree than at present. If the present increase in crime keeps on we may soon look for wholesale kidnappings, murders and lawlessness in general.

For too long a time the American citizen has permitted crime to organize and entrench itself. Because the normal, law-abiding citizen is easy-going and perfectly willing to leave the management of public affairs in the hands of others, the criminal has been able to tighten his grip upon the country until, in far too many instances, he now controls even the courts as well as the police forces. Convictions of known law-breakers are extremely hard to procure. This is illustrated by the Al Capone case.

Here we have a man who, ever since he has been large enough to carry a gun, has been a killer and a menace to respectable society. He is known to be a racketeer and a felon. And yet the only way in which he was finally jailed for a short time was by a minor charge of tax evasion. There is something radically wrong in a country that will allow the law to be openly flouted and respectable citizens bulldozed by gangs of thugs with their fingers on the triggers of machine guns.

The time has arrived for public spirited men, law abiding men, men who wish to see a clean country, to throw off the lethargy that has bound them and organize to carry on a vast drive

against the threat that is hanging over us and is daily becoming greater. It can be done. But we must snap out of our spineless, groveling, careless attitude.

IN AN article published in *The American Journal of Police Science,* Lieutenant-Colonel Calvin Goddard says:

"At a meeting of the Iowa State Bankers' Association held June 24, 1920, it was decided to take some drastic action toward stopping the steadily mounting figures of losses. The constituted authorities, try as they would, seemed unable to do this. So it was decided to arm a few reputable citizens in each small town where a bank was located, supply them with ammunition, give them facilities for target practise, have them appointed deputy sheriffs, and install alarm systems, etc., whereby they might be notified of any bank stick-up while it was still in progress. Some 3,071 men were organized into these vigilance committees in 881 towns out of 1,000 in which banks were located. To these there were distributed 730 rifles, 681 carbines, 2,452 revolvers, and 316 sawed-off shotguns . . .

"Other States saw what Iowa was doing and were not slow to follow suit. Between the Spring of 1925 and that of 1927, eight others (Oklahoma, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, California and Michigan) had fallen into line."

THESE vigilance committees proved so effective in curbing hold-ups that bank hold-up insurance rates were reduced. This same very effective practise could very well be carried out in combating general crime. Reputable citizens deputized and armed with pistols at all times will go a long way toward curbing the crime wave. A bandit, or any other law-breaker, will hesitate a long time if it is not only possible but very probable that his intended victim has the power and authority to shoot him, or at least arrest him.

Which brings us to the matter of punishment. Thanks to our energetic reformers, our prisons have become kindergartens and playrooms. What has the toughened criminal to fear from going to jail? His liberty is restricted for a time, but he enjoys games, entertainments, good food and comparative comfort. A jail sentence is no more to the criminal than a comfortable vacation.

THE criminal class can only be controlled through the medium of fear. In the two States (which are just forty-six too few) where flogging is still resorted to, there is much less crime. Less coddling and petting and a good deal more torture would soon remedy the crime situation. It is inhuman to torture, you say? Of course it is inhuman. No one tried to claim anything else. But do these rats in human shape stop to consider the fine points of humanity when they kidnap, torture and brutally murder? When a forest fire breaks out it is fought by backfiring. Fight fire with fire. Combat torture with torture. It has been proven that capital punishment does not cut down the number of murders or crimes. But if a gangster faces exquisite physical pain—well, he'll likely walk the straight and narrow with extreme care.

Since our police departments seem unable to control the crime wave, it is the duty of every citizen who has the slightest spark of manhood to come to their aid.

The way has been pointed out by the nine States mentioned. The law-enforcement agencies which are honestly endeavoring to clean out the criminal element will heartily welcome the assistance of vigilance committees. Any police organigations which oppose such committees are taking the side of the criminal. In such cases, of course, the time has come to make a grand change.

The American citizen is a long-suffering, good-natured individual. There is, however, a limit to human endurance. That limit has been reached. We face a growing peril which should be eradicated before it is too late. What are we going to do about it?

—FRANCIS H. BENT

A FEW words from Alan LeMay, bearing on this story, "The Killer in the Chute," in this issue:

San Diego, California

There are plenty of actual cases on record of killer broncs being used in rodeos, and I have really drawn this story from actual happenings. One instance that comes to mind is that of a bay horse known as Airplane. Airplane had already killed two men when at Nogales in 1927 (5th, 6th and 7th of September) he bucked down, tromped and killed Willie Kline (from the Salt River outfit). Airplane broke open Kline's chest on the right side, laying the ribs back, wide open, as if with an ax. This horse was thereafter brought into the States, where he participated in many shows, often as a regular contest horse, but more often as a special horse.

A special bucking horse at a rodeo is a horse outside the regular contest; a flat price is offered to any one who will get on, and a heavy bonus is offered if the ride is made. Twenty-five dollars to get on and two hundred fifty dollars if the ride qualifies is about typical.

Airplane was entered in the rodeo at Billings, Mont., for the third day of the regular contests, I think in 1929, but I am not sure of the year.

Coming out of the chute, Airplane ran a splinter into his throat and was killed. I wish I could remember the name the Mexicans had for this horse; part of the name was El Diablo, but there was more to it.

There is an unlimited number of cases like this of killers used as rodeo contest buckers.

—ALAN LEMAY

IN CONNECTION with our recent discussion of buzzards, a reader sends in this interesting clipping from the *Miami Daily News*. Incidentally, the birds on our cover this issue—them's buzzards.

"South Florida's belled buzzard is no myth.

The mysterious bird that startled B. F. Davis, Miami, as he was working in a Shenandoah field recently, evidently has covered a lot of ground within the past few months.

Since a story about the buzzard which has a bell attached to his body was printed in the *Miami Daily News* a few days ago, at least three persons have reported observing the bird in a territory ranging from Davie to Princeton.

First to report after the story appeared was A. D. Wilson, 151 N. E. Seventh Street, who said he heard the buzzard's tinkling overhead in Davie about three weeks ago. He was puzzled by the phenomenon of hearing a sheep bell in the sky until he heard Mr. Davis' explanation that it was a buzzard with a bell attached to his body.

More recently comes word from Thomas Post, of Redland, that not long ago he heard a bell and, thinking it was a trapped sheep, went in search of it. Finally he found the buzzard with the bell.

That was back last November. The day before Christmas, Post saw and heard the buzzard again, this time near Princeton.

Charles Behrens, of Princeton, also attests that he has seen and heard the belled buzzard near his home.

A legend that a buzzard was belled in Georgia several years ago leads to the conjecture that this may be the same bird, now hundreds of miles from home but still wearing the sheep bell which was attached to him with rawhide thongs by an angry Georgia farmer."

GREAT and varied is the correspondence received on the William Wells - Stanley Vestal tilt concerning details of the life of Sitting Bull and the Battle of the Little Big Horn. It's not at all rash to say that more Camp-fire members are read up—and well read, too—on the literature of this colorful chapter of our history than any other. But since the historians of that time and since fail to agree on many points, well—but read Comrade Frederick F. Van de Water on the subject:

New York City.

I don't know Stanley Vestal and I don't know William Wells who appear to have been fighting the Little Big Horn battle and each other. I'm entirely aware of the fate that waits for him who horns himself in on a private fracas. It's none of my business, but I love that little battle and I can't sit still and see it pulled apart any longer. I'm not defending Mr. Vestal when I argue with his opponent. I haven't the earlier instalments of the feud at hand. I am insisting that Mr. Wells in May 15th's *Adventure*, in pointing out Mr. Vestal's bulls, makes several of his own. So here I go, wading uninvited into trouble:

The first error is minor and open to argument. Mr. Wells says that Sitting Bull was a priest, not a warrior. He is right. He also says that Sitting Bull remained "among the women and children" during the battle, making medicine. Major James McLaughlin, an Indian agent on whose reservation many of the participants in the battle, including Gall, dwelt later and who knew the Dakotas as thoroughly as one may who has married into the tribe, says in his remarkable book "My Friend the Indian" that Sitting Bull ran like a dog. He was told by the warriors in that battle that Reno's first volley rattled bullets off the poles of Sitting Bull's lodge; that he immediately high-tailed it out of the village, going so fast that he left one of his twin baby sons behind and was eight miles away and still going when a messenger caught up with him to tell him the victory was theirs. He explained afterward, according to McLaughlin, that he had been going somewhere to "make medicine."

"CUSTER," says Mr. Wells, "knew that Benteen had come back into the trail and was behind Reno."

I have encountered no authority who endorses this statement. Benteen himself testified at the court-martial of Reno—for which Reno asked, by the way, to clear his sullied name—that if he had followed Custer's orders to the letter he would have traveled twenty-five miles southwest before turning back. He got disgusted searching badlands for Indians that weren't there and turned back of his own accord. By that time Custer was ten or fifteen miles away. He had sent back Trumpeter Martin with a message to Benteen, but I have never found heretofore any statement that Custer knew the captain had technically disobeyed orders, given up "the wild goose chase," as Benteen himself called it, and had come back into the trail. It may be so. I'd like to know where Mr. Wells found that out.

Reno, when driven into the grove by the stream after his first attack could not have stayed there "until hell froze over," as Mr. Wells insists. One of his troop commanders, Captain French, of M, said afterward that if they had delayed retreat across the river another twenty minutes none of them would have got out alive. The Dakotas were filtering into the grove and

starting to enfilade Reno's men crouching in the old bed of the Little Horn that ran through the timber. Mr. Wells also says that Reno had "his reserve ammunition." He had no more than Custer had. General Godfrey, commanding Troop K, says in his article on the battle (*Century Magazine*, January, 1892) that practically all Reno's ammunition was spent when his badly mauled command reached the bluff. Benteen's first act on joining him there was to divide up the cartridges with Reno's men. Lieutenant Hare was then sent back post-haste to bring on the ammunition mules from the lagging pack train.

"RENO," says Mr. Wells further, "sat there, scared to death in full view and hearing of Custer's fight, not three miles away, and would not go to his assistance."

This is the sort of loose and reckless statement that irks better historians than I am. I'll make my refutation as brief as possible.

You can not see the Custer battle ground from Reno Hill. I've stood there and I know. It is not three miles from there to where Custer died. "This hill was four and a half miles by measurement from the point at which General Custer lost his life." (Report of Judge Advocate General, February 21, 1879, in forwarding records of the Reno Court Martial to the Secretary of War.)

Reno did move out toward the sound of guns to the north. The Dakotas who had withdrawn swept down on him again and he barely got back to his hill in time. All accounts of the battle admit this.

FURTHERMORE, no one in the command had any idea that Custer had been wiped out. He had run out on portions of his command before. Men remembered how Major Elliot, of the 7th, and nineteen men died at Washita, and now thought Custer had found the going tough and had pulled out on them. Says the Judge Advocate General quoted above:

"Faint firing from the direction of Custer's command was heard by some but not by all of Major Reno's detachment. But the testimony makes it quite clear that no one belonging to that detachment imagined the possibility of the destruction of General Custer's troops; nor, had this idea suggested itself, does it seem to have been at any time within their power, fighting as they were for life under the attack of a body of Indians vastly outnumbering them, to go to his assistance. The common feeling was at the time *one of anger with General Custer for* sending them into so dangerous a position and apparently abandoning them to their fate."

Custer got himself killed by flagrant disobedience to orders (see page 66-7 P. E. Byrne's "Soldiers of the Plains.") He was therefore a hero on, as far as his Indian fighting ability was concerned, rather insufficient grounds. Reno came through alive. He was not a particularly noble character, though he won a Brigadier General's brevet in the Civil War for bravery, and the romance writers and sentimentalists had to have a villain. He was it.

I'm not going to defend him and I've run this longer than I meant to. If Mr. Wells is reading Colonel Wheeler's "Buffalo Days" for the twentieth time, as he says, he must recall Wheeler's printing the petition sent to General Sherman, by the survivors of the battle. This suggested one man above all others to fill the post left vacant by Lieutenant-Colonel G. A. Custer, deceased, and the plea was signed by every enlisted man of the 7th who came out of that fight alive. Who was their nominee? Major Marcus A. Reno. While that petition remains on the record it is as hard for me to make Reno the villain of that amazing little fight as it is for me to hail Custer as its hero.

—FREDERIC F. VAN DE WATER

EDGAR YOUNG'S recent letter in Ask Adventure on trophy heads mummified by the Jivaro Indians of South America elicits the following unusual bit of correspondence:

Panama City, R de Panama.

I notice in the last *Adventure* a letter from you regarding the Jivaro Indians and reduced heads. Inclosed you will find a picture of a couple I brought back from Ecuador in 1929. I was surprised to hear about Jack London having trouble getting his into the States. I guess I was lucky.

Just before I left Ecuador I had a little business with the American consul there and as long as I was there I asked him about taking the heads into the States. He said there was no law against it as far as he knew, but he also made a few remarks about what he thought of people who would want one of the things around. I didn't come into the States through New York, however. But the customs men found my heads and held me up a little while, but I think that was only while they all had a good look at them, as nothing was said about my not taking them in. I had them in a side-show all summer and then sold them to a showman, and the last I heard of them he was showing them in a store show in Kansas City, Mo. They are very strict in Ecuador about having them, and, I guess they are getting more so all the time. However, I guess it isn't too much trouble to get them if a person really wants them. I had most of my trouble in making people think they were genuine.

—M. E. MILES

Mr. Young's reply:

Orlando, Florida.

These two heads you sent me the photo of are

a bit puzzling to me. I have no doubt they are genuine; in fact, I would swear they are genuine, but they are different appearing dried heads from what I have ever seen. The first thing I notice is that the lips lack the three holes in each where they were sewed up to keep the hot sand from running out while they were being dried and ironed with stones. The next detail is the arrangement of the hair. I have seen mummified heads in northern Peru (Chan-Chan) that are quite similar to these. However, I do not doubt they were actually dried in the mountains of Ecuador. They might be the work of the Zarumas or Cashibos who are neighbors of the Jivaros and are said also to dry heads.

I have easily seen a hundred Jivaro dried heads. I helped a movie outfit get into the Jivaro country from the north a few years back and they took movies of the actual drying of the heads. I used a few of their "stills" to illustrate an article in *The World Traveler* a few years back. I'm just saying all this between you and me, not arguing or anything like that, as this slight difference interested me and set my head to working. The holes *may* be in the lips. It looks like an indentation in one at the right. At any rate I am glad to get the photo and I will add it to some other gruesome ones I have.

—EDGAR YOUNG

ANOTHER reader tells of his whaling experiences:

Los Angeles, California.

Mr. Victor Shaw spoke and said something about whaling. Mr. Albert Richard Wetjen spoke some more, and it was all interesting because both of these men know whereof they talk.

My own whaling goes back to 1907. And my knowledge of the industry only that which was practised on the Norwegian Sea by the whalers of my home town, Aalesund. Our "meat" was the bottle-nose. Webster has the bottle-nose as belonging to the dolphin family. Maybe it does, but we called the critters "whales," and I think we can be justified in calling them so, because the twenty-three caught by our vessel, for instance, were all between thirty and forty feet long. One had a coating of blubber that measured seventeen inches in thickness at the thickest place—abaft the head, or where the neck would have been had he had one.

ONE, rather young, towed us for about an hour; that is, he towed the schooner, a sixty-ton (reg) tops'l or square rigged two-masted schooner through the water at the approximate rate of two knots. We had shot him (harpooned from the focsle head, usual practise) in a spot a little too far back of the head, practically in the back and a non-vital place. On another we performed a Cæsarian operation, and with block and tackle hoisted inboards an unborn calf that measured thirteen feet from nose tip to tail tip.

We used the then modern Foyn guns, of which we had four in the bows and three on the stern rail; also one small one in each of our three boats. Boat cruising and boat shooting were done in calm weather only, excepting of course the shooting, which had to be done by the "killer" in the killer-boat.

I FULLY agree with Wetjen's belief of eyesight and hearing. It was an unwritten law among us to be absolutely quiet when a whale approached, and we were careful to make no sound above the creaking of rig and ship-timber when they came swimming-rolling towards us. I believe the whale, when hearing the sound emitted by the vessel itself, came swimming toward it to investigate or seek a possible source of food. Wouldn't it be reasonable to suppose that if the whale had good above-water eyesight he would sheer off long before it came within range? (Our range was thirty fathoms, the length of the fore-line.) Also that, like a wild animal, he would be aware of a danger when and if he saw it? The whales scatter at a loud noise, shouting, or the shooting of a gun.

We used to say that the whale, as he struck, dived to dark water; in other words, to the depth of where the light rays ceased to penetrate. Frankly I don't know. But I feel certain that they dived below two hundred fathoms. The slant of the line immediately after the shooting, and when three—possibly four hundred and more fathoms had whizzed round the carrick bit—really was not great. Naturally, the whale after being shot begins to descend, swims away from the ship; and if not vitally injured, speeds on and takes with him (as one had done on this ship the year previous) one after the other, the whole batch of lines. In this case seven three-hundred fathom lines.

TEETH: The big ones had one or a few. If I remember rightly, three was the most in any one whale that we caught. The teeth protruded but slightly and their effectiveness absolutely nil insofar as biting was concerned. We used to dig them out, then carve and hang them on our watch chains—if we were so fortunate as to have a watch.

This has been a puzzle to me: Whence do these bottle-nose whales come, to romp in the seas on the stretch—Shetland Islands to the Northern tip of Norway during April to August? Why do they all leave and head due west from the Faroes in the latter part of July and first part of August? Where do they go? Is the bottle-nose hunted or seen in any other ocean?

—ED REMAN

S. OMAR BARKER, of our Writers' Brigade, enters the mountain lion discussion a trifle late, but he offers some unusual comment on the diet of the critters:

Beulah, New Mexico

I do not claim to be an authority on cougars, but a number of things I do know about them in this New Mexico section of the Rockies may interest Mr. McMahan, and possibly Mr. Wells. Though I never have killed a mountain lion, as we call them here, over eight feet in length, I have seen and observed the measurement of quite a number well over nine feet. My brother Elliott, present State Game Warden for New Mexico, has killed scores of cougars, and among them several nearly ten feet long. Some of the heaviest, however, were not so long. I see no reason at all for doubting that twelve-foot cougar Mr. McMahan tells about.

As for their speed and killing skill: In this section they kill some horses and colts and *many* deer. Nor do they always fail when it takes more than one jump. I was born and raised in the woods and can read sign, and I have seen plenty of cougar kills where the tracks showed as many as seven or eight leaps before the catch—and with the deer running, too. I agree with Mr. McMahan, however, that the cougar gives up within a couple of hundred yards or less if his first few leaps fail. But for half a dozen leaps he *must* average faster than the deer, for nine times out of ten, in this country, the full grown cougar makes his kill just about whenever and wherever he takes a notion. The method of getting close, of course, is to sneak like a cat. I have yet to see evidence of a cougar lying in wait anywhere for a deer.

ALSO, in this section, it is not scarcity of game that keeps the cougar from getting over-large; it is shortness of life. Hunters here keep them pretty well killed out, with a resulting rapid increase of deer.

Inside evidence (examined stomachs) in these parts indicate that rabbits form a very, very negligible part of the cougar's diet. Usually it is venison. Sometimes it is beaver, sometimes horse meat, very rarely beef and sometimes porcupine. This last despite Ernest Thompson Seton's statement that cougars never touch a porky. Practically every lion ever killed around here has had porky quills in his forearms or shoulders. A rug I have still shows a few, even after tanning. Our cougars are invariably very fat, too.

BY THE WAY, I killed a bobcat this past winter with a stomach full of porcupine, including many quills and a couple of complete claws, all freshly eaten, and not one single quill in the cat's skin. Skill, eh? One of my brother's airedales, a lion dog, has killed porcupines unaided, too, but he always gets all stuck up about it.

These bobcats occasionally kill deer, too. Usually nothing larger than young does, but this winter one killed a ten-point buck near here. Mountain coyotes, of course, are the deer killers here nowadays, since the mountain lions are thinned out.

MR. GREGG, it is not a mistaken notion that the corruptions of Spanish words you refer to are "real Wild West". It is not the writers who have corrupted the original Spanish words. The cowboys did that, and writers of "Westerns" would be presenting a false picture if they put the true Spanish words into the average cowboy's mouth. I, for instance, have published a book of verses under the title, "Buckaroo Ballads". If I had made it "Vaquero Ballads" not even half the cowboys right here in this Spanish speaking Southwest would have known what I was talking about. They say "buckaroo", so "buckaroo" it is. And, except for a couple of trips to Europe (1st and 2nd A.E.F.), I've never even been as far east as Kansas City, much less Pittsburgh. Some of these days I'll throw a bunch of *jáquimas, vaqueros, la riatas, mecates, caballadas, dále vueltas,* etc. into a cowboy yarn and my puncher friends will see it and say, "Hell, this here must be a story about spicks!"

—S. OMAR BARKER

OUR Camp-fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance.

If you are come to our Camp-fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There are no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ASK Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Japan

OF cherry blossom festivals in old Nippon; and how the trees came to the Potomac.

Request:—"I am very much interested in the Japanese cherry tree; can you tell me:

1. Whether there is any ritual connected with blossom time in Japan?

2. Who was chiefly responsible for the gift of the exquisite cherry trees in the Washington Tidal Basin?

3. What parts of this country are best suited for growing them?"

—K. BENN, Pentwater, Michigan

Reply, by Mr. Oscar E. Riley:—1. Each year Japan has thirteen Great Festivals, with ceremonies conducted by the Emperor in person, and eight Small Festivals, at which the Emperor only worships. All the Great Festival Days are observed as national holidays, as are two of the Small Festival Days, namely New Year's Day and the Emperor's Birthday.

Cherry blossom festivals fall outside the foregoing highly ritualistic category. They are in the nature of simple, flower-viewing outings, held in parks or spots of scenic beauty famous throughout the nation for their flowering cherries.

Excursionists from nearby neighborhoods, or from Tokyo, come laden with luncheons and *sake,* or rice brandy. After picnicking and drinking hot *sake,* which acts like champagne, the visitors promenade happily, with a smile for every passerby. These festivals are usually favored with bright sunshine, and every one is obviously pleased that Spring has returned.

Gay young men, with towels tied rakishly around their heads, burst into spontaneous dances. Others, more serious minded, write poems on slips of paper and tie them to the cherry boughs. Employees of stores and factories enjoy a special holiday. Every one is in that state of good will and emotion which Americans experience just before Christmas.

Cherry blossoms reach the peak of their beauty on various days in April, depending on the species of the trees, or the fact that some localities have later seasons than others. This gives each famous cherry blossom resort an opportunity to have its day, or its weekend. Tokyo has parks which are world-famous for their cherry trees, while Kyoto is famed for its cherry blossom festivals.

2. Thanks to the generosity of Mayor Ozaki of Tokyo, 1800 Japanese cherry blossom trees were planted in 1912 on the bank of the Tidal Basin in Potomac Park, Washington, D. C. These trees, planted by Mrs. Taft, are now one of the Spring attractions of our national capital.

3. These trees seem to thrive in America, for cherry blossoms equal in beauty to those of Japan are to be found in Virginia, in Rochester, New York, and in Ottawa, Canada, to mention only a few widely separated areas.

Centerboard

THE heart of a shallow water sailboat.

Request:—"Please explain the principle of the centerboard in small sailing boats. Is the box closed at the top and open at the bottom? Does the top of the centerboard come to the level of the gunwale or above it? How wide should the opening be?"

—JAMES S. MACGRUER, All, Virginia

Reply, by Mr. A. R. Knauer:—The box is closed at the top in all construction where the top of the box is below the water line. This is self explanatory. A great many boxes are closed to keep water from slopping up occasionally while under way, to keep from having objects dropped into the slot and jamming the board, and also to make a neater looking job. Very often a hinged drop leaf table is attached to the centerboard slot in cabin boats. The bottom of the box is naturally open; otherwise the board could not be used. Top of the centerboard very often comes above the gunwale of the boat. The dagger type board as used on many sailing dinghies is simply a board, possibly 16 inches wide and 4 feet long in a 12 foot dinghy. This is lifted out when not sailing, or while rowing. The opening is usually wide enough to allow the board to move freely for raising and lowering while the boat is not under way.

The principle of the centerboard was developed for shallow water usage and is a device to prevent side slip or leeway in a sailboat.

Radio

KEEP up your code practise in slack times.

Request:—"About a year ago I wrote to you about commercial radio operating. Since that time I have done a lot of home study and practise work, and last June I acquired a commercial license. Can a fellow ever get a job at it?

I thought that because I had had 7 years' experience as an amateur operator and the same period of time as a professional service man that I would not have a very hard time getting placed, but I have found out differently."

—HERMAN C. HUGHES, Terre Haute, Indiana

Reply, by Mr. Donald McNicol:—It is a fact that at the moment there is a surplus of operators due to shipping slackness and to general depression, but that condition will improve in time. No doubt being on hand at a port ready to take advantage of emergency calls gives a fellow a better chance; but it is expensive waiting around.

I would keep in touch with things around Cleveland, Ohio, about the time navigation opens up on the lakes. Keep up your code practise.

Trading In Liberia

BUCKING the big firms, or the Syrians and Mandingos, could easily result in a West African "accident".

Request:—"Several of us are planning a trading expedition on an American vessel to Liberia, West Africa. One of us, having spent some time in Liberia, is of the opinion that a profitable trade could be made among the natives with the aid of trade goods bought in this country, to be exchanged for ivory, skins, etc, along the coast and rivers of Liberia.

1. How and where would we obtain permission for such trading?

2. What, in your opinion, would be the best trade goods for such purpose?

3. Would we have any difficulty bringing the traded returns into this country?

4. What is your personal viewpoint in regard to such a scheme if the expedition is well planned and well equipped?"

—BERTIL N. PAASKE, Stratford, Connecticut

Reply, by Mr. N. E. Nelson:—To begin with, your choice of the scene of your venture is one of the toughest countries in the world for a trader to successfully operate. Next, as a medium of exchange, Liberia, generally speaking, has progressed economically beyond the trade and barter stage, except, of course, for barter between natives of different villages beholden to the same Paramount Chief, who meet periodically in a great central market for an orgy of trading and dancing. The final and most serious obstacle to a project such as you have in mind is the fact that all trade in the country is pretty well in the hands of established branches of the great English, French, Dutch and German trading firms who have anywhere from fifty to one hundred or more years experience on the Coast. The balance of the trade is in the hands of independent Syrian and Mandingo traders.

The Syrians are perhaps the most successful traders of the lot, and all of them make money

where a white man would go broke and a native starve. They live with the natives, like the natives, and always come out on the fat end of whatever business they undertake. Next in order of comparative success so far as trading is concerned, is the Mandingo trader, who, being a negro, is closer to the native than any other trader. It is no unusual thing to find that the Mandingo trader in a village is also the adviser and interpreter to the headman or chief. In this position he has a fairly tight monopoly on all trade in that particular locality—and woe betide any competition which might manifest itself, for immediately all sorts of annoying little "accidents" commence to occur, running from pilferage to downright persecution, all underhanded, of course.

The big bulk of the commerce is carried on through the English firms of Patterson-Zochonis, the Cavalla River Company, and the A. I. C., the German firm of Woermann, the French Company of West Africa, and the Dutch Ost Africanische Co. I think that these firms would not be partial to the advent of a project such as yours and would make things interesting for you along the Coast, while the Syrians and Mandingos looked after your welfare along the rivers and in the hinterland.

I NOTE you state that one of your number has spent some time in Liberia. This being the case, I am at a loss to explain his optimism so far as making anything like a reasonable profit on your investment—or even a return of the major part of your investment itself—is concerned. Like all countries today, Liberia has been hard hit by the world-wide depression, and the prices of all its exports, of which coffee, palm kernels, palm oil, piassava and rubber are the most important, are very low—so low in fact that it hardly pays to gather the items named above.

The exportation of ivory runs approximately 9,000 pounds a year. Skins or furs are a negligible factor as profit taking is concerned, and of very little commercial value. Hunting for pelts does not play an important part in the life of the native; he hunts for food or to protect his flocks, herd and/or fields, only—to the detriment of the pelt. Occasionally a fine leopard pelt is seen, badly sun-dried and usually minus the teeth and claws, as these items are big juju in the Leopard Society, which, while not exactly flourishing, still exists in remote spots.

I am not clear whether you plan to charter your own vessel, or merely take passage to Liberia on an American vessel. If the former, it would be useless after arrival in Liberia, as, with the exception of the southernmost river, the Cavalla, which is French-controlled, none of the rivers of Liberia are navigable inland by anything larger than a motor launch, and, oftentimes, for not more than two or three miles by that. A canoe and your feet are the surest and best means of travel.

Now to reply to your enumerated questions.

1. Permission for trading inland beyond the 40 mile Coastal Belt must be obtained in person from the Secretary of State, State Department, Monrovia, R. L., with the agreement of the Secretary of the Interior. Permission to trade along the Coast (from the Coast to 40 miles inland) is obtained from the same source, but it is not necessary that the Secretary of the Interior concur. Up until four years ago, no trading was permitted beyond the 40 mile Coastal Belt, but I believe the entire hinterland is now open.

2. U. S. dollars and standard trade goods—calico prints, glass beads, cheap jewelry, cheap perfumes, shirts and shorts (not khaki), ironware, etc.

3. None—other than regular customs regulations.

4. Not worth the time and trouble to organize, and pre-doomed to failure.

Aviation

HARD to get into, but well worth a good man's trying.

Request:—"Please give me the following information on the United States Air Corps Flying Schools: Method of entrance. Age limits. Educational requirements. Physical and mental examination requirements."

—LOUIS G. NEWHALL, Yakima, Washington

Reply, by Lieut. J. R. Starks:—Age, 20-27.

White, unmarried, citizen, of good moral character.

Must be physically perfect. By that I don't mean you must be a superman, one of the big muscle boys or a crack athlete. You must be in good physical condition and have nothing organically wrong with yourself. Your eyesight must be perfect in all respects.

Should have a college education. So many more qualified applicants than there are vacancies that the Air Corps has established a priority order in which enlisted men are given priority (provided they can pass the physical and mental exams), then graduates of R.O.T.C. units, then college men and then civilians who have not had two years of college.

If you have not had two years of college work the written exams they give you are tough.

Candidates are being chosen down through those on the priority list who have completed a college course and even a few with three years of college work.

No social, political or fraternal assistance is needed, nor will it get you anywhere. Candidates are chosen strictly on their merits. They must, of course, have the usual letters from men in their community testifying to their good character.

This is one course that no *qualified* young man should pass up. Course of training is one year,

and you get paid $75 a month, keep and uniforms while learning, being commissioned a 2nd lieut. in the Air Corps Reserve and put on extended active duty for about 15 months after completing the course. Right now there is little chance for the graduates to get into the Regular Army Air Corps and so make it their life's work, as the other branches of the Army are overstrength and the total officer strength of the entire Army can not be increased; hence these other branches are gobbling up the vacancies which should go to the Air Corps.

The mental exams consist of nine subjects: Algebra, arithmetic, English grammar and composition, U. S. history, general history, geography, geometry, trigonometry and physics.

For further dope address the Chief of the Air Corps, War Dept., Washington, D. C.

China

BANDITS, floods, famines and taxes.

Request:—"What is the economic status of the Chinese small farmer under present conditions? Is there any truth to the rumor that there will soon be a great flood in the river valleys of the Hoang and Yang-tse, due to government carelessness in repairing dikes, etc. and that this is one cause for the migration of the farmers to Manchuria?"

—ARCHIE SHERIDAN, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Dr. G. W. Twomey:—I returned last night from Rochester, Minn, where I went to visit a friend from Tientsin who is a patient at the Mayo clinic. He stated that things in China were indescribable and that, in the 25 years he had lived in China, conditions were never so chaotic and unsettled as at this time. There is no business. I inquired about a dozen friends who were in business in Tientsin, Peking and Shanghai when I left and the reply was always, "He's broke too!" I asked about a special friend who, ten years ago was rated at a million dollars; the reply was, "They have only one servant." This was eloquent to one who has lived in China, for the smallest number of servants that a self-respecting foreign family can do with is three—a boy, a cook and a coolie.

As to the Chinese themselves: Wars and business depression have ruined them with the foreigners. They have been taxed over and over, their livestock confiscated, and their crops taken over by the bandits who call themselves soldiers, until they are reduced to absolute destitution in many parts of the country. Manchuria doesn't offer a lot of opportunity. The Chinese rarely emigrates, being firmly attached to the village in which he was born. Even if he had the wish to move to another part of the country, the means would be lacking.

There are always floods, famines and epidemics in China. The government never did do a lot of repair work on levees or any other public utility, and floods occur regularly along the rivers of China. I don't believe that this is any worse now than it has been in the past hundred, or two hundred, years. The farmer living along the rivers is glad, in a way, to see a flood cover his land, for it deposits a new layer of fertile earth on his soil.

Bird

HOSPITALIZATION of injured birds.

Request:—"Every now and then I have met a bird afield with a broken wing, unable to fly; and probably soon to die. Recently a herring gull was in just such a position. I caged it, and held it prisoner three days, believing its wing would shortly mend having it in such a position with no cause to flap its wings as it might have done afield when frightened. But after three days it was yet unable to fly, so I brought it down to a beach and wished it bonnechance. Should I have kept it longer?"

—PETER A. GRAGIS, Great Neck, Long Island

Reply, by Mr. Davis Quinn:—The wing of a bird is very much like the arm of a man. You must not expect it to mend in three days. Three weeks would be a fairer time. If you had had the means and inclination to accommodate the bird over that period, I should think its power of flight would have been restored, unless the fracture was very bad or there were other injuries that you did not notice.

If you find a bird afield that is in distress, bring it home, provide it a warm dry place free from draughts, try it on different foods such as bread, milk, fresh fruit, meat or eggs. Water birds for the most part thrive well on fish. Depending on the condition of its health or injury, the patient should recover quickly. If its plumage is oil-soaked, remove the oil with dirt, sand, gasoline or any absorbent or solvent handy. Thousands and thousands of sea birds perish each year from oil cast overboard from ships. Oil in their feathers renders them flightless, and also subjects them to chill and pneumonia. Unless some patient and kind hearted human removes the oil, they never recover.

South Seas

DENTISTRY in Tahiti, Apia, Suva and Levuka.

Request:—"I am a graduate dentist one year out of dental college and, as you can guess, the going is pretty tough under present conditions. Do you think there is an opportunity in the South Sea Islands for an American dentist?

A dentist on this coast has a small boat, with

which he visits islands and isolated places on the British Columbia coast. Possibly such a plan as that might work down there."

—S. C. MUMBY, JR., Olympia, Washington

Reply, by Mr. William McCreadie:—I am sorry to inform you that you would be unwise to come down hoping to make a competence. The position is that there are several dentists in Tahiti, and there was one at Apia who could not make it pay, so he went to Tonga, where he remains. Then a fresh man came to Apia from New Zealand, and there is a rumor that a second man has gone there also.

In Fiji we have one at Lautoka, the sugar center. There was one at Levuka, but he could not make a living, after being there for years, so came to Suva, where there are four now.

Levuka is without one at present; but, owing to the decay of the old capital business, even the Chinese are clearing out.

The opportunities are so few and the clientele so limited, that even charging 20 guineas as they do for a set, there is only a small livelihood in it. Business all over the islands is, as you Americans say, "on the bum", and planters are trying to scare up loans, which is a hard task. I would strongly advise you to try some town in the States where a good man can always make a living if he puts his shoulder to it.

Altitude

DIET for a mountain climber.

Request:—"Four of us are planning a mountaineering expedition to an unclimbed peak in the coast range of B. C., and the main thing to make this trip a success is the food. Camp will be for two weeks at an elevation of 5,000 ft. and over. Our main trouble is to find food that we can take that has the proper food value. At a height of 5,000 ft. I have watched a 20 minute porridge boil 3 hrs. and still taste like sawdust. At sea level a man can eat a heavy meal after a strenuous day of work and like it, but at 10,000 ft. it is hard to get anyone to eat unless the meal is very tasty.

There is 50 miles of very rough country from the coast to the peak and we hope to take everything in one trip with a 75 lb. pack apiece."

—FRED J. BROWNSWORD, Vancouver, British Columbia

Reply, by Dr. Claude P. Fordyce:—Food for altitude trips should be of such a type that not much cooking is required. Look over the list on the enclosed circular on Walking Trips. I would eliminate the flour and cornmeal and not try to bake, but take Rye Crisps, plenty of bread (rye is best), and zwieback.

Here are a few commissary lists taken by members of the Seattle Mountaineers on hard Alpine trips.

H. W. Playter gives the following lists in the *Mountaineer's Bulletin:*

FOUR people, two days, back packing from Rockdale to Snow Lake, Washington:

Cheese, 1 lb.	Baking powder, ¼ lb.
Rice, ½ lb.	Coffee, ¼ lb.
Prunes, 1 lb.	Eggs, 1 doz.
Butter, ½ lb.	Pumpernickel (1 loaf bread).
Bacon, ½ lb.	
Flour, 2 lbs.	Ham, 2½ lbs.
Apricots, ½ lb.	Maggi soup, 4 squares.
Sugar, ¼ lb.	Oxo, 2 squares.

Milk, 1 can.

Total of 14 lbs. or 1¾ lbs. per person per day.

(I suggest that powdered milk and eggs be used.)

PROVISIONS for two people on a seven-day back-packing trip around Mount Rainier, moving camp every day:

Bacon, 3 lbs.	Baking powder, ¼ lb.
Cheese, 1½ lbs.	Rice, ½ lb.
Sugar, 1¾ lbs.	Flour, 4 lbs.
Apricots, 2 lbs.	Maggi soup, 12 squares.
Prunes, 2 lbs.	Oxo, 6 squares.

Salt, ½ lb.

Total 16 lbs. 1 1/7 lbs. per person per day.

Commonly with most Alpine trips, most of the living is at an altitude of around 5000 feet. When you go up into the 10,000 foot elevation you are on a forced march and concentrated food is the rule.

West

A HOMESTEADER would starve on some of Uncle Sam's badlands.

Request:—"Would you kindly give me some information regarding homesteading in Colorado and Wyoming."

—MISS MYRA KENISTON, Milo, Maine

Reply, by Mr. William Wells:—I am very sorry to say that there is not in Wyoming, Colorado, or any other Western State, any land open to homestead entry on which it is possible to make a living. There are in Colorado about 7,000,000 acres, and in Wyoming about 15,000,000, of vacant Government land, but it is practically worthless. As you may have read, the Government is trying to give these vacant lands to the States in which they lie, and the States will not take them, saying that they are of no value. There are about 178,000,000 acres of these lands, all about of the same character, in ten of the Western States. They are all desert, semidesert, some rough and broken—badlands—with little water and not enough rainfall to raise crops. All the timbered lands not in private ownership have been included in the National Forests in which

homesteading is not allowed. What are called grazing homesteads can be taken on them up to 640 acres—a square mile—but there is mighty little grass. (I mean that these homesteads can be taken outside of the National Forests.)

The last of the lands fit for anything were taken as homesteads thirty years ago, and even then it was a standing joke that Uncle Sam bet 160 acres of land against forty dollars—the fee for homesteading—and five years of the homesteader's time, that the homesteader would starve to death before he could get title to his land.

Sorry, but that is the situation. I can imagine what you wish to do. My wife read your letter—we are old-timers of the West, I being seventy—and she said, "The poor kid."

So good luck and best wishes—these times won't last forever.

South Africa

AMERICANS are right at home in "Joburg".

Request:—"I am very interested in the so called 'banket' mining that is carried on in the Witwatersrand. I have had considerable experience here in the western States, timbering, laying track, shooting, mucking, etc; in fact, a general experience.

I believe the best possible way to know that type of mining is to go where it is practised and work in the reefs for some large company. I am plenty healthy and have a splendid physique, no credit to myself, and know that I can pass a rigid physical examination. Suppose that I am in 'Joburg,' now what would be my chances of going to work in the mines?"

—E. L. BENNETT, Denver, Colorado

Reply, by Capt. F. J. Franklin:—You may be surprised to learn that an American has a better chance for work on the Witwatersrand than any other nationality. In fact, a great majority of the mine managers are Americans and "Joburg" has become almost Americanized.

If I am any judge of character from a letter, I should say that you are the very type who could make good on the Rand. They have had a lot of trouble there with the British labor unions and the "Cousin Jacks", or Cornish miners, all belong to an English union and bring their troubles with them. Americans are too wise to make labor trouble out there. They are too far away from home, so work hard.

Wrestling (professional, amateur and ju-jutsu) is now covered by Mr. Charles B. Cranford, 57 East 56th Street, New York City.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelope and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

FOR Tuttle fans, for lovers of really baffling mysteries . . . and for anybody else who likes a red-blooded, swiftly moving story of adventure. Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens in an absorbing new novelette of the cattle trails . . .

Flimsy Evidence

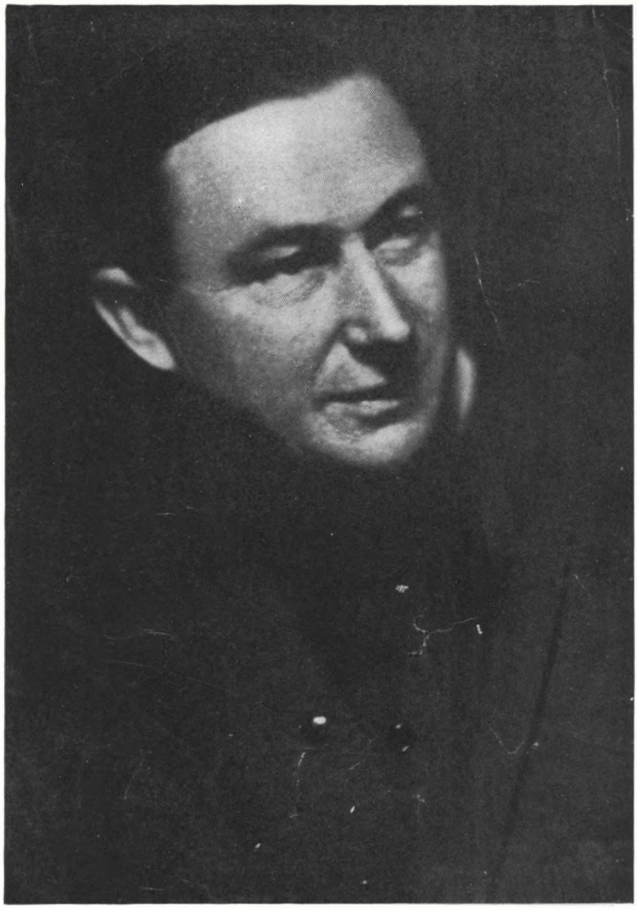
By

W. C. TUTTLE

And These Other Fine Stories

DUFFY, a story of Metropolitan crime, by ROBERT CARSE; TIBETAN TURQUOISE, a story of San Francisco's Chinatown, by SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL; SEVEN TURNS IN A HANGMAN'S ROPE, a novelette of piracy and Haitian voodoo, by HENRY S. WHITEHEAD; STEAM TRAINED, a story of the sea, by W. TOWNEND; GARLIC, a story of the World War, by ROLAND DORGELES; DISSEMBLER OF THE PLAINS, a story of African wild life, by PAUL ANNIXTER; THREE SHIPS WENT OUT, a story of the Zeppelin raiders, by ANDREW A. CAFFREY; and Part II of THE RED TRAPS, a novel of old Indian days, by HUGH PENDEXTER

CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE



As a boy, was one of two survivors of twelve lads picked out of the sea when a great fourmasted barque blew over with her hatches off, filled and foundered. In twenty-two years of professional sea service, from boy to master of sail and steam, he experienced shipwreck on four other occasions. Incidentally he was the first man to make the single-handed passage from New York to Bermuda (1918). After retiring, and taking up writing, he sailed his own little schooner for seven years; and in the end was blown . . . with her . . . into the jungle while lying in a land-locked harbor with three anchors down, in a Bahamas hurricane. Jailed in Haiti for gun-running, he escaped by crawling down an open sewer under fire. Next to the Sea he likes the Ocean best. Ahoy, Captain! Who'd sell a farm and go to sea?

ADVENTURE loyalists . . . most of us landlubbers in fact . . . are sea-rovers at heart and climb aboard with the Captain on his briny ADVENTUREs with a zest and a will. Introductions are not necessary for we know the Captain well. How about our friends, who don't know such a man has swung a tiller? Send us their names and addresses . . . to ADVENTURE, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York, N. Y., and we will initiate them into the circle with a free copy of ADVENTURE. They'll thank you for the tip-off.

• • •

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Adventure AC-132

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