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Adventure

A
COMPLETE NOVEL
of the French Foreign Legion
by
I. D. NEWSOM

Published Twice a Month

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Handy refreshment—
good between smokes.

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AFTER EVERY MEAL

ADVENTURE Oct. 1st, 1928

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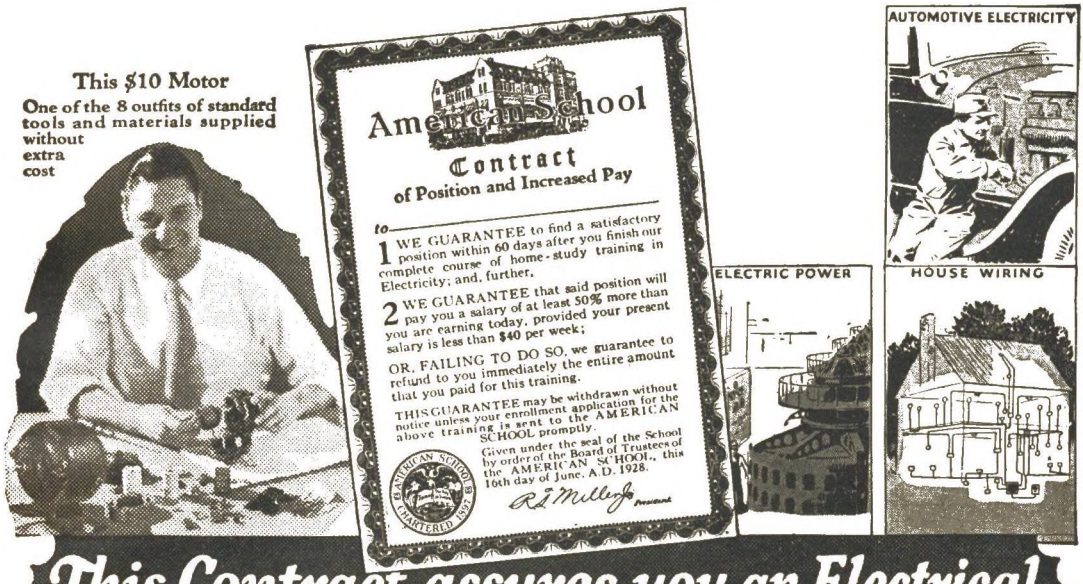

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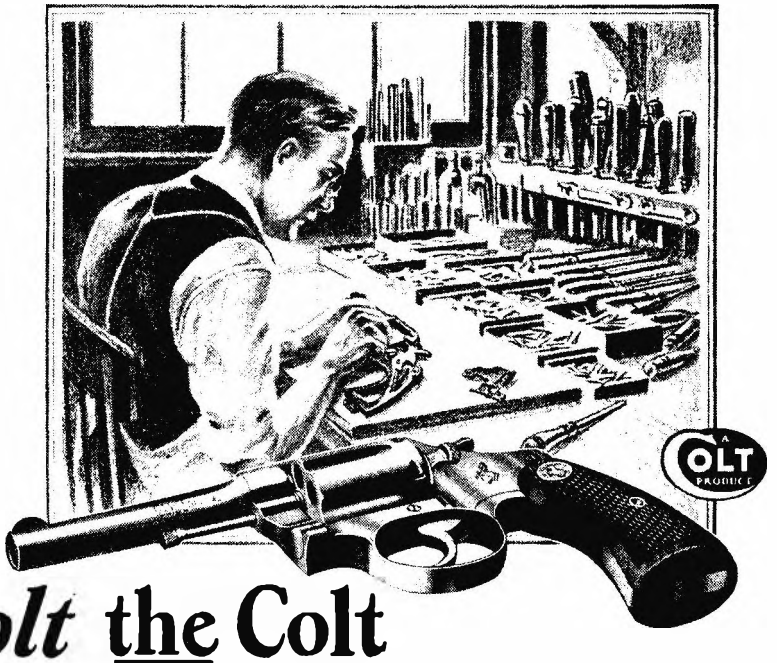

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1928
VOL. LXVIII No. 2

for October 1st

Anthony M. Rud
EDITOR

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Too TOUGH to KILL

THE RAYS of the sinking sun brushed the houses of Sidi-bel-Abbes with gold. Even the drab walls of the barracks of the First Regiment of the French Foreign Legion glowed as if plated with burnished brass.

Out of the guardhouse by the gateway, where the shadows were gathering, stepped a bugler in a white uniform. He advanced six paces, clicked his heels together and, with a flourish, carried his instrument to his lips.

A shrill call rang out once, and again, and before the last note died away every window looking out on the parade ground filled with gesticulating, cheering men. Hoots, yells and catcalls blended together into one mighty shout.

For it was payday, and the bugler had just finished sounding "*la sortie*", which set several thousand Legionaires free to go downtown and to do what they liked until midnight. Downtown there was wine to be had—wine, women, cheap cognac, sawdust gin—a diversity of drinks, drugs and vices dear to the Legionaire's heart.

In the barrackroom of No. 5 Platoon a tall, thick set man with a haggard face struggled and sweated as he wound his six foot long cummerbund around his waist. The confounded thing writhed like a snake, caught under his heels, or wedged itself beneath the bedposts with devilish persistence.

Outwardly Soldier of Second Class Charles Bland showed no signs of the tumult which seethed in his brain. Everything was conspiring to keep him back,

A Splendid Novel of the French Foreign Legion

By J. D. NEWSOM

and yet that night he meant to desert. He was through with the Legion! Before dawn he would have reached Oran and stowed himself away on board the first steamer he could find.

He was in a desperate hurry, for the Jew Moktar was waiting for him at half past six. He had barely twenty minutes left in which to finish dressing and reach the Jew's house in the Rue de Tlemcen.

His heart bumped and thudded against his ribs, and his mouth was as dry as dust. The Jew, he knew, would not wait a minute past the half hour—and the black cummerbund, coiling about his legs, acted as if it meant to keep him chained for all eternity to the life he hated.

He had learned by bitter experience that there was no sense in attempting to go out wearing an improperly adjusted uniform; the orderly sergeant would stop him if the cummerbund showed so much as a single unauthorized wrinkle.

The barrackroom was crowded with men, scrambling hurriedly into their clothes but not one of them would lend him a hand. For the past three months they had been tormenting the life out of him, They despised him because he was not like them, because he didn't drink like a fish, nor curse, nor brawl, nor revel in dirt as they did.

The whole business had been a mistake; he was not cut out to be a Legionaire.

FOR TWENTY-EIGHT years he had lived an honest, blameless life, doing all those things, and only those things, which a self-respecting citizen will do. And Fate, instead of rewarding him

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according to his merits, had smashed him to little bits.

It happened while he was spending a few weeks in Paris for strictly business reasons. While his back was turned his wife ran away with his boss, and his boss had the delicacy to suggest by cable that he resign at once, so that what with one thing and another Bland found himself suddenly stranded, without a home to go back to and nothing to do when he got there.

The blow was more than he could bear, for, though he searched his conscience to its nethermost depths, he could find no trace of guilt attaching to his conduct. He was blameless, altogether blameless, and he cursed God and wanted to die. He thought of suicide, but he had too many moral scruples to think about it long. For seven days and seven nights he wallowed in misery in a gaudy hotel bedroom which resounded with the squeak and blare of motor horns and a moaning gurgle of *nouveau art* plumbing.

At last he reached a decision which made him shudder. Nevertheless, having reached this decision he acted upon it. He made his will, forgave his wife, paid his hotel bill, and took a taxi to the Central Military Depot where, after a brief medical inspection and the affixing of his signature at the foot of a printed document, he ceased to be Charles H. Bland, and became Soldier of the Second Class Bland C, of the French Foreign Legion.

Somewhere or other he had read that the Legion was the next best thing to a suicide club, and his one desire at the time was to get himself killed in an expeditious manner. All the way from Paris to Africa he went on believing that he was headed for oblivion, and this belief made him tolerant of the rowdy vagabonds who traveled with him. He saw himself, rifle in hand, charging across sand dunes toward a row of rifles. He saw himself bowled over, lying on his face, coughing up his lifeblood. Perhaps Alice would hear about it—perhaps she would be sorry

All the way to Sidi-bel-Abbes such thoughts kept him company—and then he woke up in a matter of fact world where there was absolutely no demand for heroes.

Instead of sending him out as a target for the nearest rebels to shoot at, the Legion put him to work learning his new trade. The process was utterly devoid of romance so far as Bland was concerned. Day by day a few more of his illusions were shattered. The first thing he discovered was that there wasn't a rebel within several hundred miles of the town. It stood on a high plateau in the center of a thriving agricultural district. All about there were wheat farms and vineyards and olive groves. The nearest approach to a desert was the parade ground, where he ate dust by the peck while he crawled about on his belly practising "the attack in open formation of a fortified position".

The natives he met in town were about as fierce as sheep; either they cringed when he looked at them, or else they fawned on him and whispered mysterious addresses in his ear.

HOWEVER, he had extraordinarily little time to waste downtown. He worked and sweated as he had never worked before in his life. Truculent sergeants drilled him until he wilted. Then they drilled him some more. They loaded him down like a donkey with a monstrous great pack festooned about with cooking pots, shoes, tents and tent pegs; they hung clumsy cartridge pouches and an entrenching tool and a water bottle and a bayonet and a haversack about his waist; they put a Lebel rifle on his shoulder and made him march forty kilometers a day along straight roads that led absolutely nowhere.

When he was neither marching nor drilling he had to do innumerable chores. There were uniforms of coarse canvas to be washed and kneaded and washed again until they were as soft and as white as fine linen; there were his weapons and his accouterments which had to be cleaned and polished with minute attention.

And he had to mount guard, to sweep out the barrackroom, to fetch coffee at half past four in the morning, to peel vegetables, to salute his chiefs, to fold his blankets and his pack according to pattern.

There was no end to the list of things he had to do. He who wanted to die! And if he did any of these things in a slipshod manner he was clapped into the guardroom with uproarious drunks and was compelled to sleep on bare but verminous boards.

It was an appalling existence, and to make matters worse he managed to arouse the antagonism of his room-mates. It was not his fault—in those days nothing was his fault—if he was different from other Legionaires. As a matter of fact he did not want to associate with them; they were, without exception, the finest bunch of scoundrels he had ever met. They were tough beyond belief, crude, common and rather terrifying to a man of Bland's upbringing.

Whether they hailed from Hamburg or Warsaw, Brussels or Milan, they were tarred with the same brush. Most of them boasted openly of the foul crimes they had committed, and Bland did not know enough about human nature to distinguish between truth and falsehood. He seemed to have been pitchforked in with a gang of assassins, thugs, burglars and other enemies of society, not one of whom exhibited the least signs of repentance. On the contrary, they lived with joyful gusto, drinking themselves silly when they had enough money, fighting like fiends among themselves, working when they were told to work, and never appearing to care a whoop whether they died tomorrow or fifty years hence.

Among such men Bland didn't stand a chance. He had enlisted for altogether different motives and he saw no reason why he should degrade himself to their level. Very politely he refused their invitations to drink with them at the canteen, and with equal politeness he refused to go downtown and visit the disreputable grogshops which catered to Legionaires. He didn't like that sort of thing.

Nor did No. 5 Platoon like him. His room-mates began by calling him "that species of a Yankee", and ended up by punching his nose. He suffered in silence for a long time, because he did not want to get mixed up in a vulgar brawl, but at last he could stand it no longer. He was as far as ever from the merciful bullet which was to put him out of his misery, and he bitterly repented the folly which had driven him into the Legion. Getting into the army had been as easy as rolling off a log. Getting out again was quite a different matter.

When he realized that he had still five years of that purgatory to endure he became desperate. Then one night, while he was walking alone down a dark street, he met Moktar the Jew. And the Jew had whispered that in exchange for a certain small sum of money he could provide the Legionaire with a suit of first class, tailormade civilian clothes, almost new, and would also help him to reach the coast. There and then they had struck a bargain. Hope had leaped up again in Bland's heart; he would get out of the Legion, go somewhere, anywhere, and make a fresh start. He had been a fool to enlist and to suffer as he had suffered! No woman, no job was worth it. When he thought of his wife that night he added one short, explosive word he had picked up from his room-mates which shocked him each time he used it.

HE WAS to meet the Jew at a house in the Rue de Tlemcen—in another fifteen minutes. And his confounded cummerbund was still dangling about on the floor, tying itself in knots.

He jerked at it savagely, and his neighbor, a lanky, yellow toothed lout by the name of Roupnel, chose that particular moment to stand squarely on the loose end of it.

The sudden jerk threw Bland off his balance. He fell over sidewise on to his cot and his outflung arm knocked

his stack of blankets to the floor.

Roupnel, who specialized in practical jokes, guffawed loudly. Other men joined in, and the room corporal, who was laughing too, shouted:

"Bland, square up those blankets before you go out, thou species of a calf's head. Who told you you could knock government property about like that?"

Bland tried to heave himself to his feet, but Roupnel was still standing on the cummerbund, and he flopped down again, face foremost upon the mattress. The whole roomful of men was enjoying the fun, with the marked exception of the chief performer.

For the first time in his life Bland saw red. A fierce and terrible flame of passion swept through his brain. Something seemed to give way with an audible snap, and he wondered for one moment whether he was going to go mad. All his latent hatred of the Legion focused on one man —Roupnel, who was delaying him, keeping him from reaching the Rue de Tlemcen where the Jew was waiting.

He wrenched the end of the cummerbund from about his waist and confronted his tormentor. His eyes were glassy and his bloodless lips were twisted back in a snarl.

"Get off that belt," he ordered, and the words strangled in his throat. "Get off—now. I'm through fooling."

"Why, look at him!" crowed Roupnel. "Here's our little playfellow turned sour on us! He's in a hurry, he is, and no mistake. The sly devil, he's been hiding his game. He can't drink with us—oh, no! But I'll bet you he's got a woman down in the nigger village who—"

"If you don't get off that belt," said Bland. "I—I'm going to kill you!"

The threat was so nonsensical that Roupnel yelped with laughter.

"You're waking up!" he taunted. "Getting to be a real Legionaire! But don't start telling me what to do and where to stand, you *salopard*, or I'll flatten you out. Big but soft, that's you. So much mush."

He concluded his speech by smacking Bland across the mouth with the back of his hand. It was not a hard blow; he had done the same thing several times before and Bland had never so much as tried to defend himself.

But this time Bland struck back. That one blow made him forget everything—decency, honor, respectability. He even forgot the Jew. His one ambition was to lay hands on Roupnel and tear him to pieces and kill him.

He knew nothing at all about how to fight. His methods were wild and crazy. He bored in with maniac fury and his right fist crashed down like a hammer on Roupnel's cheek. The thud and the feel of bone meeting bone filled him with wild delight.

Roupnel was retreating. He followed him up, hit him again, pounded his face, his arms, his chest. Sometimes his fists reached their mark, sometimes he missed by a mile. It didn't matter. He was going to drive that yellow fanged swine into a corner and throttle the life out of him.

ALL AT once he became aware of a change. Roupnel was no longer backing away. The fool was going to fight. With a roar of triumph Bland leaped forward, but instead of landing on top of his foe he was stopped in mid-air. A fist, as hard as iron, crashed against the point of his jaw; a split second later something equally hard collided against his nose, and a complete assortment of stars whirled before his dazzled eyes.

But he felt no pain. He shook his head once or twice, snorted and closed in again with unabated fury. Roupnel, unfortunately, had recovered from his momentary surprise, and he too began to fight, Legion fashion, with fists, feet, head and elbows. His code permitted him to hit his antagonist with anything he could lay hands on. The thing to do was to win. He won. First he kicked Bland in the lower stomach just to steady him down, and this he followed up by butting him in the chest.

Every atom of air was knocked out of Bland's lungs. He was still fighting mad, but his legs were all wobbly and his arms were as heavy as lead. Again he was hit, again and again. His jaw felt as if it were being wrenched from its sockets, his mouth was full of blood, but he refused to give in. He was damned if he would allow himself to be licked! And the next thing he knew he was sitting on the floor propped up against the end of a cot.

When the room stopped spinning round and round he saw that he was surrounded by grinning Legionaires. Even Roupnel was grinning at him in a very friendly fashion. Some minutes elapsed before he could make out what they were saying, for several drums were beating in his ears.

"Wait till I get up," he managed to say at last. "When I get up I'll—"

Whatever he meant to say had to go unsaid, for he was seized by a violent fit of nausea. When it ended he felt slightly the worse for wear and very much ashamed of his display of weakness. Blear eyed he looked up at the Legionaires, half expecting them to jeer at him, but they did nothing of the sort.

"*Eh b'en, mon pote,*" exclaimed a stocky, bearded trooper, "for a beginner you did pretty good."

"Uh?" remarked Bland.

"You did fine. You're all right! That's the way to act. By God, I thought you'd never loosen up and act friendly, I swear I didn't!"

"But—but I was beaten," Bland pointed out, "and I've been sick on the clean floor—"

Nothing, he felt, could be more repellent than for a man to be sick in such a public manner. None of the Legionaires, however, appeared to share his opinion on the subject. Much to his surprise they treated him in a rough, friendly fashion, which he found very comforting.

"You got to learn," a trooper pointed out. "You can't expect to learn in two minutes, and what's more hard knocks don't do any harm—not to birds like you who've been brought up too refined."

Roupnel leaned over and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Get up and clean yourself up a bit," he urged. "You don't want to sit there all night, do you? Now you've thawed out we'll go have a drink to show there's no ill will. How about it?"

Good old Roupnel! Large hearted Roupnel! A wan smile straggled across Bland's countenance.

"You don't mind, not after what happened?" he inquired diffidently.

"I don't mind anything," declared Roupnel, "but I'm thirsty. *Dégrouilles-toi!* Hurry up!"

BLAND was still slightly dazed when, a quarter of an hour later, he lurched into the canteen accompanied by Roupnel and several other of his room-mates. His right eye was closing and his lips were puffed out like overripe tomatoes, but he felt more at peace with the world than he had for months. It was pleasant to be treated in a friendly manner again—even by uncouth Legionaires. They weren't so bad as he had thought them to be. In fact, they weren't bad at all.

The canteen was crowded to the doors. The air was blue with smoke, and a great stench of stale wine, sweat and garlic struck Bland in the face as he entered. There was a tumult of voices, laughing, talking, singing; and again Bland found it pleasant to rub shoulders with his fellow men.

He had one drink of red wine; he had another. He felt better than ever, so he stood drinks around and his platoon uprose and cheered him.

Suddenly he remembered the Jew waiting for him at half past six in the Rue de Tlemcen with a suit of civilian clothes. Gloom descended upon him. He experienced an almost irresistible desire to weep on Roupnel's shoulder. To forget his sorrows, for it was then close on seven, he ordered a fresh bottle of wine.

"Face of a herring!" he said to Roupnel after having drained his mug dry. "You made me miss a rendezvous of the most

important. I should hate you, but I do not. On the contrary, your ugly face warmeth the cockles of my heart." He squared his shoulders and tried to look respectable. "I'm not at all drunk," he went on. "Any man says I'm drunk I'll knock his block off. I had an appointment at six-thirty, and you made me miss it."

"Aw, the nigger village is full of women, yellow ones, black ones, white ones, all shades," Roupnel pointed out. "You'll find another one!" He dug his knuckles into Bland's very sore ribs and chuckled. "I knew you were going to meet a girl. That's why—"

"Girl! It wasn't a girl!" snorted Bland. "It was a Jew in the Rue de Tlemcen. He—hic!—good God, hiccoughs! What next! But I'm not drunk. A Jew, I tell you, with a suit of clothes."

Every man within ear shot burst into gales of merriment. Bland sat stony faced and rigid while all about him ungirt Legionaires held their sides and roared.

"I'll bet two sous it was Moktar," wheezed Roupnel. "Oh, my old camel, don't tell me it was Moktar."

"It was Moktar," Bland retorted with all the dignity his hiccoughs allowed. "Tonight, yes tonight, I was going to desert!"

"That's what comes of being so superior," chuckled Roupnel. "*Mon vieux*, you can thank the *bon Dieu* above that you did not meet Moktar. And you can thank me too. Do you know what would have happened to you?"

"Do I! I should have been out of this infernal Legion by this time and well on my way—hic—well on my way to Oran. There I should have boarded a ship—"

"Now listen to me," broke in Roupnel, "and I'll tell you something you don't know. Moktar would have taken your money and let you get about two kilometers out of town. As soon as you were out of bounds his two boys would have cracked you over the head and carted you back to barracks. There's a standing reward for deserters, and old man Moktar makes a good thing out of his little business, but one of these days he's going to run up against the point of a bayonet."

Bland pressed a sweating palm against his forehead.

"Is this true?" he demanded of his neighbors. "Would he—would I?"

"Absolutely true," answered a trooper. "Every word of it. Most recruits find out about Moktar early on, but you—"

"I am a fool," groaned Bland. "Roupnel, accept my apologies. You should have hit me twice as hard. Never can thank you enough. Here, hit me again!"

"Not now," soothed Roupnel. "There's lots of time. But look here, there ain't much variety about this canteen. Suppose we go down to Angelo's. Anybody got any money left?"

"Leave it to me," urged Bland. "I got enough for the whole platoon. Money belt's full. Let's go down to Angelo's, if I can wobble past the orderly sergeant. Sure you don't want to hit me again?"

"Later on," Roupnel temporized. "And don't talk so much about your money. You might lose it."

Bland draped one arm around his friend's neck.

"Don't know what I'd do without you," he declared. "If I wasn't so sick of being a soldier we might—"

"Dry up and walk straight," ordered Roupnel. "Otherwise it's the guardroom for you. Left, right, left! Hold your head up and breathe through your nose. Keep right on going and don't look at the sergeant."

EVENTUALLY they reached Angelo's, a stinking dive which catered to Legionaires, negroes and Arabs who had become Europeanized and had lost their self-respect.

An enormously fat white woman with a pug nose and a red gash of a mouth was dancing with all the grace of a young elephant, with a quiver of soft, gray flesh. Down her painted cheeks sweat ran in streams, and her bleached hair was stuck to her brutish forehead. Behind her, against the grimy whitewashed wall, squatted three coal black Sudanese

musicians. Two of them thumped on tomtoms; the third played a flute.

It was sordid and foul, but a rosy haze hung before Bland's one sound eye, and his enthusiasm knew no bounds. He was seeing life at last! He was stepping out! He had been a fool to high hat men like Roupnel. They were tough; they were rough; but they were the salt of the earth. He decided that he would be tough too. It paid. The trouble with him was that he had been much too soft. A door mat. Everybody walked on him; his wife, for instance, and the platoon sergeant, and that new officer du Vercourt, the one who sneered . . . Well, he was going to get out of the Legion somehow—never mind how—and forget his unfaithful wife, and make a fresh start . . .

A waitress smacked some tin cups on the greasy table. They contained a liquid which looked like dirty water.

"What for water?" grumbled Bland. "I'm thirsty. Ain't there no wine in this joint?"

"This is *bapeli*," explained Roupnel. "Native drink. Blow off the top of your head."

"Huh!" said Bland, the tough egg. "Dynamite couldn't do that."

He swallowed the stuff at one gulp. It rasped down his throat, burned his stomach and spread like fire through his veins. He felt clear headed and strong.

"Fill 'em up!" he barked, banging his fist on the table. "Where's that coffee colored daughter of sin? Fill 'em up, I say! Free drinks for No. 5 Platoon, Third Company, Depot Battalion of the First Regiment of the Foreign Legion!"

Every man in the dive appeared to belong to No. 5 Platoon; negroes, Arabs, half castes and two men of the signal corps. Bland knew quite well he was being gyped, but he didn't care. He was having a grand time.

The fat woman was going through the contortions of a stomach dance in slow time.

"Better than the Folies Bergères," declared Bland, who had never set foot in that overrated music hall.

"Wish I were there now," he added. "Good old Folies! *Mon vieux* Roupnel, you're a nice fellow, you are, but the Legion—I'd do anything to get out of it."

"What's the matter with the Legion?" inquired Roupnel. "Ain't it good enough for you?"

"Maybe it's too good. I'm not a soldier, soldier; I'm a business man. All this saluting and forming fours—and what I don't like," he added confidentially, "is all the officers and the sergeants. They make me wild. I hate 'em. I'd rather be anywhere than in the army, and that's the cold sober truth."

"Anywhere but in the army," repeated Roupnel, who had lost the thread of the argument.

"Anywhere," agreed Bland. "Believe me or not, species of a spittle skin, I'd rather be in prison. A real prison."

"A military prison?"

"Even a military prison!"

"If that's the case," whispered Roupnel in a hoarse voice, "it ought to be easy. I'd like to help you, see? You're a business man. I understand that. Better off in prison, of course. Tell you what you do if you want to go to prison. Just walk down the street as far as the officers' club and when one of 'em comes out—hit him."

"Good God!" muttered Bland. "I never thought of that. It's a good idea. Hit an officer. I'd like to hit that new one, du Vercourt. Squirt, that's what he is." And he added, as a spark of sanity flickered through his foggy brain, "I must be drunk! Did I say I wanted to go to prison?"

"Positively," Roupnel assured him. "That's exactly what you said. Prison's better than the Legion. You're going to stand in front of the officers' club and slam du Vercourt into the middle of next week when he comes out."

"Do you know what he said to me last kit inspection? He said, 'You're not in the maternal pigsty now, my man. Use a little soap next time you wash your shirts,' and he handed me six days ordinary arrest in the bargain. My poor, dear mother—"

"Never mind about her now," Roupnel broke in hastily. "Have a drink. Here, have another. That's the stuff. So you're going to wait for that two striper—that's all settled. But I've been thinking, you don't want to go to prison with a beltful of money. The guards might steal it. Better let me keep it for you."

"You're a real friend," cried Bland tears springing to his eyes. "Don't know what I'd do without you!"

A QUARTER of an hour later, minus his money belt, but fortified with several more drinks of *bapeli*, Bland reached the outskirts of the Cercle Militaire. Inside the club grounds, behind high iron palings, a string band was playing concert music for the entertainment of the socially elect of Sidi-bel-Abbes.

All the riffraff of the town hung about on the sidewalk listening to the music. There were mechanics from the railroad shops, blue chinned, collarless Spanish farmers, innumerable women, small shopkeepers with strings of children, a stray Arab or so, and Legionaires. In the crowd Bland passed unnoticed. He had sense enough left to prop himself up against a tree near the doorway of the club, for his legs were far from being steady.

He waited. First he heard a selection from "Carmen," followed by the "Jewel Song" from "Faust". Then came an endless, almost inaudible piccolo solo. He was riveted to the ground, held there by the one idea which stood out clearly in his drunken mind. He was going to lambaste the officer who had insulted his mother.

All at once he braced himself against the tree trunk. Lieutenant du Vercourt had appeared in the doorway, a tall young man wearing a flawless white uniform. He looked self-assured, superior and mildly insolent. That look of his had always rubbed Bland the wrong way; now it infuriated him.

He took three steps in the lieutenant's direction.

"Well, my man," the latter said sharply, "don't you salute your officers?"

"Naw," said Bland. "I don't salute tripe like you. You said for me to use more soap—all right, taste this and see if it's clean."

His fist landed squarely on du Vercourt's mouth. He felt a sharp, fiery pain on his cheek and knew he had been struck by the lieutenant's riding crop. Raging, he lashed out again with all his might and saw his victim lurch away from him, shielding his head with an upraised arm.

All about him people were yelling. Soldiers were pouring down the club steps. Some one caught hold of his arm; some one else leaped on his back. Blows rained down upon him. His head seemed to split wide open. He pitched forward on to his face and lay still.

WHEN Charley Bland kicked over the traces that night and ran amuck, he was still at heart a sober sided, thoroughly respectable man. In civilian life, beyond a nasty headache the next morning, and perhaps a remorseful conscience, his outburst would have had no serious consequences. Unfortunately, he was not a civilian; he happened to be a Legionaire, and the court martial which dealt with his case a few days later sentenced him to three years at hard labor.

Now the penal battalions of North Africa are the nearest approach to a hell on earth ever devised by man. They are supposed to kill or to cure the most case hardened offenders, but they neither killed nor cured Bland.

Instead of reforming him, instead of hammering a little sense into his thick skull, they ruined him. He suffered, of course. Fourteen hours a day he was made to work in a stone quarry in the hills north of Oujda. In summer the sun roasted him; in winter the wind and the rain soaked through his threadbare clothes. Thirst, hunger and vermin tormented him. When he was too sick to stand up Senegalese guards came and beat a tattoo on his back with their gun butts, and the adjutant in charge of the working

party completed the cure by thrashing him with sisal leaves which cut like saws into his back.

He suffered too much; he saw too many abominations, and his mind became blunted and warped. He had been a bad soldier when he went to prison; he came out a dangerous one—a gaunt, raw boned ruffian tanned almost black by the sun, with a bloodless slit of a mouth and a lambent flame in his half mad eyes.

Long before his sentence came to an end he was past caring what happened to him. If he felt any emotion at all he was rather proud of himself for having survived so long, and just before his release, to celebrate the event, he had a small skull and crossbones tattooed on his forehead together with a neat scroll bearing the words:

TOO TOUGH TO KILL

He picked up an additional twenty-eight days detention for this "insubordinate act", but twenty-eight days more or less were of no importance. He returned to the depot with his *képi* tilted well on the back of his head so that nobody could miss his decoration.

With the rank and file his success was instantaneous, but the powers that be did not share the same enthusiasm. Bland's presence alone, they decided, was enough to contaminate a whole roomful of recruits, and within two days of his release he was on his way with a reinforcement draft of forty men to join Special Section No. 7, which was cruising about at the back of beyond, somewhere near a place called Taggrourt.

THE LEGION has been training and taming hard cases for the better part of a century. What it does not know about the business is not worth knowing. It learned long ago that men like Bland are not to be trusted in regular units, and it created the special sections to deal with just such unrepentant jailbirds.

The sections have a code of discipline all their own and hand picked non-coms to enforce it. To guard against surprises, for hard driven men sometimes turn against their masters, each section is accompanied wherever it goes by a detachment of native troops. The latter are fully armed, whereas the Legionaires are never supplied with cartridges unless they are about to go into action.

All the way down to railhead the reinforcement draft traveled luxuriously in cattle trucks, which stank of goat and which, when the desert sun struck the iron roofs, became suffocatingly hot. But it was a holiday for the *salopards*. They shouted obscenities at the station masters, sang indecent songs and stormed the canteens every time the train stopped.

Even Bland enjoyed the change. For the better part of thirty-six hours he had nothing to do but sleep, talk, smoke cigarets and watch the scenery. After three years of prison discipline it was quite a picnic, and he was in an almost amiable frame of mind when he stepped out onto the platform at Bechar in the first gray light of early dawn.

There, however, the holiday ended abruptly. Ten *gendarmes* and a squad of Senegalese Tirailleurs started to bark at the Legionaires almost before the train came to a standstill. A volley of oaths, orders and imprecations mingled with the shrill squeal of the brakes.

"Come out of there, herd of unholy swine! Quicker than that! Five days extra drill to you, lard face. Yes, you, with the cigaret in your putrescent mouth. Take it out, throw it away! You're on parade now!"

The reception committee meant business, and its manners were vile. There is no love lost between *gendarmes* and Legionaires. The *gendarme* looks upon every foreigner as a potential criminal, and acts accordingly; while the Legionaire looks upon every *gendarme* as a potential victim if he can catch him in a quiet corner on a dark night. It is an old feud and a bitter one.

Punishments hailed down upon the Legionaires as they scrambled out of the trucks. It took ten minutes and a vast

amount of cursing to line them up, whereas left to themselves and a corporal they could have done exactly the same thing in thirty seconds.

"Eyes front! Steady! *Fixe!*"

The shouting died away at last, and the detachment stood gracelessly at attention. Then Sergeant-Major Melouche of the *Corps de Gendarmerie* marched down the ranks, scrutinizing the troopers through tightly puckered eyelids. He was a pompous little man, very erect, very round bellied, who strutted along with one hand placed ostentatiously on the flap of his revolver holster. His face was fleshy, soft and red, and his heavy jowls shook slightly as he walked.

It did not occur to him that men who had spent thirty-six hours in a cattle truck could not be particularly spruce and clean. Nothing escaped him and nothing pleased him. He had a few words to say to every one of the troopers, and he never failed to add a choice remark or so as to the culprit's ancestry.

WHEN the sergeant-major reached Bland he stopped dead in his tracks. For a second or so he squinted at him, then with a quick movement he caught hold of the Legionaire's *képi* by the brim, yanked it off, and sent it spinning down the platform. Three years with the penal battalions had taught Bland not to trifle with sergeant-majors on parade; he stood as stiff and as still as a carven image.

"Ah-ha!" cried Melouche, pointing a stumpy forefinger at Bland's head. "What's that? Answer me at once! What's that?"

"A head, *monsieur le Sergent-Major*," answered Bland in a flat, colorless voice.

Melouche's countenance became apoplectic. Purplish veins stood out in cords beneath his ears; his mustache bristled. When he spoke he sputtered, showering Bland with a wet mist.

"*Triple andouille*," he rasped, "I'm not talking about your head but about what is on it. What do you call it?"

"Hair," said Bland. "Hair and coal grit from the locomotive, *monsieur le Sergent-Major*."

"Stupid cow! Fool! Imbecile! I ask what is that thing upon your forehead. Do not drive me too far! Answer me at once!"

"Oh! That!" exclaimed Bland, allowing mild surprise to appear on his wooden face. "Oh, I thought *monsieur le Sergent-Major* knew what that was. It is a—"

"A death's head!" cried Melouche, "with crossed tibias. Do you think I am blind? Cretin that you are! Too tough to kill, are you? We'll see about that in a little while. Who authorized you to disfigure yourself in such a fashion?"

"Well, you see, *monsieur le Sergent-Major*," Bland answered stolidly, "some people have said that it was ornamental."

"It's an insult to the entire army!" bellowed Melouche, exasperated by the faint smiles creeping over the faces of nearby Legionaires. "It's—it's irregular. It's indecent. It's a challenge!"

"A challenge to Arab marksmen," Bland pointed out.

"To Arab marksmen!" shouted Melouche. "To the devil with them! You think—" but he did not say what Bland was thinking. He choked back the hot words which came crowding to his lips, and said sharply, "All right, my man, you're asking for trouble. You'll get it. Go pick up your cap!"

He marched along the platform close behind Bland, and as the latter bent down to retrieve his *képi*, he kicked him angrily in the seat of his pants. Bland lurched head foremost into the wall of the station house. A thin dribble of blood ran down his cheek. It was the *gendarmes'* turn to smile now; they beamed fatuously at their chief, and several Arab porters laughed uproariously.

"Pick up that cap!" brayed Melouche. "I didn't tell you to bash out your brains. I'll have you court martialed for self-inflicted injuries if you do that again! Pick up your cap!"

Three times Bland bent down, and thrice he was rewarded with a kick. At last he snatched up his *képi* as he

stumbled past it and crammed it down on his head.

"Now get back in the ranks," ordered Melouche, giving his mustaches a twirl. "Tough, maybe you are, my lad, but before we reach Taggrourt you'll be weeping tears of blood!"

BLAND marched back to his place and stood there like a ramrod. But his face was gray, and his eyes glowed like live coals.

"Is *that* the kind of man you are!" exclaimed Melouche, stepping back hastily and loosening the catch of his revolver holster as he did so. "You devil, you'd murder me if I gave you half a chance, wouldn't you? Don't worry! I'll drop you in your tracks if you so much as bat an eyelash!"

Without shifting his eyes from Bland he beckoned to one of his subordinates.

"Lebidot! Handcuffs!" he called out. "Shackle him!"

A steel bracelet was snapped on to Bland's right wrist, binding him by a thin chain to another of the sergeant-major's victims, a loose lipped, stupid little man who had had the misfortune to lose his entrenching tool somewhere between Sidi-bel-Abbes and Bechar.

"Now then," snorted Melouche, "maybe that will keep you quiet. It's not coming off your wrist until we reach Taggrourt. Too tough to kill—we'll see!"

He completed his inspection in quick time. Then, planting himself in front of the Legionaires, he squared his shoulders, smacked his revolver holster, and spoke after the fashion of a man who enjoys the sound of his own voice:

"You're a graceless pack of cutthroats," he began. "I've never set eyes on a filthier, more degraded, vicious gang. Never! The special section is welcome to you. The sooner I see the last of you the sooner I'll be pleased. It's close on three hundred kilometers from here to Taggrourt. You're going to march, and march fast. Don't make any mistake about it. If you can't keep up you'll be stripped of your kit and left behind. I'm warning you. And you'll be pleased to hear that the hills around Taggrourt are thick with Chleuh rebels. When they catch a Legionaire they open up his belly and fill it with stones. You'll march or you'll die. Detachment, slope arms! Forward in fours by your right! March!"

At Bechar there are large barracks and a small, unlovely village. At the end of the main street, beyond the market square, the desert begins, a gray wilderness stretching away as far as the eye can see.

It was only after they had trudged past the barracks and out of the village that the Legionaires realized what kind of brute was leading them. Melouche was marching them out into the desert without having given them time to fill their water bottles.

A growl traveled down the ranks, and one man shouted—

"How about some water?"

"Handcuff that man!" thundered Melouche. "Water, you *salopards*, you ought to have thought of it sooner. There's a well twenty kilometers from here. You can choke until we get there, and another time maybe you'll have sense enough not to guzzle your canteens dry before you find out when you can fill 'em again. March at attention. If I hear another sound out of you, I shoot!"

IT WAS suffocatingly hot. Drained of all color by the fiery blast of the sun, the earth seemed to explode with dazzling white light. A gaseous heat haze warped and distorted objects not two hundred yards away, so that they were seen as if through a film of rippling water.

To the right of the trail rose the foothills of the Djebel Horad range, scorched by the desert sun, picked bare by the desert wind, gaunt flanked, rock ribbed, springing like a wall above the floor of the level plain. Left lay the desert stretching away, naked and shadowless, toward the blurred horizon.

Down the trail crawled the reinforcement draft bound for Taggrourt. A hundred yards out in front of the head of the

column ambled the point man, a lanky Senegalese, with his rifle tucked beneath his arm, and his red fez crammed down over his eyes. Even he found it hot. The air scorched his lungs, and his shiny black face twisted with pain at each breath he drew.

Behind him, at cover point, came a dozen more Tirailleurs, plodding along barefoot, with their hobnailed boots slung over their shoulders. Ahead two hours' march away lay Taggrourt, hidden behind the shoulder of a hill. They could almost smell the water, those Senegalese. The journey from Bechar had lasted eight days, and not once along the way had they had a chance to drink their fill.

In the rear came the bulk of the column, the Legionaires, flanked by mounted *gendarmes*. It had been a hard journey for the Senegalese, hard too for the *gendarmes*, but for the Legionaires it had been one long torment. Herded and driven like sheep, under the everlasting menace of their guards' revolvers, they had been compelled to march in close formation in a smother of fine white dust.

Midway down the line Charley Bland slogged along bent backed beneath the weight of his knapsack. From head to heel he was caked with dust; there was dust on his eyelashes and dust down the back of his throat. Dust had sifted inside his tunic and inflamed the sores caused by the rub of his pack straps. The skin on his wrist, where the handcuff was fastened, had puffed up, cracked and festered. The slightest jerk sent fiery stabs of pain through his body, and the steel itself, heated by the sun, burned into his flesh.

All at once the steel chain linking to his neighbor grew taut. The bracelet bit into his wrist.

"Come on," he snarled between his teeth. "Move! What the hell's the matter with you?"

There was a great deal the matter with the other Legionaire. The sun had addled his brain and he was about to die. He stood stock still for a moment, open mouthed, his head rolling loosely on his shoulders. His rifle fell to the ground.

"Keep moving!" barked Sergeant-Major Melouche, riding in close. "You can look at the scenery some other time; name of God! Pick up your rifle and move!"

The trooper drew a great breath which rattled in his throat, then he pitched forward on his face, hugging the ground with all his body.

"Kick him to his feet!" ordered the *gendarme*. "If he thinks I'm going to dismount just to please him he's mistaken. Wake him up! Hurry!"

"Aw, what's the use of kicking a corpse?" grunted Bland after one look at the man's face. "He won't form fours again."

"Oh, no?" sneered Melouche. "I'll teach you to do as you're told anyhow."

He slipped his foot from the stirrup and drove the toe of his boot against Bland's jaw. The blow jerked Bland's head back on his shoulders. It broke the skin of his parched lips and the lower part of his face was drenched with blood which mingled with the sweat and dirt in his stubbly beard.

He swayed forward, gathering himself together as if about to spring, but Melouche whipped out his revolver. And Melouche laughed.

"That's right," he jeered. "Try it! Don't mind this little gun of mine—jump at me. Come on! You're too tough to kill—a bullet can't hurt you."

NOTHING would have pleased Melouche more than to shoot Bland down—but Bland was not ready to die just then. The fit of madness had passed away; he stood motionless, watching Melouche's crisped trigger finger.

"*Tiens, tiens!*" exclaimed the sergeant-major. "You're not as tough as I thought you were. You're learning to obey orders, my lad, and that, for a lousy Legionaire, is the beginning of wisdom. Now then, you say that man's dead. Maybe he is, and again maybe he isn't. We'll find out when we reach Taggrourt.

And what's more you're going to sling him across your shoulder and carry him there. Yes, you species of an assassin—carry him! You're tough." He thrust his gun forward into Bland's face. "Pick him up!" he barked. "At once!"

Bland obeyed. The added burden made his knees bend beneath him. He lurched forward a couple of steps, tripped and went down.

"None of that!" snapped Melouche. "If you're not up in two seconds you're going to your last long rest."

Again Bland shouldered the corpse. He was a hundred yards or more behind the column; the Senegalese rear guard and the baggage camels were almost on top of him.

"Run, my young antelope!" ordered Melouche. "Run fast! Get up in your place, where you belong. And don't forget that disobedience on the line of march means death."

Bland, however, had reached the end of his tether. He saw clearly that the sergeant-major did not intend him to reach Taggrourt. One way or the other he was going to die; the sun or a bullet. He chose the bullet.

He let the dead body slide off his shoulder and wheeled upon his tormentor, snatching at his bayonet as he did so.

Crash! He winced at the sound, but a split second later he realized that it was not the sergeant-major who had fired. A wisp of smoke writhed above the lip of a gulley on the hillside. Something went by overhead with a long drawn whine.

The sergeant-major had reined in his horse and was gaping pop eyed up the slope. Up there, in among the boulders, there was a glint of sunlight on polished steel. A spurt of white flame, smoke and rolling crash of musketery. It grew, it spread all up and down the line, rising and falling and swelling again until it became a deafening roar.

Ambush! A hail of bullets beat down upon the detachment. For a second or so Melouche was too astonished to speak or to move. He was a *gendarme*, an honest, brutal, competent *gendarme*. He knew how to deal with prisoners, how to make out service reports in triplicate, and he knew his *code militaire* backward. But he was not a strategist; a crisis always upset him, especially when it burst upon him without any warning. He had been told that there were no rebels in the immediate vicinity of Taggrourt—and here he was being attacked, less than six kilometers from the town, by God alone knew how many rebels. The hillside was alive with them.

A bullet struck his horse between the eyes. As if poleaxed, the animal pitched forward on its knees and flopped over on its side. Before Melouche could disengage himself the Djebel Horad hillsmen struck like lightning. They came pouring down out of the ravines on the hillside, they sprang up from behind the boulders, a swarm of lean, brown Arabs clad in the stiff folds of their gray *djellabas*—bare legged devils who yelled as they closed in upon the column—a prolonged clamor which made Melouche's hair bristle.

The advance guard was shot to pieces and overrun. The Legionaires met the rush with rifle butts and bayonets, met it and for a little while held off the maddened hillsmen. The line bent, bent and cracked and gave way.

Because the Legionaires had no cartridges the ambush was turning into a massacre. Not two minutes had elapsed since the first shot had been fired—and the column was gone. There were only little knots of cursing men who died very gamely indeed.

MELOUCHE struggled to his feet. "Bring up those camels," he yelled. And then he yelled, "Cartridges, for God's sake cartridges!"

But his voice was blown away and lost in the hurricane of sound.

One look showed him that the detachment was surrounded and was being hacked to pieces. He started to hobble back toward the rear guard, but a heavy hand caught him by the scruff of the neck and a harsh voice shouted:

"Not so fast. Get a key and unfasten this bracelet. Where's that key?"

Bland! He had forgotten Bland. From the top of his horse he had not realized how large and uncouth and terrible Bland really was. And his revolver had been knocked out of his hand when he fell!

"Key!" he repeated vaguely. "Oh! A key—yes, later. Let me go!" He shouted again, "Let me go, for the love of God! They'll be on top of us in a second!"

"Find that key and unlock this handcuff," thundered Bland, his fingers closing around the sergeant-major's throat. "Leave me here fastened to a dead man? Hell, no! Find it, I tell you, or I'll choke the life out of you!"

Melouche controlled his anxiety long enough to find the key, and a moment later, side by side, the *gendarme* and the Legionaire were running back toward the rear guard, which was putting up some semblance of a defense.

Three of the baggage camels had been shot down; the others had stampeded. Sheltered behind the bodies and the broken crates, a score of black troopers were blazing away as quickly as they could load, pumping bullets indiscriminately into the Legionaires and their assailants.

Melouche tried to steady them down and to make them fire according to the instructions laid down in the manual of musketry regulations. It was a praiseworthy effort, but it was doomed to failure. The Senegalese had lost their sergeant, the one white man they trusted, and they were very scared. They could see all too well what was happening to the Legionaires, the last of whom were being hacked to pieces before their eyes, and they did not intend to share the same fate if they could avoid it. The more noise they made the safer they felt, so they went on wasting good ammunition despite the *gendarme's* exhortations.

"Cease fire!" he yelled, shaking one of the Tirailleurs by the shoulder. "Stop it, I tell you. Aim before you fire. Sights at two hundred meters—at the word of command!"

For an answer the Senegalese jerked his rifle around and fired point blank at the *gendarme*; then he switched back to his original target and went on spraying bullets into the pall of dust that overhung the trail.

Melouche's legs gave way beneath him. He lay in a heap against the sweat caked flank of a fallen camel. He felt no pain save for a queer numb feeling in the pit of his stomach. Looking down, he saw a bright red stain appear on his khaki trousers. Wet and glistening, the stain spread down his belly and his thigh.

"Bowels," he muttered. "Full in the bowels! Oh, my God! Oh!"

The last exclamation was wrenched from his lips by an amazing sight; a bullet had caught the Tirailleur beneath the chin and had cracked his skull open like an egg. The force of the impact jerked the man to his feet and flung him several yards away, flat on his back, spilling the contents of his smashed skull.

Right and left men were being hit, for the last Legionaire had gone down and the Arabs were turning upon the rear guard. Bullets thumped and thudded into the carcasses of the camels. A minute before there had been twenty Senegalese; now there were only eleven . . .

MELOUCHE whimpered all to himself. He was wounded and unarmed. If the Arabs caught him alive they would torture him; he could hear the screams of the Legionaires who had fallen into the hillsmen's hands. He glanced about, hunting for a weapon, and all at once he saw Bland crawling toward him, dragging something along the ground.

"We're done for," he wheezed. "We can't—"

"Done for—nothing!" snarled Bland. "These damn' fool niggers! Couple of cases of hand grenades strapped to that camel. Never thought of opening 'em. I've primed as many as I could carry. What happened?" he went on, pointing with his thumb at the sergeant-major's stomach. "Got yours?"

"I'm dying," choked Melouche. "Can't move my legs."

"Huh! Well you can still move your arms," retorted Bland, spilling grenades and detonators beside Melouche. "Prime some of these quick!"

A flicker of indignation roused the *gendarme.*

"Trying to tell me what to do—" he began.

"I am," Bland cut in. "You tried to get me, but you didn't—and these gaudy Arabs are going to try, but they won't. *I'm too tough to kill.* Watch these babies burst!"

"You're under arrest," croaked Melouche.

They were the last words he was destined to speak, for a bullet drilled a hole in his chest and he died noisily, his breath whistling in his throat.

"Goldarn it!" grunted Bland. "Getting himself killed like that—"

A shout of warning from the Tirailleurs made him look up. Fifty yards away a group of Arabs was bearing down upon the remnants of the rear guard. The Senegalese' erratic fire had little or no effect upon them. They came on in a compact mass, firing from the hip as they ran.

Bland leaped to his feet. He was as mad as a march hare, and he cackled with laughter as he watched the oncoming hillsmen. His arm swung up and around, and a grenade went sailing through space. It burst at the feet of the nearest Arabs, and out of the ground sprang a column of smoke and dirt, jagged bits of iron and hunks of quivering flesh. The ranks of the oncoming hillsmen split open and swerved away, but they could not escape that shattering destruction. Two more grenades burst among them. Then a third. The earth rocked and disintegrated beneath them; their bodies were ripped open and flung about. Those who survived retreated.

A bomb in either hand, Bland turned upon the Senegalese, and of all his mouth he made a tongue.

"Come on, black boys, *bayonette au canon!*" he yelled at them. "Fix bayonets—let's go get 'em!"

Mad as a march hare; a crazy, blood smeared, dirt caked Legionaire in a ragged tunic, with a battered *képi* cocked over one eye. Maybe the noise of the bursting grenades had renewed the Senegalese' courage, or it may have been that Bland reminded them of one of their jungle Gods—but they listened to him as they had not listened to the sergeant-major.

They came out from behind their shelter; a dozen savages gone berserk. They threw away their rifles, drew their long bladed machetes and, close behind him, they charged.

It was insane, but it worked. Bland's grenades opened the way; the machetes kept it clear and, before long, the Arabs broke. They had had their fill of fighting; they had captured ninety rifles and more equipment than they could carry. Blinded by the dust, they could not tell whether they were being attacked by ten or a hundred men, and the sound of the exploding bombs was anything but sweet music in their ears. So they sifted away and vanished among the boulders.

HALF an hour later a relief column from Taggrourt sighted a party of ten Senegalese Tirailleurs and one Legionaire straggling down the trail in what was probably meant to be military formation.

The officer commanding galloped out to meet the party.

"Are you the advance guard?" he shouted.

"Advance guard, hell!" the Legionaire said impolitely. "I'm the reinforcement draft if anybody should ask you, and this—" he jerked his thumb in the direction of the Senegalese—"and this is the escort."

"What's that?" the officer said sharply, smacking his boot with a riding crop, "Are you out of your mind, you idiot? Where's the rest of the detachment?"

"If you want to see it," answered Bland, "you'll find it up the road. What it needs most is burying."

"Massacred!" exclaimed the officer. "And you mean to say that you alone survived? You alone out of forty men!"

"Me all alone," agreed Bland, rocking unsteadily on his feet. "You see, it's like this, I'm too tough to kill, and—"

He had to clutch at a stirrup strap to keep himself from falling, for the sun had eaten into his skull and his brain was on fire.

The officer bent down, resting his elbow on his thigh, and peered into Bland's face.

"I thought I remembered that voice," he exclaimed. "I'm not mistaken either! You're the man who—"

"Who walloped you at Sidi-bel-Abbes," muttered Bland. "Yes, and I remember you too—Lieutenant du Vercourt."

"I am Lieutenant du Vercourt, and I am in command of Special Section No. 7. Stand up! I want to know what happened to the rest of the reinforcement draft. Where were you skulking while the fighting was on?"

"The detachment was ambushed and massacred," said Bland, speaking with difficulty, for his tongue was thick and dry, "because we didn't have a round of ammunition among us. That's why, and if you want to know what I was doing—ask those black boys. They'll tell you."

The world was reeling about him. He was too tired to stand up and too tired to think. He let go the stirrup strap and dropped to the ground.

Faintly, as if it came from miles off, he heard Lieutenant du Vercourt say:

"Sergeant Rossari, have that man carried back to camp. Keep him under arrest until I find out about him. Show him no mercy; he's dangerous!"

IF COLONIES did not exist they would have to be invented, for without them there would be no pride of empire, no sources of cheap raw materials, no natives to be modernized for the good of their black souls, and no testing ground for the budding military genius of the up and coming civilized nations.

If, for instance, benevolent France were not helping the sultan of Morocco to make his country safe for industrial exploitation, Lieutenant Henri du Vercourt's career would have ended disastrously. Which would have been a great pity.

Du Vercourt was one of those fortunate young men earmarked for success and high positions as soon as they appear, yowling, on the face of the earth. Everything was in his favor; he had influential relatives scattered throughout the government services; he had a name made famous by generations of soldiers, diplomats, kings' mistresses and a traitor or so, and early in life he had acquired that condescending slightly insolent aristocratic manner, which is so respected in all truly democratic countries.

Moreover, he had money, a certain amount of intellect, and last but not least, good looks.

His good looks almost brought about his downfall, for he was far too popular with the ladies, and he was temperamentally incapable of refusing anything they asked of him.

When he was graduated from the military college he was posted to a smart *chasseurs à cheval* regiment, which was no more than his due for, although he had struggled through at the tail end of his class, he had an uncle who was by way of being a general and an important personage at the staff college.

Before he had been with his regiment for a year there occurred a large and juicy scandal. A municipal councillor of the garrison town uprose and declared without shame that the lieutenant had robbed him of his honor. The more he talked about his honor the more furious he became and, finally, losing all sense of proportion he challenged du Vercourt to a duel with—of all weapons—cavalry sabers.

They met at dawn in an apple orchard by the banks of the River Loire. It was spring; the trees were white with blossoms, and there was dew sparkling in the grass underfoot. Du Vercourt was so affected by the charm of the setting that he did not have the heart to maim the

poor fool of a politician. After a couple of minutes' light exercise he severed the shoulder muscles of his opponent's sword arm, and left the field of honor as jauntily as he had arrived.

Unfortunately, the municipal councillor refused to abide by this gentleman's decision. He had lost the use of his arm, but not the use of his voice, and as soon as his wound healed he became extraordinarily vocal and active. He stirred up the dregs of his political world and succeeded in raising such a commotion that questions were asked in the Chamber of Deputies. Dueling in the army was strictly forbidden; therefore why, inquired the solons of the opposition, had a lieutenant of *chasseurs* been allowed to injure a worthy councillor, and why had no sanctions been taken? Was it because of his aristocratic lineage? They sneered at his aristocratic lineage and urged the minister to remember that there had been a revolution which had shorn the nobles of their privileges and of their heads. The extreme left got out of hand and demanded votes for soldiers. In the end the harassed minister had to promise that the culprit would be dealt with with the utmost severity.

The next day du Vercourt was summoned before a disciplinary board, which consisted of one member, who chanced to be his uncle. Such things do happen in well regulated armies.

"Henri," said the general, stroking his internationally famous gray whiskers. "Henri, *mon garçon*, what a mess you have made of things!"

Du Vercourt helped himself to one of his uncle's cigarets, and shrugged his shoulders.

"That man was a humorless swine," he sighed. "I should have run my sword through his neck. It would have saved you, *cher oncle*, a lot of trouble."

The general let go his whiskers long enough to wave a *pince-nez* at his nephew while he said severely:

"Let this be a lesson to you. Never fight any but your social equals, my boy. Never cross swords with a man who does not appreciate the subtleties of our code, and above all else avoid politicians, infamous scoundrels that they are!" He cleared his throat and added with less severity, "The—er—the—ah—the lady, was she pretty?"

Du Vercourt blew a kiss off his finger tips.

"Adorable!" he declared. "But so tactless, so stupid. The dear little thing! Yes, she was altogether charming."

"I'm glad to hear that," commented his uncle, "because, you know—minister's orders, my boy—you're being transferred to the Foreign Legion."

Du Vercourt sat bolt upright in his chair and stared resentfully at the general.

"Surely you're joking," he cried. "Why, the Legion—"

"Is a very fine regiment, my boy. A superlatively fine regiment, but just between you and the board of discipline I don't think you're destined to be with it very long. Not too long, anyway."

"I'll be stuck away in some hot and filthy hole! Why not cashier me and send me to Guiana!"

"Be calm and listen to your old uncle," urged the general. "You are going to the Legion; it is an order which can not be set aside. Moreover, it is going to get you out of the way for awhile. So much the better for you; you'll see something of Greater France and acquire much valuable experience. I'm writing today to my old friend Lemecton, who is in command of the First Regiment, asking him to keep an eye on you."

"Really!" Du Vercourt remarked acidly. "So kind of you!"

"A pleasure, my dear boy," smiled the general, "and you don't have to be quite so snappy. I'm asking Lemecton to see if he can't give you an independent command just as soon as possible, so that you can acquire a thorough knowledge of local conditions. You'll move about, you'll see some fighting—you'll do good work, I'm sure—and in a few years' time, when all the fuss has been forgotten we'll have you switched over to the staff."

"You think—"

"I don't think. I know. There's no place like the colonies for rapid advancement, and Morocco has its good points. Staff work out there can be made very pleasant indeed."

Du Vercourt had recovered his composure. He beamed upon the board of discipline.

"I can't thank you enough, *mon oncle!* An independent command and then staff work! Do you know, I'm beginning to be rather glad I sliced that silly fool's shoulder!"

That evening Lieutenant Henri du Vercourt was gazetted out of the *chasseurs à cheval* and appointed to the First Regiment of the Foreign Legion at Sidi-bel-Abbes, and everybody, even the opposition deputies, had to agree that there was still some semblance of discipline in the army.

THERE was, as a matter of fact, more discipline than du Vercourt had bargained for; it took him two and a half years to obtain that independent command he had been promised.

Colonel Lemecton was sympathetic, but as stubborn as a mule.

"All in good time," he said soothingly. "We can't afford to run any risks in the Legion. We can't experiment. Learn all you can, study your men, get used to them, and one of these days, when there's a vacancy we'll see whether you're fitted for it."

At the depot, however, du Vercourt learned exactly nothing about Legionaires. For one thing he knew he knew all there was to be learnt about troopers (hadn't he served twelve months with a crack cavalry regiment?), and for another thing all the routine work at the depot was done by efficient non-commissioned officers who required no supervision at all.

His one really intimate contact with the rank and file occurred one evening soon after his arrival in Africa, when Soldier of the Second Class Bland C, hit him and almost dislocated his jaw. But he did not allow this incident to prejudice him against all Legionaires. So far as he could make out they were smart and clean, they drilled like clockwork, and they gave him no trouble at all.

In other words they were just soldiers, files on parade, automatons specially devised by an all wise Providence to carry out the orders of clever men like Lieutenant du Vercourt.

Having reached this conclusion he turned his attention to other things, and spent the next two and a half years preparing himself for a post on the staff. He studied a little Arabic, wrote letters to his uncle, and soft soaped his colonel, the colonel's wife and every senior officer within reach. Junior officers of his own rank he snubbed sedulously, and eventually his efforts were crowned with success. He was given command of Special Section No. 7 and sent down to Taggrourt to administer a district half the size of France.

"IT'S A very responsible post," Colonel Lemecton warned him. "I'm sending you there because your uncle tells me you are earmarked for a minor staff job, and also because I think you're fit for the task— Oh, don't thank me. Not a word! I've been watching you for a long time now, and I've formed an opinion. You'll do, and if you succeed at Taggrourt I'll be only too glad to recommend you most heartily.

"Down there you're going to find a tricky situation," he went on. "You'll have your hands full. Do you know anything about Taggrourt by any chance?"

"Er—a little," admitted du Vercourt, although he knew nothing at all about the place. "I've seen reports—but if you don't mind giving me a few pointers—"

"Not a bit. Glad to help you. Yes, indeed, always come to me when you need advice. *Eh bien*, as I was saying, it's a peculiar situation—needs careful handling. We've never been able to pacify the Djebel Horad range. It's enemy country from one end to the other. We can't spare the men, and anyhow transport difficulties are too great to warrant large scale operations.

"The man you'll have to watch out for is Abdul ben Jeffa. He's as slippery as an eel that damn' *kaid*, and he has complete control of the hill tribes. He's a saint, too. All sorts of pilgrims climb up to el Maluk to worship. He lets them through, but he won't let a white man come near the place. He's refused point blank a dozen times. Calls himself an independent *kaid*. He won't pay taxes and he tells the pilgrims that the sultan is our puppet. He's a dangerous man. What he needs is a bullet in his heart—but that'll have to wait.

"Now here's the point. You must not antagonize him, or else the religious question will be dragged out to worry us all over the country. But you must keep him in check, mop up the marauding bands he sends out, keep a lookout for agitators and gun runners. That's about all there is to it."

"I see," murmured du Vercourt.

"I'm glad of that," agreed the colonel. "Of course, you'll receive more detailed information when you reach district headquarters, but at least now you know what to expect, and if you can strike a bargain with ben Jeffa do so—anything to keep him quiet."

"What if he should fight?"

"He won't. At least I don't think he will. If you should happen to catch him off his guard, even then don't fight unless you are certain of crushing him at one blow. A mistake would be disastrous. All I ask of you is that you keep the district quiet for the next six months. If you succeed you won't have to wait very long for your promotion."

IT DID not take many weeks for du Vercourt to find out that he had been saddled with one of the nastiest jobs in South Morocco.

Taggrourt itself was no better than a cesspool. The town and the oasis straggled across the mouth of the pass leading back into the hills. At first sight it looked quite picturesque with its whitewashed houses, its date palm trees and its minaret faced with pale green tiles. A second glance, however, dispelled the illusion; it was a place of great, ungodly stinks, of flies, of intense heat, of dust and filth unimaginable.

Its people, who lived by, for and off the pilgrims traveling up to el Maluk were a mongrel crew—the dregs of North Africa. Every form of money begetting vice was practised at Taggrourt, and every brand of treachery, lust and cruelty.

The redoubt stood on rising ground covering the town and the head of the pass with its machine guns. They needed covering! Du Vercourt had discovered, before he had been there a week, that his authority did not extend beyond the range of his rifles.

Peace? There was no peace either in the hills or out in the desert. The district was in a turmoil. Marauding bands swept down out of the hills, plundering remote villages and preying upon the caravans bound for the cities of the north. Wandering *mullaks* preached sedition in the market place where the pilgrims foregathered and riots broke out whenever the white soldiers tried to arrest these trouble makers.

Du Vercourt had to face half a dozen ways at once. Occasionally he cornered a few rebels and had them shot down, but it was an unsatisfactory business, for he could not cope with the wholesale anarchy which threatened to destroy at any moment what little hold he had upon the district. He had a hundred and fifty Legionaires and as many Senegalese Tirailleurs at his disposal; he would have required a couple of battalions to make any headway at all.

And behind all the unrest loomed the bland, tranquil figure of Abdul ben Jeffa—an upstart mountain chieftain, laughing at the might of the greatest colonial empire on earth and holding it at bay. His domain was closed to the French; such was his order. But he corresponded by messenger with du Vercourt, and bedeviled the life out of the perspiring lieutenant.

Never once did he lose his temper when du Vercourt sharply summoned him to

keep his people in order. In excellent French, he had the honor to assure the commander of the French forces that none of his people could possibly be responsible for the raids. But, he went on to point out, even if some of the border clans had committed a few minor depredations, their conduct was easy to understand. They were shot at if they appeared anywhere near a French camp—a practise which they naturally resented and which he could but deplore. Furthermore, he begged to remind the lieutenant that he would be willing to sign a treaty of peace and amity with the French government as soon as it agreed to respect his sovereign rights as the representative of a free people.

Three months of that pernicious correspondence ruined du Vercourt's disposition. He broke off diplomatic relations and imprisoned ben Jeffa's emissaries. The *kaid* retaliated by ambushing a scout patrol of twenty men, which he butchered with conscientious thoroughness, and afterward sent the severed heads back to du Vercourt, with a polite note stressing the right of self-determination of small nations.

To repay this affront the lieutenant arrested a batch of pilgrims, but this was a tactical error. As soon as the people of Taggrourt heard of the outrage they arose *en masse* in defense of their customers. Riots broke out in the town, and the district tetered on the brink of a holy war until du Vercourt gave way and released his prisoners. Morally certain though he was that they were spies, agitators and gun runners, he could prove nothing against them and he let them go to avoid further bloodshed.

This display of clemency did not endear him in the hearts of the natives. Raids became more frequent; business with the outside world was throttled by the incessant incursions of the hillsmen, and even the merchants of Taggrourt who depended upon the French for protection, began to grumble.

They sent deputations to remind du Vercourt that they were law abiding, tax paying citizens and that they were entitled to protection. They pestered him so thoroughly that he lost the last shred of his temper and kicked them out of his orderly room, threatening to imprison them all if they called on him again. He had quite enough to do without listening to the lamentations of a pack of tradesmen.

Indeed, by that time, he was growing desperate. Everything that could go wrong had gone wrong, and to add to his burdens trouble had cropped up where he least expected it—among his men.

Truth to tell he had been too preoccupied to bother much about them. He had looked upon them as parts of a smooth running machine, which moved when he told it to move or fought when he ordered it to fight. He could not distinguish one soldier of the second class from another; to him they were as alike as a bunch of beets; they were automatons which the sergeants wound up and kept clean while he was dealing with more lofty problems.

And then, abruptly, he became acutely conscious that the machine far from running smoothly, was showing unmistakable signs of wear and tear. The men were slovenly, they slouched about their work and drilled like sheep. Worst of all they seemed to forget how to march. Each time they went out on patrol they went just a little more slowly, creeping along more like invalids than Legionaires. There could be no doubt about it. They were doing it deliberately out of sheer ill will.

A BROODING quiet hung over the redoubt. Instead of singing their heads off of an evening, the troopers stood about in small groups, whispering They fought among themselves and against the Senegalese; drunkenness increased until it became a plague, and the list of defaulters became longer from day to day.

Somebody was responsible for this state of things, but it never occurred to him that he was at all guilty. So he blamed

his second in command, Adjutant Orssal, and the platoon sergeants.

"You are too easy going," he told them. "Discipline—that's what is needed. Discipline! You have been neglecting your duty; never in my life have I seen such an ill trained, ill kept, slovenly group of men. You hear me? Never! And you are to blame. Inefficient does not begin to describe your conduct. Why, it's treasonable! It's damnable!"

"May I—" began Adjutant Orssal, a thick set man with a glum, stupid face.

"No, you may not!" snapped du Vercourt. "I have to deal with a thousand pressing problems; I have had to trust you; I thought I was ably seconded—and what happens? I ask of you—what happens?"

"These Legionaires—" Orssal tried again.

"You've done your best to wreck the section," du Vercourt went on. "That is what has happened. But it's got to stop. I know all about these Legionaires. What they need is a firm hand. Show them no mercy. Let no offense go unpunished. You have been too lenient, but hereafter I'll see all defaulters, and I promise you I'll cure them of their obnoxious habits. What's more I'll give you one week in which to whip your platoons into shape, and if there is not a marked improvement I'll have the stripes off some of your arms!"

If he had taken the trouble to investigate, instead of jumping at ready made conclusions, he would have found out that his sergeants were anything but easy going and that they had been struggling for weeks against the rot which was undermining Special Section No. 7.

Nevertheless, because they were well meaning men, they obeyed their lieutenant with painstaking thoroughness. Discipline at Taggrourt was soon unrecognizable from the discipline of a penitentiary—and the Legionaires, for all of it, went steadily from bad to worse.

A party of six attempted to desert; their mangled bodies were found the next day, and the sight of them made du Vercourt turn green for he was not accustomed to such horrors. Another trooper committed suicide while on guard duty outside the gate of the redoubt. A wave of hysteria swept the men cooped up inside the gray battlements. There were bursts of crazy fighting in the canteen and, after a Tirailleur had been stabbed to death, du Vercourt closed the place. But the troopers were not to be kept from going to perdition in any such simple manner. They went down to the grog shops of Taggrourt and raised merry hell, until du Vercourt, grown desperate, confined all troops to barracks, docked them all of ten days' pay and put them on a diet of bread and water for one week.

Even these drastic methods did not restore No. 7's shattered morale. There was no attempt at mass mutiny; there was not even a hint of it. The Legionaires were simply soggy, stale and utterly useless.

It was altogether too much for du Vercourt. He could neither pacify the district, nor keep order among his men; but he soothed himself with the thought that, after all, he had done his level best. So he wrote optimistic reports to headquarters, and sat back to pray to whatever Gods might look down upon Taggrourt to expedite his transfer to the staff.

SOLDIER of the Second Class Charley Bland came out of cells after forty-eight hours' solitary confinement suffering from a high fever and a sense of injured innocence. Instead of being congratulated because he had pulled a handful of men out of the ambush he had been thrown into a hot, steamy cell and kept there on a diet of bread and water.

At last, blinking like an owl, he was hauled out and marched into the orderly room, where Lieutenant du Vercourt lolled in a wicker chair, holding a cigaret between his well kept fingers.

The officer's first remark was:

"Good God, *monsieur l'adjutant,* but this man stinks like an open drain. I've never seen such filth."

Adjutant Orssal noisily cleared his throat and glared at the ragged trooper.

"Cleanliness has to be drilled into them, *mon lieutenant*," he explained pompously. "They've no self-respect, these scoundrels."

"None!" agreed du Vercourt. "I'm sure he's verminous."

"I am," grunted Bland. "I been in a cell for two days and a dirtier one—"

"Silence!" roared Orssal. "Silence in the presence of your officer!"

"Anyhow," went on du Vercourt when the thunders of that voice died away, "we are not here to discuss cleanliness. What I want you to know is that, although your conduct is open to the most intense suspicion, I am returning you to full duty. Don't mistake this for clemency. I will stand no nonsense from men like you. You have been to prison, you have had a ridiculous emblem tattooed on your forehead—you are, I believe, incorrigible. But don't forget that I shall find swift ways of dealing with you if you make trouble." He flicked his cigaret in Bland's direction and snapped, "Dismiss!"

"Sergeant Roupnel," ordered Orssal, "take charge of this man. He goes to your platoon."

"Right turn!" barked a voice in Bland's ear. "Forward, march!"

He clumped obediently out of the orderly room into the dazzling sunshine, nor did he so much as turn his head to glance at the sergeant until the latter halted him in the middle of the parade ground.

"You know who I am, don't you?" inquired the non-com.

"I do," agreed Bland. "You're the man who forgot to return my money belt and who kept my five hundred francs."

"The very same," chuckled Roupnel. "Bland, you're the greatest damn' fool on earth. You deserved to lose that five hundred. I've been laughing about it ever since."

"Sure," admitted Bland, "and I've been laughing too—in prison."

"Served you right, you brainless *salopard*," sneered Roupnel. "They ought to have given you twenty years for striking an officer." He stared at Bland's stony face for some moments and added, "You've changed, eh? You've lost all your pretty manners. You're rotten to the core. I know your type; you'll end up tied to a stake with a dozen rifles staring you in the face."

"Well," said Bland, "what of it?"

"Just this; I'm a sergeant now, and I'll not allow any dirty jailbird to throw mud at me. If you open your trap about that five hundred francs—I'll get you."

"If the mud sticks—"

"None of that! I belted hell out of you once, and I'll do it again if you say one word too many. And what's more if you give me any trouble I'll show you just what that little motto of yours is worth. Believe me, I'll have you stretched out in your grave in a week's time. Understand?"

"I understand."

Without warning Roupnel raised his hand and struck Bland in the face.

"Say 'sergeant' when you speak to me," he ordered. "And don't try to grin at me me again or I'll march you straight back to the cells."

"Very good, *mon sergent*," agreed Bland, standing like a ramrod. "Yes, *mon sergent*. Anything else, *mon sergent*?"

"Get to your kennel, you dog, and I warn you, one whisper about that money and I'll take some of the cocksureness out of you."

SPECIAL Section No. 7 adopted Bland as soon as he appeared. His fame had spread abroad while he was still in the cells, and he measured up to his reputation. The other troopers were surly and disgruntled. He was one degree more disgruntled than they were. Moreover, he had an imposing record; he had fought his way almost single handed out of an ambush; he had been in prison for three years; and, best of all, he was guilty of having knocked the officer commanding for a row of goals.

Until he reached Taggrourt the section had lacked a leader; he became that leader the very first night of his release.

"What's the matter with this outfit?" he inquired, sitting hunched up on his cot after the light had been put out. "Is it a circus or a funeral, or both?"

"You'll soon find out," grunted a nearby trooper, sprawling naked and sweating on the flat of his back. "Wait until you've been here awhile. What's the matter with the section? Nothing much except that squirt of an officer of ours, that sniffing, too refined to breathe aristocrat."

"Ya, we are not good enough for him," explained a thick German voice, rasping somewhere in the darkness. "We are a subhuman species, he says to us to our faces. Monkeys, only good enough to sweat our hearts out for him. He rides, we have to walk—*und* it's fifty kilometers a day he would have us do."

"With nothing in our bellies either," added an Italian. "Do you know what kind of food we've been having for six months—six months, mind you? Maggotty goat and spoiled rice. Tobacco? Not a sniff. Not for us. And the coffee—"

"And the wine—"

"Once a month—sour as vinegar, weak as water."

"But that's nothing," snarled a man at the far end of the room. "The canteen's closed and you can't buy a drink, and the nigger town's out of bounds. We only go out when we're on patrol and we get shot down like flies."

"And why? Because the only way that lieutenant knows how to march is in column formation as per copybook. Stage a surprise attack and catch a few Arabs as they catch us? Not much! *We're* not to be trusted."

"Canteen closed, town out of bounds, bad food," summed up Bland. "And none of you tame pussy-cats has ever raised a howl! Not one of you has ever made a complaint."

"Try it and see what happens," broke in the German. "Tell the sergeant the food is bad, tell him it is not fit for subhumans like us, and it's ten days defaulter's drill you will be picking up."

"And the two striper—"

"He doesn't care. He's busy manicuring his finger nails and writing letters all day long. Runs about telling the adjutant how busy he is. Scared to put his nose outside the gates. There's hell to pay outside. Nobody knows whether we're holding down this rat run of a country or being besieged. The Arabs have got him frightened silly."

"Then he ought to be easy to handle," commented Bland. "Walk straight up to him and—"

"Land in the cells. It's been tried and it won't work. If you've got anything to say you've got to say it to the sergeant, and you won't get far with a bird like Roupnel."

"You can't tell me anything about him," said Bland. "We were together at the depot."

"Don't trust him. He's as mean as sin. He's got a pet trick; stand you up at attention and wallop you in the face. If you bat an eyelash, it's cells and starvation. If you move—he shoots. Self-defense, of course! He's dropped two men since we've been here."

"He hasn't changed much," chuckled Bland. "I was a recruit in those days and an easy mark. He kept five hundred francs for me when I went to prison. He's still keeping 'em. If he didn't have those stripes on his arm I'd spoil that leathery face of his!"

"Steer clear of Roupnel," advised one of his neighbors. "He's crooked."

"Let me get him all alone in a quiet corner," Bland grunted, "and he'll find out—"

"*Ferme ça!*" somebody whispered sharply. "Shut up!"

A SHADOWY figure stood in the doorway. There came a brief pause followed by a cough, then Roupnel's voice rang out—

"Room orderly, light that lamp at once!"

A match flared in the darkness. Sec-

onds later the glow of an oil lamp shed a splotch of yellow light in the center of the room.

Sergeant Roupnel marched down the aisle between the cots and came to a halt beneath the lamp. He glanced slowly around the room until his eyes met Bland's.

"You," he said sharply. "Come here!"

Bland stepped forward. He was stripped to the waist, and the lamplight played upon his sweat drenched brown skin, transforming him into a thing of bronze, lean muscled and tense, with smoldering eyes set deep in their shadowy sockets.

"I was passing by outside the hut," said Roupnel, giving a passable imitation of du Vercourt's drawl, "and I chanced to overhear a few of the remarks you jackasses were making. What I heard interested me very much—particularly what you were saying, Bland. I heard you telling your comrades that I robbed you of some money. That's what you told them, isn't it?"

"That's what I told them, *mon sergent*," admitted Bland. "Five hundred francs and my money belt. I was drunk at the time—"

Roupnel's countenance had grown livid. He struck Bland a resounding smack on the cheek.

"You lying swine!" he retorted. "You'll do twenty days' extra drill for having called me a thief. Undermine my authority, would you?"

Again his fist shot out, crashing full against the point of the Legionaire's jaw. Bland, who had been standing at attention, lost his balance and went sprawling. Before he could struggle to his feet Roupnel kicked him savagely in the ribs.

"So you'd like to catch me in a dark corner?" jeered the sergeant. "I suppose you would—to dig a bayonet into my back. Now get up and tell these men that you lied, or I'll knock every tooth in your head down your diseased gullet."

"Then you'll have to wait," answered Bland. "You can wait until reveille or the year after next. It's all the same to me."

Roupnel's hand closed on the butt of his revolver.

"Either you'll speak or else you'll go straight back to cells," he warned.

"Aw, for the love of heaven, shove me in a cell and be done with it," urged Bland. "You're safe enough—you're a sergeant. What the hell do I care whether I'm in a cell or a barrackroom? But you wouldn't be so free with your fists if you didn't have those stripes on your arm and a gun at the end of your fist."

"'Right!" snapped Roupnel. "Get your clothes on. You'll do twenty days defaulter's drill you won't forget in a hurry!

"I TOLD you not to open your mouth," he went on as he drove Bland ahead of him across the moonlit courtyard. "You're stubborn but leave it to me! You think you're tough; you talk a lot, but that's as far as it goes. There's no fight in you."

He paused as if expecting some answer, but Bland trudged straight on without an answer.

"There's no fight in you," Roupnel repeated, "and I'm going to prove it. Turn off to your right, up that alley behind the cookhouse. I'm going to give you a hiding you'll never forget!"

"With one hand on your gun," jeered Bland.

"With my two fists. And when I'm through with you you'll do your twenty days just for good measure. That's the kind of a sergeant *I* am. Man to man, I'll show you what you're worth, and that's not much."

The alleyway was empty and quiet. The far end was bathed in silvery light. In the nearby stables a horse moved restlessly, jingling its halter against an iron manger.

"Strip off your tunic," ordered Roupnel. "Don't stand there gaping at me!"

"As man to man," inquired Bland, "how about you? How about that gun and that bayonet?"

Roupnel unbuckled his belt and dropped it at the foot of the wall. Leisurely he

unhooked his collar band, and then, while Bland was wriggling out of his tunic, he leaped forward and butted him in the pit of the stomach. It was an excellent beginning, where he was concerned. Bland was gurgling for air and struggling to free his arms which were still caught in his coat sleeves. So Roupnel closed in and clouted him once on the head and followed this up by driving his knee into his opponent's groin.

The blow wrenched a groan from Bland's lips, much to Roupnel's amusement. He was quite calm and cool, confident that he could dispatch his victim whenever he liked. But he was in no hurry; he meant to do just as much damage as possible, to hurt Bland and to maim him, and to put the fear of God into his heart.

He stepped back a pace, gaged his distance with a careful eye, and let drive a mighty blow aimed at Bland's chin, but his fist met nothing more than thin air. He tried to steady himself, and as he did so he was hit beneath the right ear by something that felt like cast iron. Then Bland was upon him, punching, pounding, hitting, driving him all over the place without pause or respite. He tried to fight back, but he was swept off his feet. Neither with his fists, nor his knees, nor his feet could he stop the madman who tore into him and beat him down.

His face was battered to a pulp, and his ribs cracked beneath the impact of the blows. Step by step he was forced to retreat until at last he stood with his back against the rough stone wall. There for a moment he stood at bay, fending off as best he could Bland's murderous fists.

By the wall, not three feet away, lay his bayonet and his revolver. If he could reach them—snatch up his gun and drill a hole in Bland's head—kill him before he himself was killed—

He tore himself away from the wall, drove his fist into Bland's face and dived to the ground. His hand closed on the leather holster, his fingers snatched at the gun butt, but before he could roll over Bland was upon him, kneeling on his back, choking him, twisting his arm from his socket.

"Drop that gun," snarled Bland. "I'm one guy you won't plug. Drop it or I'll twist your head off your shoulders!"

Panic stricken, Roupnel gave up all thought of dealing single-handed with the madman crouching on his back.

"*Au secours!*" he yelled. "*À moi!* Help! Help!"

His shout rang in the stillness, but abruptly it was drowned out by the clear, high call of a bugle. Once, twice and a third time the summons was repeated.

Bland and Roupnel, their feud forgotten, struggled to their feet.

"Now that—" began Bland. "That was—"

"That's the alarm," croaked Sergeant Roupnel, wiping blood out of his eyes. "On the double, you *salopard!* Move! Full kit and equipment and stand by for further orders!"

There was a stirring of awakened men. Lights appeared in the windows of the hutments. A door was flung open and some one ran shouting across the parade ground. From end to end of the redoubt arose a score of voices, all yelling the same thing:

"Turn out! Turn out! Full kit and equipment! Turn out!"

"Now why," wondered Bland as he lumbered along, "now why did I let him get away. I had him cold."

And the brassy voice of the bugle answered him, sounding again the call that had brought him to his feet.

THE TIRAILLEURS Senegalais were lined up and ready to march away in under twenty minutes. Not so the Legionaires. After the first flurry of excitement, when they realized that the redoubt was not being attacked, they acted as if they had been struck dumb, blind and paralytic. On the spur of the moment they devised many and novel ways of wasting time. They rushed about and accomplished nothing. They dropped things, they mislaid things, and the louder

the sergeants shouted the more inefficient they became.

Fully three quarters of an hour elapsed before they shambled out onto the parade ground and formed up as gracelessly as sheep.

Their conduct exasperated du Vercourt to such an extent that, gladly, he would have kicked every one of them. He controlled his temper, however, for beside him stood Mulay al Kabura, a quiet, stately Arab, in whose presence he was compelled to exhibit a high degree of self-control. It would never do, he felt, to betray his impatience in the presence of a native.

Mulay al Kabura had ridden up to the redoubt shortly before ten o'clock and had refused to go away until he spoke to the lieutenant. To the orderly sergeant he said he was bearer of important news concerning Abdul ben Jeffa, and du Vercourt had condescended to receive him.

As soon as the Arab was hustled into the room he barked at him:

"Well, what is it? What do you want at this time of night? What's all this about ben Jeffa? Speak up! Be explicit!"

His manner was as domineering as he knew how to make it, for he had found that most natives, unless they were treated with brutal insolence, did not act as if they were conscious of the importance of his position.

This particular Arab, however, was pleasingly deferential. He was the rightful sheriff of Ain Ghabrit, he explained, a small village some thirty-five kilometers from Taggrourt, but he had been driven from his home a year gone by by Abdul ben Jeffa, because he had sworn allegiance to the French and had supplied information to du Vercourt's predecessor which had led to the arrest of a large number of gun smugglers.

He was a proud man, he assured du Vercourt, and he had refused to appeal to the white troops for protection. Moreover, they could have done nothing for him, for ben Jeffa's agents would have knifed him had he attempted to go back to his village. So he watched and waited for a chance to even the score with the *kaid*—and now the time had come! At that very moment ben Jeffa was within the walls of Ain Ghabrit. He had come down from el Maluk with two hundred followers—the pick of his fighting men—to fetch a bride, the daughter of the new sheriff, who was a knave without shame or honor.

"If you strike now," he concluded, "you hold ben Jeffa at your mercy. Surround the village and smoke him out, but make haste, for he leaves at dawn tomorrow."

"How do I know you are not lying?" retorted du Vercourt.

"If I lie then shall my life be forfeit," Mulay promised. "Let me ride beside you, knee to knee, and if I have spoken one false word shoot me down as you would shoot a dog!"

The man did not look like a liar, du Vercourt told himself. The risk was worth running. If he could corner ben Jeffa and wipe out a couple of hundred of his warriors the rebellious spirit of the hillsfolk was sure to collapse. And his own reports to headquarters, instead of being a record of failure, would be transformed overnight into a discreet hymn of triumph.

It was then half past ten. The thirty-five kilometers between Taggrourt and Ain Ghabrit could easily be covered before dawn, but he would have to hurry.

"Damn' insubordinate swine," he thought as he watched the Legionaires form up. "It will do them good to be shot at for awhile. I hope to God those rebels put up a stout fight!"

JUST before the signal to march away was given he tried to put fresh life into his men.

"We're going to Ain Ghabrit," he told them curtly. "It's thirty-five kilometers. You'll have to step out. And at the end of the road a fight awaits you. We are going to surprise ben Jeffa, the rebel who is responsible for the death of many of your comrades. Legionaires, you will avenge them! You will show yourselves

worthy of the fine fighting spirit of your regiment!"

The Legionaires received this little speech without any manifest enthusiasm. One sergeant tried to raise a cheer, which sounded as dismal as the crowing of a cock at three o'clock on a wet winter morning. A rear rank man yawned. One hundred blank faces lost in the blue black shadows thrown by the bent brims of their *képis* stared up at him. Their scrutiny became unbearable; he had been about to promise them a double wine ration on their return, but he quickly changed his mind.

"Don't forget," he barked. "Best foot foremost now! March away."

Special Section No. 7, disregarding this exhortation, trudged off the parade ground at a pace which was almost funereal. They were hungry, they were dog tired and they were resentful. They neither wanted to march nor to fight. The honor of their regiment left them icy. They had been bullied too much and punished too much to be soothed by any last minute addresses.

"Let him get off his horse and set the pace," grumbled Charley Bland as he limped along. "He ain't going to run me off my feet. Slow up!"

And the section slowed up. Du Vercourt was almost in tears as he rode up and down the line, urging the men on, cursing and pleading with them. And close beside him cantered the graceful figure of Mulay al Kabura, silent, respectful and very wide awake.

The laboring column crawled through the oasis and marched out across the desert which the moonlight had transformed into a sea of silver fringed with strange shadows thrown by the jagged hills.

One long kilometer slid away. Then, after endless minutes, another one lay behind. The stillness of the night was oppressive, and it seemed to du Vercourt that he was dreaming and that he led a nightmare army through a nightmare land. The dust smothered the sound of the tramping boots, toning it down to a dull thud. Little noises came to him with startling distinctness—the click of bayonet scabbards, the squeak of leather belts, the cough of a trooper far down the line.

When he spoke his voice was small and insignificant in that gigantic silence. The heat was like the breath of an oven, and he sweated as he rode from platoon to platoon, goading the men along.

"Left—right—left!" he called out, beating time on his knee with his clenched fist. "Left—right—left! Pick it up!"

And nothing happened. Mulay al Kabura lighted a cigaret and smiled all to himself as he stared up at the black mass of the hills.

The worst offenders in the section were the men of Sergeant Roupnel's platoon. A strawberry festival party straggling home through the dark would have shown a better understanding of march discipline. They straggled all over the place; they argued in low, snarling voices; they tripped over loose stones and fell down.

"But, *mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" protested du Vercourt, "what's the matter with your men, Sergeant? Make them march in fours and no more of this disgusting conduct! I will not have it!"

A smothered chuckle came to him out of the haze of moonlit dust, and a fluted voice exclaimed:

"*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!* What's the matter with them, Sergeant? Make them march in fours! Oh, we *do* love marching in fours!"

They were laughing at him. Du Vercourt didn't mind being hated or feared—but to be laughed at! He felt degraded and horrified.

"It's Kauth and Bland," apologized Sergeant Roupnel. "I can't do anything with them, *mon lieutenant.* They're bad men."

"Bring them out here," said du Vercourt in a strangled voice. "I'll see what I can do, since you're so incompetent."

The two men stood before him, stooping slightly beneath the weight of their packs, their rifles slung from their shoulders.

"Kauth," explained Roupnel. "He

made that remark. And Bland—he has been spreading lying rumors, *mon lieutenant*, about me and about you."

"That's enough!" ordered du Vercourt. "Take away their rifles. Disobedience on the line of march. Penalty—death. We'll make an example of this pair. Hold them here until the Tirailleurs march past. They die at once!"

Roupnel stepped forward and tried to take hold of Kauth's rifle, but the German who, until that moment had stood motionless, suddenly jumped aside and tore his weapon from his shoulder.

"Subhuman, am I?" he cried out. "Maybe so, but you'll go to hell just as fast as I shall!"

Du Vercourt had drawn his revolver. He fired full in the trooper's face and dropped him spreadeagled by the side of the trail. It happened so swiftly, his gesture had been so involuntary, that he was dazed to see smoke curling up from the muzzle of his revolver, and to hear. the sound of the shot ringing in his ears.

Kauth's cap had rolled off his head From a hole in his cheek ran a dark thread which glistened in the moonlight. His eyes were wide open.

BLAND and Roupnel stood side by side with their heads cocked sidewise, looking down at the corpse. Behind them, in a swirl of luminous dust, the column trudged by in ghostlike silence.

To du Vercourt the whole scene was unreal. Resentment against the dead man glowed in his brain, and he wondered angrily whether, when the spell broke and Bland moved, he would shoot him down also. Time stood still while he waited, sitting rigidly upright in his saddle, gripping his gun in his aching fingers.

And all at once several things happened which wiped all thought of Bland from his mind.

A light winked out of the velvety shadows at the foot of the hill. Sergeant Roupnel stretched out his arm and shouted:

"*Attention à l'Arabe!* He's going to fire!"

Out of the tail end of his eye du Vercourt caught a glimpse of Mulay's horse reined in on its haunches and beating the air with its front hoofs.

He heard Mulay snarl, "Thou dog!" and as he slewed himself around he was dazzled by a flash.

Bang! A streak of pain flowed up his right arm. When he tried to raise it it hung limp and useless at his side.

Almost in the same second came the crash of another shot. Mulay spilled out of the saddle, his right foot wedged in the broad bottomed stirrup iron, and the frantic horse went galloping away, dragging behind it a white thing which bounced heavily over the ground.

Bland lowered his rifle and jerked back the breech bolt. The spent cartridge dropped among the stones at his feet.

Roupnel said—

"You had no orders to march with a loaded rifle, you *salopard!*"

"Want the next one?" inquired Bland. "Kauth was right, if I'm going to die . . ."

THEN a tumult of sound broke loose. The shadows became alive with flickering points of fire and a covey of bullets went by with a long drawn *wheeeep!*

Du Vercourt forced himself to overcome the numbness which was creeping over him. He had blundered into a stupid trap and his command was being shot to pieces. Out of the haze of dust and moonlight events rushed in upon him and swamped him.

Adjutant Orssal appeared out of nowhere clamoring that the Senegalese were being hard pressed.

"There's no cover for them anywhere," he panted. "They're holding on, but they can't last long."

"Tell them to fall back toward Taggrourt," ordered Du Vercourt. "Keep down the casualties as much as possible."

"But they'll bc butchered," explained Orssal. "Most of the fire's coming from behind that hummock over there to the right."

Rising in his stirrups, du Vercourt saw

that the low ridge was fringed with spurts of red flame. From second to second the weight of fire was growing more intense.

"We'll give 'em a taste of cold steel," shouted du Vercourt. "Form up the Legion—we are going to charge!"

Somehow or other the Legionaires were gathered together and brought around facing the hummock. A storm of lead swept them. Orssal went down; man after man collapsed before the section could fix bayonets.

"*En avant!*" du Vercourt called out. "Forward! Follow me!"

But his horse was shot from under him and when he struggled to his feet he saw that the charge had petered out. The Legionaires had gone to ground; they lay behind their propped up knapsacks, shooting back at the flashes.

Follow him? Follow that sacred species of a little squirt who had badgered them for months on end, who had sneered at them and treated them as if they were hyenas? Follow him into the teeth of that deadly hurricane? Not while they knew it! Let him charge alone, if he liked that sort of thing.

Amazing things happened in that clamorous moment. Adjutant Orssal, brave and stupid Orssal, shot through the lungs and bleeding to death, dragged himself forward on his knees, obeying orders to the very end. Another slug smashed in his skull and he fell over backward with his legs doubled up beneath him.

A sergeant marched up to du Vercourt, saluted smartly and said in the same unemotional voice he would have used at orderly room:

"I beg to report, *mon lieutenant*, that the men of my platoon refuse to advance. I can do nothing with them."

And he shot himself in the mouth with the same matter of fact deliberation.

Two hundred yards away the Senegalese were behaving heroically. They had managed to form a defensive front, while they waited for the orders which never came, and were firing with clockwork regularity. Volley—pause—volley. It was magnificent but ineffective.

Du Vercourt lost his head. He ran among the Legionaires shouting:

"Get up, you filthy cowards, you swine! Get up! Black troops are putting you to shame! Get up and charge like men!"

But no one heeded him as he lurched among the dead and the living, not did any of them look his way when he fell exhausted beside a faceless corpse. The horror of that wet mask with its one red streaked eye popping out of a mass of pulp brought him quivering to his feet.

Then above the rolling thunder of the guns arose the yell of the hillsmen. They came pouring out of the shadows and the Legionaires stood up to greet them.

What they had refused to do for their officers they did for themselves alone. Shoulder to shoulder they met the rush and blew it to shreds at point blank range. Led by a wild man with a skull and cross bones tattooed on his forehead, they hacked their way out of the trap. With them went du Vercourt, nursing his smashed right arm.

They butted into the Senegalese.

"There has been no order given to retreat!" thundered the Tirailleur adjutant. "Stand fast!"

"Some other day!" yelled the tattooed Legionaire. "We're going home to mama!"

AND HOME they went, driving the Senegalese before them. There was no shred of discipline left. They were a mob gone mad with the reek of blood and powder; men who fought with terrible deliberation, cursing between clenched teeth as they rammed home their bayonets into the bare brown chests and brought their gun butts crashing down on the hillsmen's heads.

How long it lasted du Vercourt never knew. By degrees he grew conscious that the firing was dwindling away. Ahead, close at hand, there were trees. He had reached the oasis of Taggrourt.

The fight sputtered out. Somebody raised a hoarse cheer, and the outfit straggled on in confusion toward the redout. They laughed, they talked, they

smacked each other on the back for all the world as if they were well pleased with themselves.

Du Vercourt stumbled heavily, and a great swaggering ruffian caught him up as he fell.

"Hold on, *mon vieux*," urged the Legionaire. "We're almost there now. The pigsty's right ahead." And he crowed, "I've said it all along, I'm too tough to kill. Melouche, he's in his grave; Roupnel, I knocked hell out of him—and I'm still alive. They'll never get me. Not even that camel of a lieutenant. He meant to shoot—"

"Let go my arm, you fool," rasped du Vercourt. "Take your filthy paws off me!"

"Hello! It is the lieutenant," Bland exclaimed. "Sorry for presuming to help you, *mon lieutenant.* I thought you were a soldier of the second class like me."

"I need no help from cowards," retorted du Vercourt. "Get out of my way!"

And he limped along until he found the adjutant of the Senegalese, a veteran who treated him with every mark of respect.

"We must do something at once," gasped the lieutenant. "Get them formed up. We can't go into the redoubt like this. They're completely out of hand."

"Leave them to me, *mon lieutenant*," quoth the adjutant. "I'll restore order!"

Which he did with promptitude and efficiency.

He threw a cordon of Tirailleurs across the roadway, then he summoned the Legionaires to assemble in column of fours. When they hesitated to obey he pointed out that he had them covered by two machine guns and that it would please him beyond words to send a few Legionaires to their home in the netherworld. To add weight to his warning he brought one gun into action and winged a couple of troopers who tried to break away.

After that there was no more discussion. Order, discipline and sanity came back into their own again. Sergeants reasserted their authority, corporals became corporals once more, and the outfit plodded into the redoubt as gloomily as it had started out. But the things the Legionaires said beneath their breath about Senegalese Tirailleurs and hair brained officers will not bear repetition.

DAY WAS about to dawn when du Vercourt reached the fort. His arm throbbed and his nerves were raw, but he forced himself to attend to every routine detail before going to his quarters.

In the presence of his men he kept a stiff upperlip, but when the final "dismiss" was called out and the Legionaires shuffled away to their huts, he was on the verge of the most unmilitary sort of hysterics.

He was utterly disgusted with his unruly crew; the wound in his arm worried him; he wanted to be clean and comfortable again, and to be soothed by the soft white hands of some lovely woman, not a close relative, who would call him "*mon gros loup*" and other terms of endearment.

But instead of being addressed by any such fanciful names, he was pestered by the orderly sergeant, who announced—

"During your absence, *mon lieutenant*, there arrived—"

"I am wounded," protested du Vercourt. "I am badly wounded. Give me a few hours of peace before bothering me with your footling news."

"But—" the sergeant said.

"When I wish to hear your news I shall let you know," snapped the lieutenant. "Meanwhile, for the love of God, my good man, leave me alone!"

He tottered up the three steps leading to his rooms, pushed open the door, and stopped dead on the threshold, staring angrily at a large man who sprawled in the one comfortable chair in the room.

The man gathered himself together and stood up. At first du Vercourt thought that his bleary eyes were playing some trick on him, for the man seemed to grow, and grow, and the more he grew the less prepossessing he looked. He was huge and

uncouth; a barrel chested, bull necked, long armed creature, and as ugly a customer as du Vercourt had ever beheld. His right ear was bent out of shape and he had no left ear at all. He wore a threadbare, faded uniform, and the two gold stripes on his sleeve were tarnished. The strange thing about it, thought du Vercourt, while he waited for the man to speak, was that those stripes should be of gold braid, for the creature looked less like an officer and a gentleman than he did like a stevedore or something equally common.

"Good morning," said the creature. "I'm Grellon—Lieutenant Grellon. Headquarters at Souk el Kellifa ordered me to—"

Du Vercourt's nerves had been giving way strand by strand. He burst into shrill peals of laughter.

"You—an officer!" he cried. "Oh, *mon Dieu!* He is an officer!"

"Been wounded, eh?" murmured Grellon as if speaking to himself. Then his voice stung like a whip lash:

"Stop that cackling! You'll be throwing a fit in a second. Stop it! Come here and let me see what's the matter with you."

A cold spray could not have had a more immediate effect on du Vercourt. He sat down meekly and did as he was told.

Grellon slit open the blood soaked sleeve and inspected the wound, cocking his head first on one side then on the other.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Pin prick."

"Pin prick," gasped du Vercourt. "Why, my whole arm—"

"Artery's untouched, no compound fracture; nice clean hole through the biceps," Grellon summed up. "Pin prick, that's all. Now shut up and close your eyes until I'm through."

IN FIVE minutes he had washed and bandaged the wound, and ended up by forcing the sufferer to drink a glass of raw rum, which he poured from an army canteen.

Du Vercourt was not in the least grateful. He disliked this rough unmannerly fellow, and he hated himself for having submitted to so much bullying.

"I can't drink rum," he explained when the glass was thrust beneath his nose. "The odor—"

"*Je m'en fous,*" Grellon retorted coarsely. "Drink it down and don't be so finicky."

And du Vercourt, much to his own surprise, drank it down.

After he had gagged, wheezed, coughed and spluttered for some moments he began to feel slightly better. As his head cleared some of his self-confidence returned.

His first impression was that Grellon rubbed him the wrong way. There was a brutal directness of purpose about Grellon, a dynamic quality, which made du Vercourt feel unpleasantly small and ill at ease. Yet he knew instinctively that the man was nothing more than a vulgar ranker, one of those lowly persons who somehow manage to thrust themselves upon the society of gentlemen. Like many another broad minded aristocrat, du Vercourt had no social prejudices so long as no one belonging to an inferior order attempted to climb up to his level.

And here was this hulking great brute sitting on the edge of *his* table, in *his* private room, smoking a foul pipe without *his* permission.

"If it's not asking too much of you," he inquired in that icily polite manner he used when addressing his social inferiors, "would you mind explaining just who you are and why you are here?"

On the instant all the rough good nature was wiped out of Grellon's eyes. His face set hard.

He knew that particular intonation and he did not like it. As du Vercourt had surmised he was a ranker. Twenty years' service, working his way up from private to sergeant-major step by step. Then he had been sent to the officers' training school where he learned all about the battle of Austerlitz and the muzzle velocity of Lebel rifles. But no power on earth could drill into his thick head

anything remotely resembling gentility.

At heart he was still a sergeant-major, and one of the hardest boiled eggs in creation. He could handle a squad of Legionaires with the ease of a trained nurse manipulating two year olds. He was efficient and he knew it, and he refused to kowtow to the well born young gentlemen who tried to snub him when, in due course of time, he appeared among them with gold braid on his cuff.

"I'm taking your place," he said gruffly. "You're going back to headquarters. I hear you're being transferred to the staff of Colonel Lemecton."

"But," cried du Vercourt, refusing to believe the glad tidings," but I have had no official notification. Are you quite sure?"

"I'm sure. Don't worry. The original orders were probably looted on the way up when the reinforcement draft was ambushed."

"Oh—er—you've heard about that," floundered du Vercourt. "You see, I—"

"Some Arab picked up the news and brought it in just before I left—so I brought along duplicate copies."

A happy smile dawned on du Vercourt's haggard face. All his worries were over! He was out of purgatory at last. Ahead lay a pleasant billet, easy work, nice people to talk to.

He came out of his trance with a guilty start, aware all at once that Grellon was speaking, saying something about the district.

"Yes, I have had a good deal of trouble," he admitted. "Nothing really serious."

"Nothing serious," snorted Grellon. "What in the name of thunder do you call it?"

Du Vercourt, sighing wearily, tore himself away from rosy thoughts of the future and started to sketch as briefly as possible the events of the past few months. Unfortunately, Grellon took a positive delight in tripping him up, in cross examining him, in pinning him down and forcing him to admit many things he had had no intention of mentioning. It became unbearable.

"You appear to know a great deal about my district," he said acidly. "More than I know myself, in fact!"

Grellon blew a stream of blue smoke out of the corner of his mouth. He shrugged one ponderous shoulder.

"I heard a bit here and there," he admitted. "I came up slow, stopped off to feed with a couple of old Arabs I used to know—and I don't mind telling you," he added, pointing the chewed stem of his pipe at du Vercourt, "they seem to believe France is about to be kicked out of North Africa. They're calling ben Jeffa 'The Conqueror' nowadays!"

"Indeed!" sneered du Vercourt. "I understand now; you have been gathering advance information about my district from lying Arabs!"

"Your district happens to be my district," Grellon retorted. "And don't be too sure all Arabs are liars. How did you make out last night?" he inquired abruptly. "Any luck?"

IT OCCURRED to du Vercourt that the right moment had come to tell his successor a few things about Special Section No. 7. Rankers of Grellon's type usually had an immoderate veneration for their regiment—and he wanted to see Grellon writhe.

"Any luck," he repeated scornfully. "No! Never have I seen more cowardly men than those Legionaires. We went out. I had word that ben Jeffa meant to raid Taggrourt. It could have been a complete success. And those damnable curs instead of following me when I ordered them forward went down on their bellies. Dirty foreigners! You're welcome to them!"

All the scorn had gone out of his voice. Shame and anger overcame him when he thought of all the hardships he had endured, and his overstrung nerves gave way with Latin thoroughness. He wept, and he was proud that he had the courage to weep in the presence of a man he despised.

"The filthy curs," he choked. "They came back with their tails between their legs. Even when there wasn't a rebel within miles I couldn't get them to stop running. The cowards!"

"Lucky for us they ran faster than the Arabs," remarked Grellon with an indifference which was far worse than a direct insult.

"Thank the Senegalese if we're still alive!" cried du Vercourt. "I don't know what would have happened if they hadn't been there. We gave those cowards one volley. That straightened them up! Yes, you're welcome to them—you can have your vile Legionaires. If I'd had decent troops I could have pacified the district in a month. But they're rotten! Rotten! Jailbirds. They ought to be shot down every one of them. Thank God, oh thank God, I am going away!"

He went on and on, unburdening his soul, while Grellon sat on the edge of the table, puffing at his pipe. He cursed the Legion, and Abdul ben Jeffa, and the heat, and he even cursed Grellon, calling him "a prying, snooping ranker".

"You think you can do better than I have done," he snivelled. "You stupid ignorant fool! Wait until you've tried and done your best for six months! This isn't a sergeant-major's job."

"Calls for brains, does it?" inquired Grellon, canting his head forward and peering at the victim of hysteria through his heavy black eyebrows.

Du Vercourt didn't hear the question; he was far too busy with his own thoughts.

"And even if you had the best troops on earth to work with," he gabbled, rocking back and forth in his chair, "the very best—you couldn't do anything. Not in the face of the orders headquarters sends out." He laughed harshly. "Look at the pilgrims—you can't touch 'em. Smuggling guns up to ben Jeffa, but you mustn't raise a finger! And this town—a hotbed of rebellion. All those filthy merchants with their filthy petitions. I'm so sick of it all."

"The trouble with you," said Grellon, "is fever. You need a doctor. We'll start you off for the base at once."

"I'm all right."

"You are going to leave here at once," repeated Grellon, "and you'll take the Senegalese with you."

Du Vercourt recovered sufficient control of himself to gasp:

"But you're crazy! Those Legionaires will cut your throat."

"Never mind about me and my Legionaires," thundered Grellon. "Mind your own damn' business."

He stood up, towering massive and enormous above the prostrate lieutenant.

"You're going to hospital and the Tirailleurs are going with you. Read those orders I handed you; on the strength of your reports the Tirailleurs are being recalled to rest and refit. The situation is *well in hand*, isn't it? That's what you said. Too late to change that now—and I wouldn't change it if I could. I lead my men; I don't drive them. Now pull yourself together. You're not hurt. Pack your kit, give your orders and go. I'll take over command afterward."

Du Vercourt was too tired and weak to offer any resistance. Moreover, he was only too glad to leave at once, and he hoped devoutly that the Legionaires would get out of hand and reward Grellon's foolhardy ways by sticking a bayonet into him.

An hour later, mounted on Grellon's horse, he rode out for the last time beneath the gateway of the Taggrourt redoubt and headed down the trail which led to Bechar, to railhead, to civilization and staff jobs.

With him went the detachment of Senegalese Tirailleurs, grinning all over their shiny black faces at the prospect of putting many useful miles between themselves and Special Section No. 7.

UNTIL the gates swung behind the back of the last Tirailleur the Legionaires stood about in clusters in the doorways of the hutments, watching the performance with the critical, rather puzzled stare of men who scent a trap.

Afterward the hush endured for a full minute, then one trooper, coming slowly out of his trance, raised his arms above his head, stretched himself and yawned a prodigious, jaw cracking yawn. Another man chuckled mirthlessly; some one else gave a long, low whistle.

Charley Bland took his hands from his pockets, swung around on his heel and tramped into the hut. The place appeared to have been struck by a hurricane. No attempt had been made to tidy it up since the troopers had come tumbling off their cots the night before. Blankets trailed on the floor; stray garments hung from the shelves above the beds, knapsacks, belts and rifles, tin cans and hunks of bread were scattered about the floor.

Bland sat down heavily on the edge of his cot, unlaced his boots and flung them one at a time against the wall, bringing down a cascade of whitewashed mud.

"*Et alors?*" inquired a bemused trooper who had trailed in behind him. "What's going to happen now, huh? What's it all about? There's something queer about this business, that's what I say. Something mighty queer. Here we are all alone."

"Let me tell you what's going to happen now," chuckled Bland. "We're going to go to bed—curl up and sleep!"

The Legionaire scratched the top of his bristly head.

"You'll have to admit it's funny," he grumbled. "Looks to me as if they're laying for us."

"How so?"

"Well, just supposing. Here we are with the place to ourselves. It's not natural. Suppose we wanted to mutiny, eh? What's to keep us from doing so? Why, nobody! There's this new officer who hasn't showed his nose out of doors yet, and there's three sergeants—and that's all. You can't count corporals. So that makes four of them against seventy of us, including the wounded."

"An easy job," admitted Bland, stretching out on his cot and wriggling his dusty toes.

"That's it," agreed the trooper, appealing for support to the other men standing nearby. "That's just it. I been thinking it out. They want us to mutiny. I'll bet you it's been all fixed. This other officer must have brought in some order, see what I mean? They want to get rid of us, and as soon as we show fight they'll have the whole lot of us shot down. That's what happened at el Kader."

One or two of the Legionaires nodded their approval, but Bland laughed jeeringly.

"Trash," he declared. "Bunk! We're inside; the Senegalese are outside. Let 'em try to get in again if we don't want 'em in. Mutiny!" He waved a long arm above his head. "Naw, that's not the idea. They've sent some poor fool of a lieutenant along, and him and us are going to get ourselves killed by the Arabs. Nobody's going to waste government ammunition on us. Let the rebels do it. Seventy men three hundred kilometers from nowhere, and ben Jeffa hanging about outside waiting to fill us full of lead; that's us."

"Then, *nom de Dieu*, let us mutiny!" cried Morawetz, a burly, hairy, bullet headed Czech. "Let us get it over! Cut a few throats and go!"

"Go where?" inquired Bland. "North, south, east or west? Down into the Iguidi desert? North into the hills? We don't know the trails and we wouldn't last a week."

"True," admitted Morawetz, "but then what? It can not go on like this—this misery of ours. It would be better to blow out my own brains!"

"Suit yourself," Bland agreed callously. "I'm not trying to stop you, but here's what I suggest. What we'll do is break this new two striper's heart. Do it slow and careful. We'll work when we feel like it. We'll take things easy. Nobody can stop us. We can do what we like so long as we stay here."

"How long could that last?"

"A couple of months maybe. I don't know. I don't care. When we've had enough of it, then we'll blow out the two

striper's brains. Killed in action, see? Who's to know anything about it? Make 'em suffer as we've suffered. String 'em along."

"You're right," admitted Morawetz. "We break his heart, eh?"

"And we start *now*. I'm not moving off this bed until I'm good and ready. Anybody feel like turning out on parade? No? Fine! Pass the word along to the other platoons. We'll show this lieutenant where he gets off."

IT WAS some ten minutes later, as he was beginning to doze off, that Sergeant Roupnel appeared in the doorway—a very worried Roupnel, who licked his dry lips before he spoke, and tried without success to make his manner threatening.

"Turn out, you *salopards!*" he ordered. "D'you think you are going to snore while there's work to be done? And what's happened to this room, *sacré tonerre!* Never have I seen such a pigsty! Get up, lazy swine. Turn out!"

Bland propped himself up on one elbow and shook his fist at the sergeant.

"We'll turn out for nobody, you damn' thief. See that rifle?" He pointed to the weapon propped against the wall at the head of the bed. "It's loaded, and it'll go off in about two seconds. Get out of here—quick!"

"I tell you—"

Bland snatched up his rifle, and the sergeant promptly faded away, followed by a burst of unpleasant laughter.

Sweating with apprehension, he hurried back to Lieutenant Grellon.

"It's this man Bland," he panted. "He threatened to shoot me, *mon lieutenant.* It's his doing. The men listen to him. He's been lying to them about me."

Grellon tapped the bowl of his pipe on the palm of his hand and shoved it into his pocket.

"What kind of a sergeant are you?" he inquired. "Your men are out of hand and all you can do is to come running to me instead of making them listen to you!"

"Bland—" began Roupnel.

"One man's gabble can't make seventy men mutiny unless they're ripe for it. If they're ripe somebody's to blame. What the devil have you been doing since you came in two hours ago? Sitting in the sergeant's mess lapping up white wine. Too scared to go near your men. There aren't any Senegalese to back you up now, that's the trouble isn't it, with you and the other sergeants?"

He crammed his *képi* down on his head, brushed Roupnel out of his way and went striding across the parade ground toward the row of huts.

A trooper standing beside the window hardly had time to sing out, "*Le voilà!*" before he was in the room. The impact of his personality was enough to bring every trooper in the room up standing. Here was no young gentleman with a sneer on his lips and a revolver on his hip, but a rough man like themselves—huge, uncouth and unafraid.

"BLAND!" he thundered. "Which one of you's called Bland?"

"Right here," answered the trooper.

Grellon had him sized up in two seconds.

"Too tough to kill," he commented. "That's good news. You're the bird who threatened to shoot Sergeant Roupnel? What's your complaint?"

It occurred to Bland that he stood an astonishingly small chance of breaking this particular lieutenant's heart. Grellon's onslaught had caught him off his guard. Grellon's bleak eyes bored into him; but he was determined that he was not going to let anybody make a monkey out of him; go out on parade, swelter in the heat, bury all those dead men strung out for miles? Not much!"

"Complaints," he began. "Huh! We don't even get two minutes off duty."

"You've been off two hours," retorted Grellon. "That'll do; I know the chorus—bad food, bad tempers, bad feet. All right, we'll start with a clean slate. I'll

give you one minute to make up your mind. Move!"

There was a resistless drive behind his words which compelled obedience. He seemed to weigh down upon Bland and to smother him. And much to his own surprise, Bland moved. Under the circumstances there appeared to be nothing else for him to do. Before he quite knew what he was doing he was out on the parade ground, standing more or less at attention, while Grellon told Special Section No. 7 exactly what he thought of it.

His speech was gaudy with strange oaths; he used the brutal dialect of the rank and file to drive home his meaning, but not once did he call the troopers either *salopards* or swine or any of the other choice epithets so often hurled at the Legionaires' heads.

And after having told them exactly what he thought of their conduct, he went on to speak about queer, laughable things such as are rarely mentioned in the presence of jailbirds. Standing before his sullen crew with his great fists on his hips, his feet planted wide apart, he talked to them about their regiment, and about their own honor and their own self-respect.

While it lasted Bland had to force himself to be cynically amused, for Grellon's words rang like trumpets. Grellon himself was transformed. There was something irresistible about the simplicity of his appeal. He did not threaten, he did not plead; he stated facts, ramming them home one by one.

"The Legion has never yet tackled a job and failed," he concluded. "We're not going to fail here. There's seventy of us to do the work of two thousand. All right, we'll do it. The district's in an uproar? We'll calm it and show these flea bitten Arabs that it doesn't pay to shoot at Legionaires. Now you're going to clean up the huts. I'll give you until four o'clock to smarten up a bit. After that, burial party. Dismiss!"

As the ranks started to break, he called out—

"Bland, come here a minute!"

Tight mouthed and scowling, Bland confronted the lieutenant—and the latter chuckled deep down in his throat.

"Yes," he admitted, as if he were answering an unspoken question. "You're tough, *mon brave*, you're hard. But maybe you're just a bit too hard for your own good. What's the sense in going around with an arm in that condition?" he inquired, pointing to Bland's right wrist, rubbed raw by the handcuff, inflamed and suppurating. "Want to lose your arm?"

"That's nothing," shrugged Bland. "I had worse wounds than that when I was in prison—and anyway if I report sick I'll get shoved in cells. So what's the use?"

"You're not in prison now," retorted Grellon. "Come along with me and we'll patch that arm up a bit. I don't want any one-armed heroes in this section; I want Legionaires who're fit to do some work."

TEN MINUTES later, with a neat white bandage around his wrist and a faint smell of disinfectant floating in the air about him, Bland went back to his hut.

In gloomy silence the Legionaires were folding up their kits, stacking their blankets and putting the place in order. They loathed doing it; but they were doing it all the same. They looked up inquiringly at Bland as he slouched down the aisle.

"He speak to you, en?" said Morawetz. "He threaten you, not so? "What we do to him when the time comes, eh? That elephant!"

"Yea, when the time comes we'll get him," growled Bland without very much conviction. "It'll come right enough! Just give him enough rope, that's all."

But the time did not come, and that day marked a turning point in the history of Special Section No. 7.

UNAIDED, Grellon rebuilt the creaking machine and put fresh life into it. He was everywhere; he saw everything. Within forty-eight hours he knew every man by name; within a week he knew not only their military

records but something of their past lives. The food changed, the discipline changed, the canteen reopened, and the three surviving sergeants, after a period of doubt, began to walk about again with renewed confidence.

Roupnel, indeed, became entirely too cocksure for his own good. As soon as he felt sure that his throat was not going to be cut he started handing out punishments with all his former enthusiasm. Among his first victims was Bland, whom he sentenced to five days extra drill for the sake of reasserting his authority.

Now Roupnel had a way of his own with defaulters. Not content with the full load each man had to carry, he loaded them down with an extra bagful of sand perched on top their knapsacks, and to make the ordeal a little more trying he forced them to march with unlaced boots. The boots filled up with sand and before the end of the four hours drill the culprits were in agony. Two or three days of that regime usually—in Roupnel's opinion—worked wonders.

But Grellon caught him before he had been exercising his squad twenty minutes. When Grellon stopped speaking—and he had a lot to say—unorthodox punishments had been banned, sergeants were forbidden to carry revolvers on parade, and Roupnel himself had been reduced to corporal's rank.

Outside as well as inside the redoubt Grellon's influence was at work. As soon as he was sure of his men he set about the titanic task of restoring order in the territory.

There were no more purposeless patrols for ben Jeffa's people to shoot at. He went out with small parties of twenty men and ambushed the rebels, raided their villages, tracked them down through their hills and butchered them with grim enthusiasm. And as the Legionaires became accustomed to his methods he entrusted the leadership of minor operations to the non-coms and the men themselves.

He stood no nonsense from the people of Taggrourt. A riot broke out when he arrested a holy man preaching sedition on the mosque steps. He shot the holy man, turned machine guns on the rioters and fined the city ten thousand francs gold. His hand was heavy and he knew no mercy, but the merchants paid, for their caravans were no longer being looted, and murder had ceased to be an everyday occurrence.

Another riot broke out when Grellon closed the pilgrim route. Again the machine guns came into action, and the next morning, after order had been restored, twenty-four pilgrims caught with rifles hidden beneath their burnous were lined up and executed in full view of the crowd, which wailed and yelled and cursed, but very wisely refrained from any hostile acts.

Abdul ben Jeffa tried to start a holy war, and he headed for Taggrourt with five hundred warriors, promising deliverance to the city folk and death to the French.

Grellon and his seventy Legionaires fell upon his camp a day's march from the city and snuffed out the holy war with Lebel bullets.

ABDUL BEN JEFFA sued for peace. The war was, he admitted, a stalemate. Wherefore, why go on with it? He had no hope of driving the French out of Taggrourt, but on the other hand they could not hope to invade his mountains with any hope of success. His letter was a masterpiece of composition, studded with trite phrases, but it had no effect whatsoever upon Grellon.

"Tell him," he said to ben Jeffa's emissary, "tell him if he wants peace he'll have to come down here and get it. I'll wait one week. After that I'll be knocking at the gates of el Maluk."

The messenger pleaded for a longer truce, which Grellon refused to grant and the little war went on while ben Jeffa was making up his mind. The French were overrunning his hills; each day he heard fresh tales of disaster, and his power over the border clans was diminishing.

So he went down to Taggrourt—a short,

stout little man with twinkling blue eyes and a beard dyed red with henna, riding in state on a white stallion, followed by the chiefs of a score of fighting clans. And he saw sixty-odd men drawn up to greet him; sixty men in spotless white standing like rock on either side of the road. A bugle rang out; sixty rifles came up to the present with a crisp, quick rattle, hedging him in with bayonets.

"And the other troops?" he inquired as he walked beside Grellon into the redoubt.

"I heard—"

"There are no other troops," Grellon told him. "There's only Special Section No. 7 of the Foreign Legion—and you've seen all of it."

"*Inchallah!*" breathed the *kaid*, turning in his tracks to look again at the lean, expressionless faces. "My people said that there were hundreds upon hundreds of soldiers—and I see no more than sixty!"

"But they're Legionaires," Grellon reminded him. "Legionaires!"

"I know nothing of your regiments," admitted the *kaid*, "but this I do know; when there were three times as many men holding this fort they were powerless against me. Either the *djinns* of the desert have cast a curse upon me or else thou art a very clever man, and," he added, "I have little faith in the power of the *djinns* after having read your Voltaire."

"Voltaire!" snorted Grellon. "I haven't time to read anything but army reports. Come on in and have tea while we fix things up."

With that interview the last flicker of unrest died away and, very gradually, it dawned on the powers that be that something amazing had happened at Taggrout. The district had been a sore spot for so long that no one, least of all Intelligence, which is supposed to be very wise, believed it could have been cured and healed.

At Bechar and at Rabat and at Souk el Kellifa, where the poobahs sit enthroned, Grellon's laconic reports were received with incredulity. Gentlemen whose knowledge of South Morocco was encyclopedic —among them Captain du Vercourt— waited patiently for the first hint of bad news, but the news was persistently good.

And at last a party of very senior officers was sent to Taggrourt. They came to criticize; they stayed to praise, and some one woke up to the fact that all the credit for this achievement was going to go to a crew of scoundrelly Legionaires and to a lieutenant whose social standing, to put it mildly, was dubious.

The powers that be developed an almost pathetic interest in the welfare of Special Section No. 7—decimated, overworked Special Section No. 7. They came to the conclusion that the Legionaires needed and deserved a rest. They relieved the section and sent it to Souk el Kellifa, north of the Djebel Horad hills—and a commandant, gaudy with gold, went to Taggrourt to "complete the task so ably undertaken by Lieutenant Grellon".

CAPTAIN HENRI DU VERCOURT, chief intelligence officer on the staff of Colonel Lemecton, was in an execrable humor when he hurried from his office toward his bungalow on the outskirts of Souk el Kellifa.

The cause of his bad temper was Special Section No. 7. It had been stationed at Souk el Kellifa for three weeks, and ever since its arrival du Vercourt had not known a single quiet moment.

Wherever he went he had to listen to favorable comments about Grellon. It was Grellon this, and Grellon that, morning, noon and night. The creature, for all his boorish ways, was treated by his fellow officers as if he had really accomplished something out of the ordinary, and no one, not even the colonel, ever gave du Vercourt any credit at all for the spade work he had done at Taggrourt.

He felt slighted but he could not afford to complain, for what grounds for complaint could there be between a staff officer and a ranker lieutenant of the legion? He would have been accused of

jealousy, whereas he was merely indignant at so much ingratitude.

Fortunately the ladies sympathized with him. They understood him so well when he said Grellon's presence was enough to spoil the atmosphere of a gentlemen's mess. He was, they intimated, a vulgar beast, but they had to receive him for the good of the service.

The ladies' moral support was of little use to du Vercourt, however, during working hours. Officers who should have known better insisted on ramming Grellon, figuratively speaking, down his throat. That evening, for instance, though he was in a hurry to dress for dinner, he had had to hang about in the office and "yes" his colonel, while the latter raved about the sterling qualities of that monstrous boor, Grellon.

It was galling to have to smile when the Old Man blinked his eyes and gabbled:

"*Ah oui!* Success is a dangerous thing. Sometimes it is a—ah—a—er—drawback to a really successful career, if you see what I mean".

He was always saying "if you see what I mean", much to his staff captain's annoyance.

Du Vercourt had nodded his head although, as a matter of fact, he saw nothing at all, and the colonel went on, pawing about for his words:

"Now you, *mon cher*, let us assume you had—ah—had been in a position to achieve the same results while you were at Taggrourt. What would have happened? You would have been a marked man, and instead of—ah—fulfilling with so much earnest zeal the functions of chief intelligence officer, with every hope of further rapid advancement, you would be hobbled to Taggrourt for the next fifteen years. That is the penalty Grellon will have to pay for his good work down there, poor fellow!"

"I feel," ventured du Vercourt after a quick glance at his wrist watch, "I feel if I may say so, *mon colonel*, that my share of the work done at Taggrourt has been somewhat overlooked. Not that it matters, of course—but one would have thought that Lieutenant Grellon in his reports would have acknowledged—"

"Your invaluable contribution to the cause of peace," concluded Colonel Lemecton, with a slight outward flip of the hand. "Of course, of course, *mon cher*, but what will you? Grellon is not a man of much refinement. His reports are terse. He wastes no words in praise of himself nor, alas, of others. A weakness one must deplore of course, but—ah—the experience you gained at Taggrourt has stood you in good stead, if you see what I mean. I should be quite lost without you."

"Thank you, *mon colonel*," murmured du Vercourt. "You are—"

"Oh, pleasure, pleasure," Lemecton assured him, "and I see you are in a hurry, my boy. Yes, yes. I don't blame you a bit. Madame Lemecton will be quite desolated if I detain you."

And he shooed the captain out of the office with a friendly tap on the shoulder —which made du Vercourt wince. That last remark of the colonel's about his wife had sounded a trifle suspicious. One could never be quite sure what the old man was driving at. He had a trick of wrapping up his thoughts in a cloud of words, and of reaching decisions when they were least expected.

Nevertheless, du Vercourt's sense of guilt was entirely subordinate to his intense irritation against Grellon and Special Section No. 7. And while, in his mind, as he hurried along, he consigned them to eternal damnation, he saw coming toward him a long loose jointed soldier of the second class of the Foreign Legion. As a rule he never glanced at the troopers he met in the street; but the sight of this particular trooper instantly aroused his antagonism.

THE MAN in question was Charley Bland, *képi* over one eye, thumbs tucked inside his black cummerbund, strolling along as if he owned the whole of Souk el Kellifa.

A year with Grellon had not changed him much. He was still rebellious of all

authority; he obeyed grudgingly; he was still the worst soldier in Special Section No. 7. Grellon could not impress him. He had steered clear of trouble simply because he wanted to get out of the Legion and the time he spent in prison didn't count for service. So he soldiered with his tongue in his cheek, and listened with an inward grin to Grellon's infrequent outbursts about the honor of the regiment and all that sort of flubdub.

When he saw du Vercourt coming toward him he took his thumbs out of his belt, straightened his back, and favored the captain with a brisk salute.

Du Vercourt should have returned the salute and gone his way, but he was too angry to do anything so sensible.

"You there!" he snapped.

Bland came to a halt with a click of the heels. He stood looking straight to his front, slightly above the top of du Vercourt's cap, hands down, palms turned out, little fingers in line with the seams of his trousers, exactly according to the rules laid down by the manual of military training.

"Bland!" exclaimed du Vercourt.

"*Oui, mon capitaine!*"

"You know me, don't you?"

"*Oui, mon capitaine.*"

"Still out of prison, I see."

"*Oui, mon capitaine.*"

It was a most unsatisfactory conversation. Du Vercourt clenched his fists till the nails threatened to cut into the palms of his hands.

"So you have not been made to remove that filthy tattoo mark yet!" he burst out. "It's scandalous. No doubt you have been fighting with the same high courage you displayed that night at Taggrourt! Your vulnerable spot is certainly not in your back."

"*Oui, mon capitaine,*" parroted Bland.

That "*oui, mon capitaine,*" was driving du Vercourt frantic.

"You're an insolent beast," he sputtered. "Incorrigible! You'll do ten days in cells, my man. That obscene tattoo mark may have been tolerated at Taggrourt, but I'll not have it here. We don't have to be reminded of your cowardice."

"You can ask Lieutenant Grellon how much running away we've been doing of late," rasped Bland. "He'll tell you—"

"What!" cried du Vercourt. "You dare adopt that tone— Here, Corporal," he went on, beckoning to a passing noncom, "take this man to the headquarters detention room. Sentenced to ten days' cells. I'll bring in the charge later. March him away!"

For one second Bland paused, irresolute, frowning slightly as he stared at the captain; then he turned on his heel and marched away followed by the perspiring corporal.

AFTER that incident du Vercourt felt much better. With the aid of Hamed, his native orderly, he changed into a clean uniform, put a drop of *eau de cologne russe* on his handkerchief, and reached Madame Lemecton's house just in time for dinner.

There were several distinguished guests; some Rumanian officers with patent leather hair and graceful manners; a senator, who had been a minister and might pop into power again at any moment, and a political journalist sent out from Paris to write twenty thousand words of the purest gush.

All through dinner du Vercourt was kept busy quoting statistics for the benefit of the journalist, and laughing at the senator's three jokes. It was not until the party had adjourned to the salons that he came face to face with Grellon, who had been down at the far end of the table growling at the startled Rumanians.

"Look here," said Grellon without any preamble, "you've locked up one of my men."

"But of course I have," laughed du Vercourt. "He insulted me in the street so I sent him to jail for ten days. What could be more natural?"

"You spoke to him first, jeered at him, called him a coward. He referred you to me—where does the insult come in, eh?"

Several of the bystanders were letting

their coffee grow tepid while they listened to Grellon's rumbling voice. Madame Lemecton looked quite startled. The colonel, however, had heard nothing. He was standing at the other end of the room talking to the senator.

"Please," urged du Vercourt. "Can't we talk shop at some other moment? Tomorrow maybe—yes? And there is really nothing to talk about. The man offended. I had him locked up. The matter begins and ends there."

"If you are trying to ruin one of my men you're going about it the right way," retorted Grellon. "A man I've been working over for a year! A man who'll be as good a soldier as ever wore shoe leather if he's only given a chance—and you have to pick on him."

"Lieutenant Grellon," snapped du Vercourt, "I do not wish to discuss the matter further. The sentence stands. You are at liberty to take whatever steps you like through the proper channels. Meanwhile, excuse me!"

SOME minutes elapsed before du Vercourt reached Mme. Lemecton's side, for he worked his way around from group to group, with a pause here and a pause there, keeping one eye on the colonel. But the latter was explaining something in his vague way to the senator and had his back turned to the room.

"That man," said Mme. Lemecton, "suffocates me. He's paleolithic—and I have to put up with him! It's maddening. If you had seen the look on those poor Rumanians' faces. What can the colonel see in him?"

"Shall we look for a possible explanation in the garden?" murmured du Vercourt. "It's rather close in here, is it not, *chère madame?*"

So they went out into the garden and strayed down a sanded path, until they came to a place protected by a thick bank of shrubbery where the darkness was complete, and there they fell into each other's arms. Unseen, somewhere near at hand, a jet of water cascaded musically in a marble basin.

While it lasted the moment was ideal although quite improper, but it did not last very long, for a match suddenly flared like a torch, and out of the shadows leaped Grellon's unhandsome countenance with a pipe gripped between his teeth.

Mme. Lemecton's hands flew off du Vercourt's shoulders and clutched at her own white throat.

"That odious man!" she gasped, horror struck. "Spying on us! The beast!"

Grellon blew out the match, stood up and walked away, but du Vercourt brought him to a halt.

"Species of an unspeakable cad," exclaimed the captain, "you sat there, making not a sound—and you think that because this lady stumbled and fell luckily for her, into my arms—you imagine—"

"I don't have to imagine anything," Grellon's harsh voice growled in the darkness. "I don't have to."

"You are deliberately attempting to compromise us," stormed du Vercourt. "Not a sound did you make until you struck that match, hoping, no doubt, to find out something nasty. But let me tell you—"

A large, heavy hand descended upon his shoulder, and a thumb pressed alarmingly close to his windpipe.

"Don't tell me anything. I don't want to listen to any more of your gabble," snarled Grellon. "I want you to understand this: I didn't hear you coming; I didn't know you were out here at all. I was just as surprised as you were when I lit that match. Now don't try to fool me; I've seen too much, and I warn you—" his thumb crept a little closer to du Vercourt's windpipe— "I warn you, I'm giving you one week to clear out of Souk el Kellifa. If you're not gone at the end of the week, I'll take you by the neck and twist your dirty little head off your shoulders."

The lady uttered a stifled moan.

"I will not tolerate—" began du Vercourt.

"I'm a common man," Grellon went on. "Your standards and mine aren't the

same, but—" here he gave du Vercourt a slight shake—"but you are not going to make a laughing stock of the Old Man while I'm around. You're warned; get out of here or I'll break you in two."

He pushed du Vercourt away from him, wiped his hands on his tunic, and went stamping down the path, grumbling all to himself.

"Do you think he'll say anything?" sobbed the lady. "He frightens me so! I knew something would happen. It's your fault—"

"I believe he will keep his mouth shut for the present," du Vercourt assured her. "He's dangerous, of course. The imbecile really thinks he can compel me to ask for a transfer!"

"It's too dreadful! If there is a scandal—"

"There will be no scandal," he declared. "That ugly brute is going out on patrol day after tomorrow. That gives us a few days in which to find a means of drawing his claws, and I feel certain I can manage it."

"You must manage it," she insisted.

"Depend upon me to do all that need be done," murmured du Vercourt, that gallant gentleman, bending low to kiss the lady's fingertips.

And he was as good as his word.

BECAUSE of his good understanding with Abdul ben Jeffa, Grellon had been detailed to reconnoiter the northern foothills of the Djebel Horad range and to report upon the flow of water at a place called Bekhedar.

His presence at this point, it was believed, would not arouse ben Jeffa's suspicions, and general headquarters' most urgent desire was to keep the *kaid* in an amiable frame of mind until they were ready to deal with him.

At some future date they meant to smash him very thoroughly, for independent *kaids* ruling over forbidden cities are an anachronism in a well administered protectorate, and in their slow way they were gathering together information and men in sufficient quantities to smother ben Jeffa at the first blow.

Of these matters, however, Grellon was altogether ignorant. There was nothing secret about his orders, but the next afternoon before he left his office du Vercourt scribbled a few lines on a sheet of paper, marked it "confidential" in large red letters and slipped it into his pocket.

When he dressed for dinner that evening he placed the paper on his dressing-table beneath a hair brush, and went out without it.

As soon as his back was turned his faithful orderly, Hamed, made a copy of the document and carried it to the house of a poultry dealer, who lived not far from the barracks. Having read the message the dealer gave Hamed twenty francs, which he quickly recovered, for he knifed the orderly between the shoulder blades as the latter was about to leave to make sure that the secret would be well kept.

Later that night a Fathi man rode south toward the hills with the message tucked away in the amulet bag hung around his neck.

And a little later yet du Vercourt, coming home from mess, smiled when he saw that the paper held down by the brush had been disturbed. He burned the paper and then went to bed, but he had to pull off his own boots, for his servant had been found dead in an alleyway near the entrance of a disreputable grogshop.

A LEADEN tinge had crept into the sky, but it was still pitch dark in the valley where Special Section No. 7 was encamped by the Bekhedar well.

Charley Bland yawned and scratched himself vigorously behind his right ear. He was bored, he was tired, and his legs ached. He grunted wearily as he shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

Another hour to go before reveille; another sixty minutes of standing about peering at the empty shadows, and after that a full day's marching to be done. It was, he told himself, a hell of a life.

As the minutes dragged by he almost regretted that Grellon had not left him alone in the cells to finish his ten-day sentence. Grellon had fished him out at the end of the fifth day, just before the section left Souk el Kellifa.

"I know how you feel, my lad," Grellon had told him. "You're sore and I don't blame you. But you'll swallow your medicine and forget it."

"Medicine," grumbled Bland. "I wasn't sick," and he added, "I served my time for having struck the captain. I did three years, but if I'm to be punished every time he feels like it, I might as well—"

"I thought you were tougher than that," laughed Grellon. "I never expected to hear you whine because you've had to spend five days in a cell."

"Aw, it's not that," confessed Bland. "I've had a clean sheet for almost a year, and then this comes along—"

"You great fool!" thundered Grellon. "I make the entries in your military booklet, don't I? Have I asked you for yours? Do you think I want my section's record all spotty with fooling offenses? Get to your barrackroom and pack your kit—and for *l'amour de Dieu* don't stand here gaping at me!"

That had happened a week ago. Ever since then the section had been scouting about among the northern foothills of the Djebel Horad range—as desolate and foreboding a land as Bland had ever set eyes on.

He leaned his forearms on the muzzle of his rifle, and rested his chin on his crossed wrists. Before he was conscious of what he was doing both his eyes were shut and he was asleep. He caught himself just in time and straightened up, grunting.

The grunt died away in his throat. He craned forward, trying to pierce the thick wall of darkness. Something, he thought, was squirming along the ground; a black, bulky something, which might be a stone. The stillness weighed against his eardrums, and the quick thudding of his heart oppressed. He was very much aware of the hundred yards of empty ground which lay between his post and the camp. His back felt broad and vulnerable. Again he thought he saw the dark mass move. He waited one long second, and all at once he knew that the thing had moved, and that to right and left of it there were other dim figures. He heard the faint scratching sound of cloth dragged over sand. A pebble slithered, rolled and bounced down the face of a ledge of rock.

"*Aux armes!*" yelled Bland. "*Alerte!*"

Fire leaped from the muzzle of his rifle; a rending crash smashed the stillness. Out of the darkness a man leaped at him. He fired again, and the man dropped, howling, at his feet.

He went stumbling back toward the camp, tripping and blundering among the loose stones. A hundred rifles blazed away behind him, and the valley filled with thunder. A sleet of bullets sang past Bland's ears, and almost at once he was hit; a slug tore a long groove along his ribs, and bowled him over, knocking all the breath out of his body. He crawled into camp on hands and knees.

FROM the first the Legionaires stood no chance. Blinded by the darkness, they were cut down by a storm of lead as they came scrambling out from under their shelter tents. Before they had time to form, the hillsmen came at them, hemmed them in, and butchered them in among the ropes and the sagging tents.

Together with a score of other leaderless men Bland fought for his life. When his bayonet jammed and broke, he clubbed his rifle and swung it at the shaved heads swirling before him. The squad held its own, drove off its assailants, reloaded, and broke up the next rush while it was still a gray menace rolling in toward them out of the shadows.

Grellon loomed up before Bland's bleary eyes, a titanic creature gripping a bent rifle barrel in his paw.

"*Ça va!*" he yelled. "It's going good. Hold 'em! When the light comes we'll smash hell out of 'em." He cupped his

hands about his mouth and roared, "Corporal Roupnel, this way with the machine guns—on the right flank, Corporal—"

A yell answered him, and the hillsmen who had been creeping in under cover of the dust and smoke, uprose and closed in, sweeping upon the camp like a black tidal wave. It pressed in close against the battered square, threatening to swamp it beneath an overwhelming weight of numbers. For a fraction of a second Bland caught sight of Grellon out in front of the line, towering breast high above a swarm of naked brown men, swinging his rifle barrel at the end of his long arms. Then, abruptly, Grellon vanished.

Other Legionaires had seen him go down. They surged forward, a handful of cursing, snarling men, but the pressure against them was too great. Step by step they had to give ground. The dead and the wounded were trampled under foot, and were lost as Grellon had been lost.

Day was close at hand. The stars were gone and the hilltops were afire, and the shadows in the valley were growing thin. A shaft of sunlight lighted up the pillar of dust boiling about the Bekhedar well.

And as if it had been waiting for the full glare of the dawn to come into action a machine gun jarred off with a rattle. It coughed, sputtered, coughed again, and settled down to a staccato chatter, counting out its bullets, two hundred to the minute.

Through a gap in the Legionaires' ranks it hosed down the rebels, rank upon rank, heaping up the dead four deep. Mechanical and dispassionate, it chattered steadily in the midst of the turmoil, and before its fiery blast the warriors of the Djebel Horad, for all their high courage, were brought to a standstill.

The attack withered away, and as the survivors retreated another machine gun and a pair of automatic rifles blazed away at them and shot them down as they ran.

Special Section No. 7—thirty-two weary men—was left in possession of the well, but the position was untenable. Above them on the hill slopes, and down in the steep banked ravines, and behind the boulders a host of unseen marksmen banged away at them. There were no leaders left; Grellon was gone and the sergeants lay dead.

For a few minutes the Legionaires held on, long enough to put their wounded out of their pain and to hunt among the corpses for some trace of Grellon. They found his blood soaked *képi* and, in an Arab's fist, they found a strip of khaki cloth, but of the man himself there was no sign.

"If they caught him alive," hazarded a trooper, "they'll be a week killing him. A strong fellow like him."

"He's dead, I'm telling you," snarled Bland. "Just forget that stuff, will you?"

"Then where is he," insisted the Legionaire. "We've looked all over the place."

"Quit arguing and get busy!" broke in Corporal Roupnel. "Fill your water bottles and grab all the cartridges you can find. We're going to clear out of here."

ALL MORNING snipers hung on to the flanks of the section, but the valley slowly widened out and by noontime, when the Legionaires halted in the middle of a bare plain, the last marksman had been left behind.

Crushed down by the flaming white sun, they sat hunched and silent, each man busy with his own thoughts.

"*Eh bien, les copains,*" one man said at last, "we've been properly licked. We'll go back to Souk el Kellifa with our tails between our legs."

"Yes, and who's to blame?" jeered Roupnel. "Who? That species of a great, blustering fool of an officer. Grellon, he's to blame! I'm glad to see the last of him! So darn clever he thought he was, and look what kind of a trap he led us into!"

Bland, who had been squatting with his head on his knees, sat up with a jerk. It was as if Roupnel's words had eaten into his brain and set it on fire. What right had this yellow toothed swine to criticize Grellon? And all at once, for

unfathomable reasons, he was filled with blind fury against Roupnel.

The words burst from his lips—

"Where the hell *are* we going?"

Roupnel jeered at him.

"Where do you think, *salopard?* Back to Souk el Kellifa, back to the girls and the good red wine. That's where we're going as quick as we can leg it!"

It is a debatable question whether Bland was wholly sane. Rifle in hand, he was on his feet, standing almost on top of Roupnel.

"You're wrong," he shouted. "We're turning back. We're going to find what's left of Grellon if we have to go to el Maluk to fetch him!"

"When I give an order," began Roupnel, "I don't expect—"

"You can't give orders to this section," retorted Bland. "We're not licked until the last man's down. Those lousy Arabs broke the truce. They've knocked us silly, but that doesn't mean we're through. We're not! We're going back to fetch the lieutenant. Ain't that so?" he demanded, wheeling upon the Legionaires. "Ain't that right? Anybody want to follow this corporal?"

He didn't attempt to plead with them. He stated bald facts, and when he mentioned Grellon by name the Legionaires came to their feet with a shout. Thirty ragged scoundrels who cheered because in all probability they were going to die.

The only sane man among them was Corporal Roupnel. He was the senior non-commissioned officer present, a corporal who had been a sergeant. He might be a sergeant again now that Grellon was out of the way. He had a right to give orders and to compel obedience.

He snatched up his rifle. Some one shouted a warning. Bland swung around, saw the danger, and knocked the muzzle of Roupnel's rifle skyward with a sweep of the arm.

"Kill him," urged a trooper. "He's not worth saving."

A second shot rang out and Roupnel pitched forward on to his face.

CLOSE on a thousand men were gathered in the small market square at el Maluk, and each second more men and more horses and more camels came pouring out of the narrow streets to mingle with the crowd.

There was a babel of tongues, a riot of colors. The dust kicked up by the trampling feet smelled of dung and sweat and roasting coffee. Blindingly the sunlight struck down upon the close packed throng. Blue clad Tuaregs rubbed shoulders with naked, coal black Bantu slaves; nearby stood a group of stocky Berber hillsmen in ragged snuff colored *djellabas;* a hawk faced Algerian with a gaudy straw hat perched on top of his turbaned head threaded his way through the crowd. A Tunisian dandy in a pale green *haik* leaned against a pillar of the covered walk.

And all that crowd, reflected Grellon, had come together to witness the manner of his death. He lay in an iron barred cage, in the full glare of the sun, on the edge of the terraced roof of Abdul ben Jeffa's palace. His arms were strapped behind his back and a rough bandage had been plastered over the sword gash which had ripped him open from shoulder to hip. A cloud of flies hovered about his head and crawled sluggishly over his body. His clothes, save for the tattered remnant of his trousers, had been stolen, and the sun had roasted his tough skin, blackened it and puffed it up in great welts.

He had been kept in that cage for four days so that he might regain a little strength before they tortured him. Four days of filth and flies and torment; he was quite ready to die.

The sound of footsteps made him turn his eyes, though he did not move his head. Two negroes had come out onto the terrace, one carrying a chair, the other a parasol of red silk fringed with gold. Behind the negroes appeared Abdul ben Jeffa, placid, portly, and faintly smiling.

He sat down, sighing contentedly.

"In an hour," he said, "after the midday prayer, they will take you down into

the square and fasten you to that stake you see over there to the right. It is good that so many men should see how grotesque a Frenchman can be—under certain peculiar conditions."

Grellon roused himself with an effort.

"My death will change nothing," he muttered, and his voice was so indistinct that ben Jeffa had to lean a little sidewise to catch the words. "You have broken our truce, but after me will come other men—enough men to blow el Maluk off the face of the earth."

Ben Jeffa laughed in his red beard.

"Liar! May those words choke you as you die. Had I not stopped you you would have been at the gates of el Maluk. *Inchallah!* One of us is a traitor—and that one is you, and you are going to die quite slowly, in great pain. Do you think I am unwise enough to trust the word of any Frenchman? Have I not watched you shoot down and enslave free men—and then heard your pious cant about your civilization?

"Your civilization indeed! When we fight we fight for a faith, for an idea, for our God, but you fight slavering jawed for money, for markets, for the minerals in the bowels of my hills. Christian murders Christian for the sake of loot—outlaw nations all of you! Yet you want us to suffer your law and your order. You want us to share the blessings of your corrupt civilizations and to waste our lives in your mines!

"Shall I trust such men? Not I! But I did trust you—and you would have cut my throat had I not been warned in time!"

"Warned of what?"

"Of your coming! Aye, you send your spies to el Maluk and I stick their heads on spikes, but my spies walk untroubled through the streets of your towns, and you are too blind to see them. I had a copy of your orders in my hands the day after you left Souk el Kellifa!"

"A copy of my orders?" repeated Grellon, forcing himself to listen.

"Your secret orders, stolen from Captain du Vercourt's room by his own orderly, and sent on to me by my agent!" snarled ben Jeffa.

GRELLON'S eyes opened wide and an amazed oath burst from his lips.

"Du Vercourt!" he exclaimed. "What's he got to do with this?"

"Still shamming?" sneered ben Jeffa. "Still keeping up the pretense though in a little while you must die? Is your brain addled that you can not understand?" He drew from his pouch a crumpled slip of paper and shook it at Grellon. "Here it is," he snarled. "Here in my hand. Listen to it if you have forgotten the words:

> "Lieutenant Grellon's request is hereby granted. Since he believes that he can deceive Abdul ben Jeffa as to the purpose of his mission, he is hereby authorized to proceed to el Maluk and to occupy the city.

"Now deny it! Tell me it is false! Thou dog of a Frenchman. Thou cur!"

"But that's crazy stuff," protested Grellon. "That's not an army order—no order was ever made out in that form. Never! Where the devil did it come from?"

"From Captain du Vercourt's room, as I have told you before." He spat through the bars full in Grellon's face. "A secret order," he jeered, "but not a secret for me. The fool left the paper in his room, for he trusted his servant!"

Grellon sank back exhausted against the bars of the cage.

"Yes," he admitted, "I believe you. You're not lying. You couldn't have invented that. It's du Vercourt, because he was afraid—"

He stared with bloodshot, maddened eyes at the marketplace where du Vercourt had condemned him to die. Death for himself he did not mind, but when he thought of his murdered Legionaires he strangled with rage and strained against his bonds.

Over yonder, above the red gateway on the far side of the square, a row of

skulls grinned back at him—the skulls of his own men.

And Abdul ben Jeffa taunted him:

"See them come. From the very ends of the earth. Men from Cairo and men from Mogador—and that one with the peaked turban, an Afghan. One faith, one creed girdling the earth! Watch them pray to the One True God to shake from their shoulders the yoke of the Unbeliever."

A hush had fallen over the gathering for a muezzin had appeared on the platform of the minaret flanking the mosque. Four times he called, and as his voice died away the Faithful went down on their knees and bowed their heads in the dust.

And even while they prayed more men came straggling in through the gate, and among them was a party of thirty men dressed in rags, who brought with them two small gray donkeys staggering beneath the weight of wicker baskets filled with bulky objects packed in canvas sacking.

"Men from the coast," explained Abdul ben Jeffa, who prayed only on state occasions. "From Tangiers by the looks of that burnous. Even the beggars come to el Maluk, for beggars can rebel against your authority."

After a whispered consultation the party of Tangiers beggars split in two, each half taking a donkey with it. One group stayed by the gateway, while the other worked its way along beneath the shaded portico until it reached the southeast corner of the square.

For a moment these men stood looking curiously at the kneeling multitude, but much to the *kaid's* surprise they made no attempt to join the worshippers.

"Rabble!" he commented angrily.

One long, gaunt ruffian, wearing a grey burnous which hung in rags, looked up, shielding his eyes with his hand, and it seemed to Grellon that the man's bearing was queerly familiar. He saw the beggar turn and speak to his companions, and they too turned and stared up at him for a second—and his heart began to race and pound against his ribs, and a wild impulse seized him to yell.

Beside him ben Jeffa was clucking indignantly as he watched the strange antics of the beggars.

They were bending over the baskets on the donkey's backs. Something hard and bright flashed in the sunlight. All at once one man began to squirm violently. He tried to shout, but the cry became a gargle. Worshippers kneeling near at hand were beginning to look up. Then the lanky beggar who had first noticed Grellon cupped his hands about his mouth and bellowed loud and clear:

"*Allez, les gars.* Let 'em have it!"

A roar answered him. Two Legionaires armed with automatic rifles, one at each end of the square, opened fire simultaneously. Seconds later the machine guns were hoisted out of the baskets, mounted on their tripods and brought into action. Rifles came out from under the torn burnouses and added their sharp voices to the chorus.

PANIC lay hold of the crowd. The multitude uprose as one man and flung itself at the narrow exits, and the bullets drummed into it, piling the dead waist high in the street entrances. Some escaped; some tried to rush the guns; others, taking shelter behind the corpses, tried to fight back, but the bullets found them and wiped them out.

Before his eyes Abdul ben Jeffa saw the pick of the fighting men of the Djebel Horad pounded to pieces, and when the marketplace had been swept bare of its living freight, a squad of Legionaires came running toward the palace. The doors gave way beneath the weight of their blows. A string of shots rang out, a woman screamed. Bland scrambled out on the terrace, and behind him other men appeared — filthy, bearded scoundrels, grinning from ear to ear.

Ben Jeffa came out of his trance. He snatched at his revolver, dragged it from its holster and fired.

Bland hurled himself forward. His bayonet slid home hilt deep into the

kaid's chest. They fell together at the base of the parapet, and it was only when he tried to struggle to his feet that Bland realized that he had been wounded. Ben Jeffa's last bullet had drilled him through the left thigh, and his leg throbbed with a dull pain.

"T'aint nothing," he told himself, and he added a triumphant, "What th' hell?" as he lurched over to help his mates release Grellon.

And Grellon, great fool that he was, was crying, which did not improve his appearance.

His tears, however, did not last long. The Legionaires gave him a drink of water mixed with looted cognac, and carried him below. It took six men to tote him into the *kaid's* harem, which boasted of the one comfortable couch in the palace.

"What happened, *mon lieutenant?*" said Bland, who was beginning to turn green. "Well, nothing much so far as I know. We sort of decided we didn't want to go back to Souk el Kellifa. So we cornered some pilgrims and helped ourselves to their lousy clothes. We kept a couple of 'em to show us the road, but they weren't what you might call dependable. One of 'em tried to squeal just before we opened fire. That's about all there is to it, *mon lieutenant.* Things seem to be growing quiet outside."

"You're good lads," said Grellon, squatting among the cushions. "I'll make Legionaires out of you yet."

The troopers in their verminous rags looked modestly down at their toes. If they had been schoolgirls they might have simpered, but they were not schoolgirls and one trooper gave vent to his emotion by spitting on a perfectly good carpet.

Grellon, however, was in no mood to hand out any more bouquets. Something had to be done and done quickly. He was in possession of el Maluk and might be able to hold it for a few days, or hours, until the hillsmen recovered from their momentary panic. If reinforcements arrived promptly it might be possible to pacify the Djebel Horad range without further trouble.

"You've done a sound piece of work," he went on, "but we're not through yet. I want one man who knows how to stick in a saddle to ride back to Souk el Kellifa at once. Chances are he won't get through, but it's got to be tried. He'll have to ride until he drops, day and night."

One man stepped forward.

"Me, *mon lieutenant,*" he began, "on my old people's farm at Steenvorde, I used to ride—"

"A plowhorse," broke in Bland, "a plowhorse, *mon lieutenant.* That fat Belgian! Now me, I used to ride real horses. I've ridden in Central Park in New York City, and there was a time—"

"You've been wounded, haven't you?" inquired Grellon. "What's all that gore down your leg?"

"I can have that attended to when I reach Souk el Kellifa," Bland assured him. "I wouldn't be much use around here, *mon lieutenant.* Better let me go."

"*Bon,*" agreed Grellon. "You'll do. I can't write; my arms are still numb. Find Colonel Lemecton and tell him this: The section's at el Maluk. He's to rush in every man he can spare. Got that?"

"*Oui, mon lieutenant.*"

"All right. And tell him this. Listen carefully: ben Jeffa attacked us at Bekhader because he thought we were planning to break our promise. He was led to believe this because of a secret document a spy stole out of Captain du Vercourt's room. I'll furnish all details later together with a copy of the document. That's all, and if you should see Captain du Vercourt give him my best wishes. All that straight in your nut?"

"*Oui, mon lieutenant.*"

"Then find a horse and travel," ordered Grellon. "Wait!" he called out. "Come here, *mon brave,* pick up my hand and give it a shake. That's right; I'm proud of you!"

"Thank you, *mon lieutenant,*" brayed Bland.

He turned and stamped out of the room, leaving a dribble of blood behind him on the carpet.

COLONEL LEMECTON drummed with his finger tips on the table top.

"I don't understand it at all," he complained. "This will upset all the general's carefully prepared plans, if you see what I mean. One was under the impression that there was no sign of trouble and this—this set-back occurs."

"Personally," admitted Captain du Vercourt, adopting a diffident manner, "personally I have never believed in this so-called truce."

"No? Well, well!" The colonel's mind came back to earth. "So you didn't believe in the truce, eh? Yet it worked splendidly, and I must say no hint of impending disaster came to me through your department."

"Absolutely none, I quite agree," smiled du Vercourt. "What I meant to say was that too much dependence should never be placed on the promise of a native. This ben Jeffa—I believe Lieutenant Grellon trusted him too much, and in consequence he must have failed to take all the precautions he should have taken."

"That means every scrap of work will have to be done over again! We're as far from a settlement of this confounded area as ever we were! Trouble, trouble, trouble!"

"Without wanting to decry the very real merits of Lieutenant Grellon," drawled du Vercourt, "particularly at the present time when we feel his loss so keenly—yet it seems to me that he was inclined to be rather rash."

"I don't understand it," repeated the colonel. "Something happened—and the general is clamoring at the other end of the wire. He's coming down in person to investigate!"

He jumped from his chair and paced about the room with his hands clasped behind his back.

"That *kaid* ought to have been shot!" he exclaimed.

"My very thought," agreed du Vercourt. "Had I been in Grellon's place, when he actually had the *kaid* in the redoubt at Taggrourt—"

IT WAS at that moment that they were interrupted by an excited, sputtering orderly officer, who begged to inform the colonel that a man who professed to be a Legionaire belonging to Special Section No. 7 had been found on the outskirts of Souk el Kellifa dragging himself along on hands and knees.

"He's shockingly wounded," explained the officer, "and he appears to be out of his mind. But he says he has a verbal message for you from Lieutenant Grellon. He won't give it to anybody but you, *mon colonel.* He did say that the section has reached el Maluk—"

"What!" yelled the colonel.

"El Maluk," repeated the officer.

"*Ça, par exemple!*" began the colonel. He waved the orderly officer out of the room. "Bring that man in," he ordered. "Right in here. I'll see him at once!"

He caught du Vercourt by the arm and walked him up and down and about the room, while he cried:

"El Maluk! Grellon at el Maluk! Why, he can't have more than thirty men. Think of all the corpses we found at Bekhader. It's amazing! Doesn't it amaze you?"

"Er—oh, of course!" agreed du Vercourt, trying to keep his voice from squeaking. "It's most extraordinary. Perhaps there's some misunderstanding—"

But there was no misunderstanding at all. Bland was brought in lying on a stretcher, an emaciated, semi-delirious creature, riddled with bullets, and wheezing.

Word by word he gave the colonel Grellon's message, omitting nothing, and when he had finished Lemecton turned to du Vercourt with a puzzled look on his face.

"What is this secret order?" he inquired. "I know of no secret order."

Du Vercourt spoke between stiff white lips.

"Indeed, *mon colonel,*" he exclaimed. "May I fetch you a copy?"

Quite jauntily he stepped into the adjoining office and closed the door behind him. Seconds later a shot rang out, and Lemecton, wrenching open the door saw that the position of chief intelligence officer at Souk el Kellifa had been abruptly vacated by its occupant.

"You might help Captain du Vercourt," he told the orderly officer. "He has had an—ah—unfortunate accident, if you see what I mean."

The officer saw quite clearly what the colonel meant. Du Vercourt's accident was final and irremediable. The bullet had pierced the back of his mouth and smashed his spine.

Colonel Lemecton bent down beside the stretcher and peered curiously at the tattooed skull and crossbones which showed dark blue beneath the grime on Bland's forehead. Queer folk, Legionaires! Thirty of them had gone to el Maluk and captured it, and this one had ridden back in three days. They had done the work of a battalion, these strange, hard mouthed foreigners.

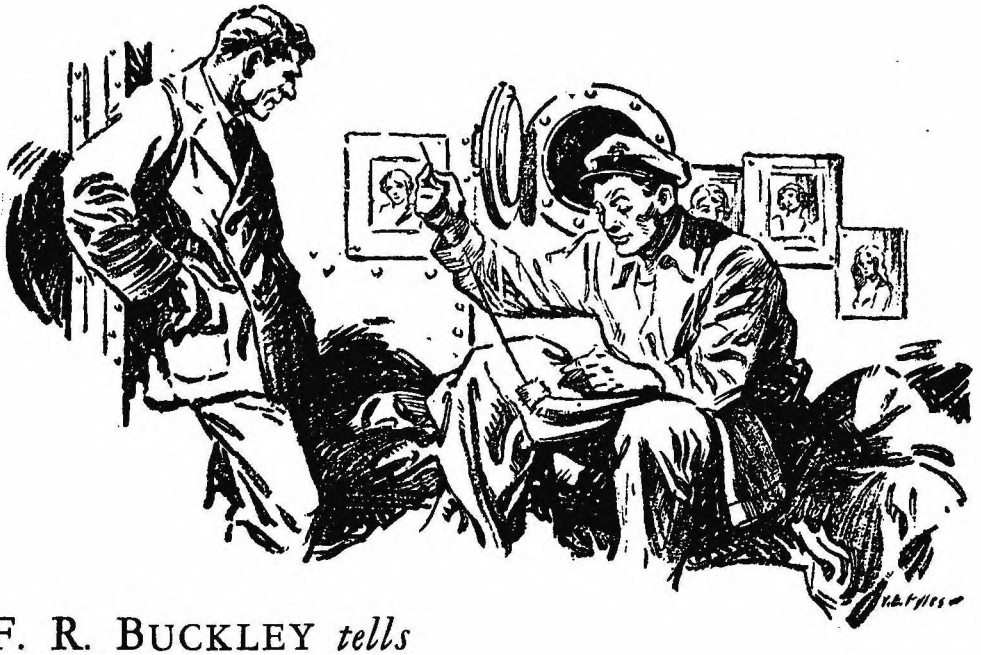
"You have done a magnificent piece of work," he declared. "Your prowess will live long in the annals of your regiment."

Bland lay perfectly still, breathing heavily through his wide open mouth. His breath rattled faintly in his throat. His lips were flecked with a pinkish froth.

"Is he going to live?" Lemecton inquired, speaking in the ear of the medical orderly who, to emphasize his professional standing in the colonel's presence, was feeling Bland's pulse. "He's badly hit, isn't he?"

Then Bland opened one eye and looked up at the colonel with an expression of profound disgust on his face.

"Am I going to live?" he croaked. "Am I? I am! I'm too tough to kill!"



F. R. BUCKLEY *tells*

a wise and sparkling tale
of a much married mate

IN EVERY PORT

IN A SMALL room of which the oscillation was violent and continual, and whose axis changed its polarity with a jerk about twice per minute, the second officer of the steamship *Elizabeth Wakelin* was patching his winter weight underwear with spunyarn; a very fortunate young second officer, one might have thought, in respect both of heredity and of environment.

To be sure, he was momentarily located at a point sixteen days from Liverpool, and near the center of the worst storm of a bad year, in a ship whose certificate of inspection had about three months more to run; but, more immediately, his steam heater was in commission and his cabin lay to port, whereas the northeaster which was causing the *Elizabeth* to stand alternately on her bow and her stern blew, since the ship was westbound, upon the starboard hand.

As for heredity, Mr. James Wilson was a symposium of all that was best in his ancestors; he was six feet in height, and broad in proportion; he had features of that benevolent aquilinity which looks best under a uniform cap; his eyes were of a deep blue; and in his thirty-fourth year, the black hair over his ears was romantically touched with gray.

Yet he plied his sail needle after the

manner of one brooding over a great wrong; and, when the third officer entered completely sheathed in ice and swearing steadily as he wrung frozen hands together, Mr. Wilson expressed his resentment in action.

"Shut that door!" he shouted; but arose to slam it himself, and also to catch the third officer urgently by the shoulders.

"Oh, no, you don't. Oh, no, you don't by any means sit down on my settee and get it all sopping wet. If you're going to come in here, you're first going to park that tarpaulin in the alley.

"I can't get the catches undone," said the third officer plaintively, and added, after certain remarks of a quasi-theological nature, "The catches are all frozen up; and my fingers are as stiff as—"

"Crack the ice off against the outside bulkhead," snarled his host, "and bunt the catches open with your wrists. What's the matter with you? Never been to sea before?"

"You're a blanked unfeeling blank," moaned the Third.

There ensued from the alleyway sounds as of large scale and ill tempered deliveries of refrigerating materials; and he returned.

"You wait till you've done your trick," said the third mate, seating himself and rocking to and fro with his hands under his armpits. "Oh, hell. The dodger's carried away."

"WHAT'S the wind?" asked Mr. Wilson, looking up as he moistened the end of a new strand of yarn.

"Nor'nor'east—about five. Right in the earhole; and honest to—"

"I suppose you want some whisky," said the needleman wearily. "Here you are. I suppose you can take it out of the bottle, can't you? And if you could leave me a drop I'd be very appreciative."

The third officer proved both abilities. Then he wiped his mouth with a hand miraculously warmer and less stiff.

"Oh, gosh," he said, pulling off his boots and disposing his feet on the radiator. "What you doing? Patching your pants?"

"No, I'm walking down Piccadilly Circus on my hands. And will you kindly," howled Mr. Wilson, "take your everlastingly condemned hoofs off that steam? What do you think this is, a Turkish bath?"

"You're an unfeeling swine," said the third officer, obeying. "What's the matter, anyway? Haven't you got a housewife with you?"

"Do you think I'd be usin' spunyarn an' a sail needle if I had, you fool?" inquired the second officer bitterly. "I figured I'd got a wife in Liverpool, never mind a housewife. This is a fine way to send a man to sea, ain't it? Look at this vest. Six months to get my gear ready, and *look* at it!"

"I didn't know you were married," said the third officer sympathetically.

"Well, you do now," said Mr. Wilson, "and I hope it'll be a warning to you. For the love of Pete, what's Chester tryin' to do with the ship? Is the Old Man on the bridge?"

The *Elizabeth*, having risen on her haunches as if to take a fence, changed her mind and her course at the same time, shuddered as a sea caught her full broadside, and then turned back into paths of virtue with a wrench that flung all the second officer's shaving tackle to the floor.

"Yes, he's up there—having a regular Donnybrook over the engineroom speaking tube. Gregory claims we'll have to heave to, or our coal won't last. Been married long?"

"Long enough to wish I was like the rest of you guys," said the second officer. "What you going to do with that razor—cut your nails with it? Put it back on the washstand, will you? That's a pre-war Kropp."

"How do you mean?" asked the third.

"You can go ashore," said Mr. Wilson darkly, "and get stewed, and have floosies go through your jeans with a vacuum cleaner, an' come aboard safe in the arms of the harbor police, an' have a wonderful time. I'm not made that way. When I

come off a trip, I don't want to spend my pay getting myself sick. I want to live a decent life, and have a home, an' a pipe an' an armchair, an' somebody to put my slippers out to warm for me, an' have a picture of the ship hangin' out in the front vestibule, an' send me off to sea comfortable. Time the *City of Manchester* was laid up in Birkenhead, I could have had a hot time in the old town, and don't you think I couldn't; two months of it. What did I do? Went around looking for a nice respectable girl that'd kind of mother me a bit, and married her all straight and proper in Liverpool Cathedral. And now look at this pair of socks! You take my advice, bud; lay off the marriage racket."

"Couldn't afford it anyway," said the third officer, staring at the socks with the fixity of near hypnosis.

"That's no protection, these days," said Mr. Wilson. "There's rafts of them that earn their own livings. Say, if you're goin' to sleep, wouldn't it be just as well to use your own cabin?"

The third mate brought himself back to consciousness with an effort.

"Maybe you're right," he said, rising slowly, "only, my God, it is so cold! The radiator ain't workin', and I've had a sea down the ventilator."

"You ought to keep a cushion in it," said Mr. Wilson, indicating his own ventilator, from which an embroidered Red Indian dripped salt water into a bucket. "Good night."

"So long," said the Third, yawning. "Think of me at eight bells."

He turned at the threshold to add a cheery afterthought.

"You'll have the skipper up with you, so keep your breath clean."

"Will you shut that door?"

IT WAS now eight-thirty by the clock which hung over the head of Mr. Wilson's bunk. Three and a half hours until he was due on watch. He arose, bit off his thread, thrust his needle into the pink silk pincushion that swung from a corner of his mirror and proceeded to dress himself in the underwear already mended. The steam radiator, it seemed to him, had not yet recovered from the contact of the third officer's feet; he produced a rag and wiped it dry, after which process and some consideration, he sought a small wrench, neatly wrapped with others in a chamois case, and for some fifteen minutes tinkered with the air valve.

The radiator, spitting a quantity of hot water into Mr. Wilson's face, responded nobly to treatment; the red line of the thermometer on the wall above it crept up to forty-seven degrees; and the second officer, regarding this while he scratched reflectively his tattooed left arm, almost smiled his satisfaction.

Inspection of the bottle showed that there was no more than enough for a nip at four A.M., so he retired this possibility under the pillow of his bunk. Then he stuffed his prospective mending into a drawer and pulled forth a collapsible reading lamp which he connected to a privately owned double socket clamped to the head of the settee.

Before emptying the bucket of salt water down the washstand he removed his slippers and placed them on the radiator; so that by the time he had found his copy of *Genuine Confessions*, they were gratefully warm. Wriggling his toes into them and hanging his shirt, trousers and pea jacket where they would be warmed in their turn, Mr. Wilson lay down for a period of intellectual entertainment.

He noted that the fourth engineer, to whom he had recently lent his periodical, had read it without washing his hands; a large thumbprint in black grease blotted out the facial expression of a young lady just about to make the great mistake of her life; and there was a certain added violence in Mr. Wilson's pulling out of a drawer wherein to anchor his foot.

Scarcely had he taken this precaution against being flung to the deck, than his door was thrown open again.

This time it was the chief officer.

"Hey, Jim," he cried, "sling on your duds and tumble out. Quick! Shake a

leg! The Old Man says he's going down to beat the block off Gregory. Shake it up!"

Mr. Wilson choked back the seven different grounds of protest which had risen to his lips, slung *Genuine Confessions* to the other side of the room and reached for his jacket.

"Hey—wait a minute!" he yelled after the departing chief officer. "Why don't you get the Third, too?"

"Tried him—he's caulked off and I can't wake him," said the chief. "Make it snappy, Jim. Oh, what a night!"

"What's the—" began Mr. Wilson, bringing one leg through the narrows of his trousers and to safe anchorage on the floor; but the chief officer was gone, leaving the door open to a breeze which forthwith blew all the clothes off the second officer's bunk.

Disregarding this and completing his frugal toilet with a pea jacket, oilskins and a pair of sea boots, Mr. Wilson staggered forward to the charthouse.

Here Captain W. P. V. Saunders, sometime county councillor of Wallasey, Cheshire, England, and a shoregoing pillar of the Merseyside Methodist Church, was removing outer garments, with language which his deacons, however broad minded, could not have approved. Behind him, slanting to strange angles as the ship dived at stranger angles still, stood the chief officer, engaged in delighted pantomime. From the aft bulkhead, the swinging mouthpiece of the speaking tube bubbled and spat as if still manned at its far end by a furious engineer.

"TELL 'm to stop swearing an' come up an' fight," said Captain Saunders, rolling a bloodshot eye over his shoulder. "I've had enough of that Scotchman, Mr. Wilson. I'm goin' down an' show him who's master of this ship, an I want you along as a witness. You can put it in the log. Got to trim down my seamanship to his everlastingly celestially neglected tea kettle engines, have I? Chester, don't you let that damn' fool at the wheel let her swing off her course again, or there'll be trouble. Now, then, Wilson. Come on!"

"You better have your coat, sir. It's—"

"Condemn and dynamite my coat," roared the skipper in synonyms. "I'll get warm knocking seven bells out of that Aberdeen penny biter. Come on!"

So they went down the aft bridge ladder by the simple process of seating themselves, throwing the crooks of their elbows over handrails coated six inches thick with sleet and sliding down the ice filled steps; crossed, with some prayers and more oaths from Mr. Wilson, the unsheltered ten yards between deckhouses and at last arrived in the lee of the engineroom superstructure, where there awaited them a barrel shaped individual in a cotton singlet. Behind him, wearing anything that had first come to hand, stood five other gentlemen of the engineering persuasion.

No remarks were necessary. Without waiting even to crack ice from the deck light that should have illuminated the scene of combat, Captain Saunders rushed upon his enemy; and after the exchange of two punches, he fell with him unreservedly to the deck.

"First blood to Greg!" cried the fourth engineer.

"He slipped," said Mr. Wilson, coming forward and unfastening his coat, "and what's more, why don't you wash your greasy paws sometimes?"

With this remark, he hit the fourth engineer in the left eye, thus bringing down on himself the wrath of the second and third engineers and turning the fight into a free for all. This mode of fighting being established, Mr. Wilson was permitted by his conscience to go to the assistance of his own superior officer, who, having had the misfortune to fall underneath, was having his head banged against the deck plates in a manner that threatened to induce unconsciousness.

Mr. Wilson kicked the chief engineer in the face and, sending one of his own adversaries staggering with a straight left, took additional time to hoist Captain Saunders by the slack of his trousers.

Thereafter—for the remaining thirty seconds of the battle—the two deck officers fought side by side. The chief engineer, getting to his knees, received a hamlike fist under the ear and retired, clucking. The Fourth, nursing a nose from which blood was flowing freely down the front of a mauve pajama suit, leaned against the bulkhead and watched the second engineer join the chief; and to the hesitant third engineer, Captain Saunders addressed words of authority.

"You make another move, young feller," said the master grimly, "and I'll have you in irons before you can say Jack Robinson. You go back to your coal hole, an' when this fat stoker wakes up, tell him to think twice before he starts to give me any back talk again. Come on, Wilson, that'll be enough for this gang. You remember what I've told you, my boy. Come on, Wilson."

PASSING the door of his own room, the captain paused. Also, he laid a hand on the doorpost.

"I think I'll just go in here for a bit," he said hesitantly.

"Don't you feel well, sir?"

"I feel all right," said Captain Saunders, biting his lip and laying an exploratory hand in the region of his heart, "but I'm not so young as I was. I think I'll lie down for a bit. You stay with Chester on the bridge for awhile, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll relieve you—shortly. You—haven't got a drop of whisky anywhere, have you?"

"Guess I could rouse some out, sir."

"I'd like a glass," said Captain Saunders weakly; and with these words he fell full length, face downward on the alleyway deck.

Obviously, the first thing to do was to pick him up and deposit him on his bunk; and then it was necessary to rouse the third officer—a difficult and thankless task facilitated in this instance by a tooth glass full of water to the sleeper's head.

"The Old Man's had a heart attack," roared Wilson, restraining the Third from immediate battle. "Lam out and get his steward, will you? Somebody's got to go up on the bridge with Chester. You can, if you like."

A singularly recherché wriggle of the *Elizabeth* tumbled the third officer into a sitting posture on his settee. Only the renewed hiss of water in the tooth glass prevented him from dropping off to sleep at once.

"If you do that again, I'll kill you, Wilson," he said. "I can't go up on watch again. What time is it? Oh, my God, I'm so tired."

"Too bad about you. Now, listen, are you getting after that steward, or—"

"Yes. Hup, lady. What gave the skipper the jim-jams?"

But Wilson was gone. He reappeared in the captain's cabin simultaneously with the arrival of the third officer and the steward and stayed until Mr. Saunders, having taken two fingers of Scotch into his lungs by mistake, coughed violently and opened his eyes; and then, with a haste that by no means denoted enthusiasm, he climbed the gyrating ladder to the bridge.

The wind fell upon him like a wall; and the frozen snow with which it was freighted drove into his face like shards of broken glass. From the pitch blackness forward came the hollow boom of a sea trapped under the flare of the bows; and then the roaring hiss of water rushing aft through the forecastle's tangle of winches. The *Elizabeth*, stopped dead as by a mighty hand, threw up her screws to thunder for a moment in the air; and then, still shaking from this extravagance, surged heavily forward again.

"That you, Wilson?" came Chester's voice, on the strained ghost of a shout.

"Yes."

Chester pulled him into the chartroom.

"Where's the Old Man? They've just called up from the engineroom that they've heated a bearing. Claim it was while they were up scrapping—damn' thing's probably been running hot all night. Where's—"

"He's keeled over with his heart. Thompson and the steward are with him."

The chief officer swore steadily though wearily for about fifteen seconds.

"I knew some goat rammed thing'd have to happen," he said. "This is what I get for taking my master's ticket. You'll have to stick up here with me, Wilson. I ain't goin' to stand this watch alone."

"I thought I would."

They went out again together.

IT WAS evident to Wilson, as he crouched as low as possible under the forward rail of the bridge, that unless the third officer had seriously underestimated the wind during his watch, the force of the blow was increasing. Throwing out a hand to his right, he encountered the mass of ice that represented Chester and approached his lips to that gentleman's ear.

"We're in for a bad one," he howled.

"Got it!" shrieked Chester in return; and, as if to confirm his estimate, the *Elizabeth* shipped another sea.

Since her bow, at this moment, was twenty feet in the air, she took it in the waist; the two officers heard it thunder against the superstructure and cream viciously up on to the boat deck aft. That meant a boat gone.

"Hadn't we better reduce speed?"

"We're down to nothing," shouted Chester, interrupting his low mumble of non-stop profanity. "If we can ride out tonight without those engines breaking down—"

And they did so, though not, in a manner of speaking, gratuitously. Dawn, breaking over a horizon with no pretensions to the horizontal, revealed the absence of all boats save one which had been landed bottom up on the wireless house; and it was reported by the fourth engineer (very sulky and with two black eyes instead of the one on which Wilson had counted) that the donkey engine had been shifted on its bed, to the damage of its connecting steampipes and of the deck beneath it.

There was almost another fight there on the bridge during the discussion of whose fault this was. The chief officer contended that it fell to the engineering department to see that all equipment under its care was fastened to the ship otherwise than with mucilage; while the fourth engineer argued that no system of bolts could be expected to withstand the machinations of fools who knew no better than to drive a three thousand ton ship into the teeth of a seventy mile gale.

"Suppose you come up here and navigate, since you know so divinely condemned much about it!" shouted Chester, stepping forward.

"An' if you're such a great engineer, why the infernal regions don't you go down and monkey with that bearing you got red hot for us?" snarled the Fourth, quite prepared for battle.

Wilson kept the peace.

"Get along and roll your hoop," he said to the engineer, stepping between him and Chester. "You ain't got any more eyes to blacken. I want some breakfast."

"We haven't had any breakfast yet," said the Fourth, from the charthouse door.

"Nor you don't deserve any," said Chester. "Get along out, will you? Hey, Wilson, chase down and send young Thompson up. Is your room dry?"

"Was when I left it."

"Well, let's get our chow in there. Tell the steward, eh?"

"Right-o."

They spent half an hour with the captain, who was sitting up, very blue about the lips, but still determined that he wasn't going to heave to.

"We'd drift down to Rio," he said feebly. "Then we'd be short of coal, all right."

"What about this bearing? Suppose that goes out?"

"Wait till it does," said Mr. Saunders. "If I'd stopped the engines every time the black gang claimed they'd got the shaft warm, I'd never have got out of harbor yet—which would have suited them down to the ground. Damn' plumbers! Who's goin' to take this watch?"

"Third officer," said Chester, fixing that young man with his eye.

"I'll be all right soon," said the captain. "I'll be up in a little while. Better get on the bridge, Thompson."

He glanced up at the telltale compass.

"Keep her so," murmured the captain, and added, "damn' plumbers. Blacksmiths. Either that Gregory's gettin' out of this ship or I am. Now you men cut along and feed. I'm all right."

AFTER a brief resumé, to the third officer, of the messes he would have to clear up on deck, they retired, but not immediately to feed. The sea which had perched the boat on the wireless house had also done things to the galley and its fire, and the captain's steward was having to do his interminable best with a patent gasoline stove.

"Got any dry duds for me?" asked the chief officer wistfully, as he watched Wilson fumbling in drawers.

"If you don't mind holes," said the second mate, "I can do you a suit of underclothes and a shirt. Trousers I don't got some."

"That'll do fine," said Chester. "It's just next the skin I'm thawing, and—hey! What've you been doing to yourself?"

Mr. Wilson, having removed his jacket in preparation for the change into dry clothes, had tugged at his shirt, and desisted with a groan. This garment, soaked at all points besides with sea water, appeared to be stained, on the left shoulder, with blood and, by grace of this substance, half frozen and half dried, to be sticking to its wearer.

"Ah, shucks," said Mr. Wilson, tugging tenderly, "that's where that young whelp of an engineer landed on me."

"What with?"

"Oh, his—ouch!—fist. Opened up an old wound."

"It can't be so old," said Mr. Chester, rising to assist, "if it'd open up like that."

A roll of the ship sent him staggering, Wilson's shirt lapel still in his hand. The second officer gave a howl of agony.

"Ow, you clumsy ox!"

"Sorry, old man." Mr. Chester, being a simple soul, tried to cover up his gaucherie with conversation. "What I was saying—it can't be such a very old—"

"It's three months old, if you must know," said Wilson peevishly. "Last time we were in Hamburg. Suffering jumping Judas, this water's cold!"

"You didn't say anything about it at the time."

"Maybe I didn't want it known," said Mr. Wilson, mopping the two inch cut on his deltoid muscle. "Ouch, thou sweet—"

"Was it a woman?" asked Chester.

"Yeah. Now what?"

"Oh, nothing. Only—"

"What?"

"Well, I thought you—"

"Come on! Spit it out! What's the matter now?"

"Well, I thought you had a wife in Hamburg, haven't you?"

Mr. Wilson started.

"Oh, yes? Who told you that?"

"Well, it was Yates, of the *City of Mombasa*. Ain't it so? He said he was your best man."

The second officer rinsed and resoaked his sponge.

"I wish Yates would keep his damn' mouth shut about what isn't his business," he said plaintively. "I asked him not to say anything, but I might have known he would. He's got enough lip to cover a hatch with."

MR. CHESTER stood up and embarked on the complicated athletic feat of removing his shirt.

"Well, if you go monkeying round—" he began virtuously, his head obscured.

"I wasn't monkeying around! You've got your gall with you! What business is it of yours, anyhow?"

"You don't mean to say," asked the chief officer, emerging into God's daylight again and throwing the shirt on the deck with a splash, "that it was your wife that stuck you that way? Yates said she was—"

"Oh, damn Yates! Fine lot he knows

about anything. Shove over and let me get to the cotton, will you?"

Mr. Chester, now appearing in the likeness of a bow legged Greek god of the worst period, helped himself to pants.

"That's the worst," he said, "of goin' marryin' foreigners, all in a minute, while the ship's in port."

"Who married foreigners in a minute? Did Yates tell you that? Well, if he did, he was lyin'. I was in Hamburg six months—m'uncle got me a job as secretary to one of those cock eyed missions we were sendin' over there—thought it'd be a nice rest after that last time I got torpedoed. That was in 1920. An' lemme tell you this girl wasn't the kind you can marry in a minute; daughter of a saddler on the Hofplatz, she was; lemme tell you I'd known her three weeks before I—"

"It's a fool thing to do, anyhow," said Chester.

"Yeah? Lemme tell you I'd lost ten pounds in weight in the month I'd been there, helling around with a lot of naval auxiliary men and all that. Yeah—and ask Yates about the time I found him tryin' to kiss the statue of Astarte in the Tiergarten, and two cops pullin' at the tail of his uniform jacket. Yates'll tell you what Hamburg was like in 1920. I've got no taste for that kind of thing; it don't suit me. What I want is some place to bring my stern to an anchor, and smoke a pipe, an' maybe have a glass of beer, and put my feet on the mantlepiece if I feel like it. That's what I married Gretchen for; Yates'll tell you she wasn't any roaring beauty."

"Well, he did say she was kind of heavy in the heels."

"Oh, he did? Well, he ought to see her now, then. She's a darn sight too light in the heels for my taste. Here I turn up in Hamburg for the first time in eighteen months, and she's out at a dancin' tea with a lot of floosies, all painted to the eyes an' smokin' cigarets. An' all fixed to go out again that evenin'. An' when I tell her she'll stay home an' warm my slippers, like a wife should, she ups with a carvin' knife, an'—"

"Gee!" said Mr. Chester reverently.

"Yeah," said the second officer bitterly. "Gee is right. Hey, what's become of the engines?"

"If they've gone phut—" said the chief officer, hurrying with his toilet.

It appeared that they had. The fifth engineer, in no more than his trousers and a generous coating of oil, came bolting along the alleyway to testify to the fact that the bearing, already reported hot, had just about seized, and that Mr. Gregory had closed the throttle before worse could occur. Simultaneously, the *Elizabeth Wakelin* swung under their feet and rolled thirty degrees under the smash of a sea broad on her starboard beam.

Without further remarks to the engineer, who had been flung through the cabin doorway into a sitting position against the port bulkhead, Messrs Wilson and Chester threw on their oilskins and rushed for the bridge. From behind the captain's door they could hear a weak but profane voice demanding various articles of dress, ordering the steward to pick up a scattered breakfast and asking what the sanguinary Hades was going forward anyhow; but they did not pause. On the ladder they met Mr. Thompson, descending with a white face and the news that the ship was broaching to.

"I think the wireless house has gone over the side," he said. "I know two men have—they were shifting that boat."

"Go down and tell the Old Man. Ask him if he wants to heave to *now*. My God, this is a fine mess. Come on, Wilson. We'll have to rig a sea anchor. We'll have to unship a couple of derrick booms. God alone knows how the hell we'll do it in a sea like this."

"We might get some oil over the side, now that Saunders is—"

CAPTAIN SAUNDERS himself appeared, fantastically dressed, very pale, and followed by the third officer, who wore the expression of one fresh from vain protests.

"Mr. Wilson," said the master, "get aft to the wireless house and have the opera-

tor SOS. Chester, we'll have to ride to a sea anchor."

"The derrick booms, sir?"

"Yes—and quick! Rouse out both watches and get to it right away."

"How about oil, sir? We're making enough leeway now."

"Yes—rig a hose to windward, then; and have a block on the anchor cable to run out a bag when you've got those booms out."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"You stay on the bridge with me, Thompson," said Captain Saunders, sinking into a sitting position on the chart room table. "Ask the engineroom how long they think they'll be."

In the doorway of the wireless house—which had in point of fact sustained no damage more serious than the carrying away of its door, two ports stove in, and a complete flooding—Mr. Wilson hanging desperately on to a soaked green curtain, was watching the frenzied efforts of an operator with a badly gashed head.

"Anything doing?" he inquired genially.

The operator nodded.

"We ought to 've lost all our antenna leads," he gasped, "but we didn't. It's going out."

He hammered his key, regardless of a speaking tube which whistled furiously to his right. Wilson picked up the mouthpiece and answered.

"God help the poor broadcast listeners on a night like this," he said. "I'm off to play with the waves, sweetheart. Keep on sending that SOS."

And he tumbled forward to the forecastle, where twenty-four men and the chief officer were already having doings with the North Atlantic Ocean.

PERHAPS it would be more strictly accurate to say that the North Atlantic Ocean was having dealings with them; certainly the spectacle forward of the bridge was not one calculated to impress even the most biased observer with ideas as to the potency and dominion of Man as distinct from the elements. Man, as exemplified on the forecastle head was, in fact, looking rather ridiculous and, as time passed, and his work continued, he grew | more ridiculous still.

He found it necessary, for instance, before taking any measures for the unshipment of the derrick boom to tie himself with ropes to various solid and projecting portions of the ship, in order that he should not be swept overboard; and, thus lashed and overtaken by one of the seas that came over the bow, he would float frantically around, tugging at his moorings to the great detriment of his ribs, liver and suchlike accessories.

Then, to deal with the said boom—which the North Atlantic could without effort have picked up and tossed through a hatch, or used as a club wherewith to wipe the bridge over the side—Man had to rig a tackle high up on the foremast and garnish the same with blocks designed to multiply the pulling power he could exert.

The North Atlantic, possibly feeling that an unfair advantage was being taken, used the mast as a catapult and threw two men quite a remarkable distance overboard; but three more went aloft, wrapping arms and legs around the shrouds at every roll, and the tackle was rigged. Between this rigging and the accomplishment of the end toward which the rigging was designed, however, a great gulf was fixed, a gulf into which the North Atlantic playfully swept three more men, and would have swept four, had not First Officer Chester chanced to to be wearing a pair of sea boots too small for him. It was by the ankle that Mr. James Wilson caught Mr. Chester, just as Mr. Chester was going over the port rail accompanied by two or three tons of foamy gray water; and the ankle of this particular pair of boots was too small to allow Mr. Chester's foot to pass without at least three minutes of prayerful maneuvering, for which this sea gave no time.

Mr. Chester therefore postponed his posthumous exploration of submarine

fauna and returned to swear inaudibly at the men who were hauling away. In this matter of swearing the victory was distinctly with the storm. Both Chester and Wilson were in that frame of mind which produces masterpieces of profanity, and they were mouthing them in fantastic profusion, only to have them blown back down their throats by the wind.

After two hours the boom was adrift and it celebrated this occasion by bursting loose from the lashings designed and installed—at the cost of another man—to keep it secure until such time as it could be got overside. Had it not got jammed between the butt of the mast and the donkey engine, which immediately started several more bolts, it might have swept all hands off the deck; but since it was so jammed it had to be fetched loose again, and all hands were the reverse of grateful.

They got it out—with speculations as to why the ship hadn't broached to and foundered long ago—after the lapse of an hour, and in thirty minutes more had it overside, secured with a cable around port and starboard bitts and the foremast. The spar, caught in a cross swell, slammed once against the *Elizabeth's* side and started two plates; and then, reluctantly, it bobbed away to windward. Chester and Wilson watched it go.

"If we could rig a mizen—" howled the chief officer.

They had rigged a mizen at the beginning of the storm—when there was still a fire in the galley and all the world seemed gay. They had made it of canvas hold ventilators, rotten from the suns of a thousand tropical ports, and it had blown to ribbons in the third or fourth gust. There was no more canvas; and Mr. Wilson said he was glad of it.

"If that don't hold her—" he screamed into Chester's ear; and to show his complete resignation to, and even welcome of, anything that might happen if the sea anchor cable carried away, he let go what he was holding and shrugged his shoulders.

Also, he finished casting off his safety line and turned to walk aft.

The North Atlantic now had the last word in its argument with Mr. James Wilson.

Causing the port rail of the *Elizabeth* to heave about ten feet, and the starboard accordingly to dip to the same extent, it sent aboard a small, unobtrusive sea weighing no more than a ton and a half; and with this puny implement it slammed Mr. Wilson bodily against the storm door of the port alleyway.

Chester picked him up and carried him to his room where, the natural fountains being released by warmth, he began to bleed comfortably from the nose and ears.

ACCORDING to Captain Saunders' copy of "Every Man His Own Physician" the particular symptoms exhibited by the second officer meant a fractured skull; and according to his own personal experience a fractured skull received two hundred miles east of Nantucket Light in the existing circumstances, meant death. So that the skipper was not in the least surprised when the gale suddenly decreased to a mere forty miles per hour. He was, in some portion of his ancestry, Highland Scot; he had sacrificed one of his officers to the Power of Nature; and, despite his blasphemous inquiries as to what was coming to the weather in these latitudes anyhow, it seemed quite natural to him that the Powers should make some return.

He entered the miracle in the log as:

2nd Off. J. Wilson hurt by sea, that fatally.

So ends this day and, being also partly Lowland Scot, he went down to see whether he could not make a profit off the Fates by saving Mr. Wilson's life. The therapeutic agents available were iodine, epsom salt, and ice cracked off the deck, of which last Captain Saunders made a towel wrapped turban for the cooling of Wilson's scalp. He then sat down and, except for an interlude of four hours when he and two seamen fought to keep the delirious second officer in his berth, read *Genuine Confessions* until dawn.

CONTRARY to all expectations, the next day found Wilson still alive; the following evening, when the *Elizabeth* was once more under her own steam, found him actually conscious; and by the morning after that, he was hungry, ill tempered, and fit to be left alone. Captain Saunders left him; he relieved, in order of seniority, the two bearded, ice cut, red eyed men who had held the bridge double watches since Wilson was hurt; and, going to his cabin that evening at four bells, he devoted a half hour to visiting the convalescent.

"Who'd sell a farm and go to sea?" asked Mr. Saunders wearily. "Well, we ought to be in day after tomorrow, barring cyclones and submarine volcanoes. How are you feeling now?"

"Pretty well, sir. I can stand watch tomorrow—easy."

The captain nodded, his eyes fixed thoughtfully on Wilson's face.

"I didn't know you were married," he said suddenly.

The second officer swallowed something.

"Who told you that?" he demanded inauspiciously.

"Why, you did. What's more, you thought I was some man named Alvarez, and you'd 'a' strangled me for it if I hadn't called help. You were out of your mind, you know."

Mr. Wilson made no reply.

"It's no business of mine," said Captain Saunders, examining his knuckles with care, "but it seemed to me that if you had it on your mind as much as all that, you might prefer to—er—get it off your chest, like. That's the only reason I mentioned it. Have some trouble, or something?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wilson.

He leaned back on his exiguous pillow, fixed his eyes on the bolts of the cork painted ceiling and gave a sigh clearly audible above the howl of the wind outside, the bumble of the rejuvenated engines and the crash of the sea below the port.

"I dunno whether you've had time to get to know me, sir," he said slowly, "but I'm a peculiar sort of man, as seamen go. What I mean—I'm not so old, but I don't know whether you've noticed it—I don't go ashore raising hell like most chaps of my age. I would if I liked it, but I don't. By the time I've got through with a trip like that one we had to Buenos Aires, or this one, say, I'm not feeling like going and blowing my pay for another rough passage down the Barbary Coast."

Captain Saunders examined his palms, and nodded.

"That's how come I got married," said Mr. Wilson. "Time I was out to B. A. on the old *Princess Jane*—Captain Munroly. We'd had a dusting that trip—shook off our propeller, and came in seventeen days overdue. So we'd missed our return cargo and had to lie there over a month. Well, you know how it is, sir. Nothing to do; nobody to talk to; and I thought I'd be regularly on that run, Liverpool to B. A.; that was before the Princess Line joined the Blue Funnel."

"Mm," said Captain Saunders. "Well, this girl—"

"She was a typist in the agent's office," said Mr. Wilson. "Spanish girl. Orphan. Lonely. Got talking to her, times I'd be up there for the mail; and we went to a couple concerts together. She was a nice girl, sir; not one of these—"

"Uh-uh. Well, what happened finally?"

"I was buying a lot of furniture an' everything," said Mr. Wilson somberly. "Got there this time, and went up the hill—thought I'd have an evening with my slippers on, and get a button or two fastened to my duds. Found she'd flown the coop, furniture and all."

"Gosh!" said Captain Saunders sadly. "Who was this Alvarez?"

"He was the guy that used to come around collecting for the furniture," said Wilson. "It was him she went with."

There was a silence.

"Gosh!" said Captain Saunders again. He sighed. "It's a tough job for a sailorman—marriage."

"There isn't anybody needs it more," said Mr. Wilson.

"That's right. But what you need and what you can have don't follow, my boy. I've found that out."

"Yes," said the second officer, "so have I."

"Women—" remarked the captain, and canceled the rest of the oration. He arose, walked over to the berth and patted his subordinate on the shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Wilson," he said. "I know how you feel. I—"

"It wouldn't have been so bad if I'd just been—well, you know, sir. But when all you're tryin' to do is to act like a decent sort of man, do right by the girl, an'—"

"Yes, yes. *I* know. Well, it's a lesson, after all."

"You bet it is."

"It's a lesson," said Captain Saunders regretfully, and scratched his chin.

"Yes, sir," he added, *diminuendo*, "we live and learn. Die and forget all. However, you're not dying this trip. Want me to send my steward along? Coffee, or anything?"

Mr. Wilson, still staring at the ceiling, shook his head.

"No, thank you sir," he said, "I'll just lie here."

SO THEY got to New York, where the newspapers, for some inscrutable reason, decided that they were the heroes of a Drama of the Sea; and where the quarantine doctor, deciding that Mr. Wilson had neither cholera, bubonic plague nor, in fact, a fractured skull, casually mentioned that on the other hand he did have four cracked ribs, which ought to be X-rayed and otherwise manipulated with at a hospital.

The hospital selected was Mount Olivet, where, by the intervention of a Yonkers grocer who had read the papers and who had always wanted to go to sea himself, Mr. Wilson was installed in a private room; really a remarkable private room; a room such as is occupied by movie stars recovering from the strain of having their doubles jump off aeroplanes for them.

There was one active steam radiator under the window, where it could warm any vagrant breeze that got in through the non shatterable plate glass, another by the door and a third placed, for no very obvious calorific reason, just where Mr. Wilson's eyes could caress it without moving in their sockets.

A reading lamp was already installed; on the bedside table were two of the lesser works of Robert Browning, unctuously bound in royal purple. Everything was dry, everything was warm. Walls and floor were unflinchingly and respectively perpendicular and horizontal; and there was no limit to the number of times a man could change his nightshirt.

Rather apologetically, and with explanations to a plump nurse who seemed to understand without being told, Mr. Wilson changed his four times in the next forty-eight hours. After that, they put him in a plaster cast.

Naturally, the *Elizabeth Wakelin* could not wait, either for her second officer or for the passing of a dangerous low pressure system which—by courtesy of the United States Bureau of Agriculture—was over Maine and moving out into the Atlantic. Having completed what repairs were possible and shipped replacement seamen and a new second officer, Captain Saunders sailed for Liverpool on the very day when Wilson's cast was removed.

"M'M! ANOTHER week, and you'll be as good as new," said the doctor. "Crazy to get back to sea, I suppose?"

Wilson dropped a jaw at him.

"Oh, I don't know. I've got to wait awhile—till another of our boats come in. That'll be a month or six weeks."

"And by that time," said the doctor, taking his leave, "I suppose you'll be all fit to come back to the hospital again. Ha-ha!"

"Fool!" said Mr. Wilson to the plump nurse.

With fussy yet comforting movements, she rebuttoned his dressing gown, put a foot stool at just the right distance and

slid a well punched pillow exactly into the hollow of his shoulders.

"You don't want to mind him. Take some of your milk."

Obediently and reflectively, Mr. Wilson complied. Inhaling this gracious fluid, well iced, through a glass tube, he watched a rain laden gust drive through the two scrubby trees of the hospital enclosure. The *Elizabeth* would be just about off Sandy Hook, catching similar gusts on the port beam.

"He makes me sick," said the second officer dreamily. "Suppose he thinks that after what I've been through I want to go out in this weather an' accumulate a headache on bootleg gin."

"Well, you can't stay here forever," said the plump nurse.

"No," said Mr. Wilson.

He put down the glass of milk, seeming to have lost his taste for it. The plump nurse's hand being within easy reach, he took that up instead, gravely separating and counting its plump fingers.

"You've made me awfully comfortable," he said.

"Seemed to me you needed it," said the plump nurse.

"I'll be sorry to leave," said Mr. Wilson.

"I'll be sorry to have you go. Still—"

"When I'm livin' in New York, wherever I do live," said Mr. Wilson, concentrating on the thumb, "I'll think of you in that apartment up near Avenue J. Certainly sounded cosy. I always thought nurses lived in hospitals."

"You'll be all right," said the plump nurse.

"Oh, I'll get through. But—you know, you hear a lot about sailors. I'm not one of that kind. My idea's different from most of them. I don't want to go hellin' around. When I get ashore, my idea's to stick around some place where there isn't any trouble going on, you know, some place with a bit of a garden in the summer, or an armchair and radio in the winter; and potter around and smoke my pipe—"

"I know," said the plump nurse.

She was a sympathetic creature, of tender emotions. Suddenly tears came into her eyes and she laid the plump hand that was disengaged upon Mr. Wilson's dark hair.

He added it to his collection; and then, abandoning his first capture, he put an eager arm around the plump nurse's waist.

"Say," demanded Mr. Wilson, as if struck with a great idea. "I'm ashore for a month, an' I'll be back an' forth in New York quite a lot hereafter—"

The plump nurse looked down at him, and her respiration rate increased quite considerably.

"How about," said Mr. Wilson, "our getting married?"

Seemingly this account brings to light one of the most romantic episodes of the turn of the century. For obvious reasons Mr. Young presents his evidence and leaves the question unanswered. Perhaps it will come before the eye of some reader, herein mentioned anonymously, and he will be willing to come forth and corroborate whatever portion of this experience he was party to.

WHO WAS THIS MAN?

By EDGAR YOUNG

ON APRIL 30, 1905 a Southern R. R. flyer stopped at Tarboro, South Carolina, at daylight to take water, and two tramps got ditched off the blind. One of these was myself, and the other a lad I had put in with back in New York City named Joe Roselle, who lived, when he was at home, at Sharon, Connecticut. Tarboro was no metropolis at that time. I don't know how large it is now for I haven't seen it since, but at that time it had a turpentine still, a wood rack, a few shacks, a couple of small stores. It was a tiny hamlet, ranging along the track on either side. A man could have stood in the center and thrown a stone out of town in almost any direction.

After the people got to stirring and smoke began going up from the chimneys we began battering back doors of shacks and cabins to get something to eat. At least half of the places we tried were negro cabins. Whites and negroes were hard up. We did not get a bite, although we tried every shack in town. We wandered back over to the railroad and saw a couple of men dressed in soiled khaki and riding boots strolling slowly along. We took them to be foremen of the turpentine still, and when we came up to them we immediately hit them for the price of a feed.

They laughed and told us they were on the tramp themselves and had landed in the place off of a freight the night before we did and had battered the town the morning before, just as we had been doing. They had not eaten a bite since arriving. We asked them where they came from, and they said they had deserted a Wild West circus known as The Boer War Circus at Raleigh, North Carolina, and had started by freight to Jacksonville, Florida. The khaki clothing, boots and hats they wore were the rigs in which they had ridden in the circus. They had jumped with their saddles and bridles also, but had parted with them for a couple of dollars the first day. They had been in the actual Boer War, they told us, and this is how they came to join the imitation war that was touring the United States. They men-

tioned a number of towns and cities in which they had ridden.

We strolled along the track out of town and turned off into the pine woods for a few rods, where we sat in the shade talking for a while before sprawling out for a sleep so as to be ready to travel if something stopped at the tank during the coming night.

ONE OF the two strangers was a tall man, thirty years of age, lean, sun tanned and extremely active. He told us his name was Jack Bangs. The other man was a rather heavy set blond and he grinned when he gave us his name as Bill Gotch. He said he was twenty-seven years old. I was twenty-two years old and my pardner was twenty-four. Both men spoke with an accent. Jack Bangs' accent was very slight. He spoke excellent English but gargled particular words. Bill Gotch spoke with a German accent when he spoke English. Now and then they spoke together in a language which was not German, English or French.

At the time I did not know what language this was, but from certain words I remember they used I know the language was Flemish. I had been tramping as a "blowed-in-the-bottle-stiff" for some six years and was familiar with various languages, but did not know Flemish when I heard it at that time.

Before we dropped off to sleep they told us that they arrived from South Africa several months before, arriving in New York on a ship that had taken over supplies for the Boers and was returning. They had stowed away and had been found and put to work. Arriving in New York, a seaman had told them of a deep sea boarding house where they went and put up. The crimp signed them before the mast of a smack bound for Halifax and return. The skipper asked them to box the compass and a few other things when it came their turns at the wheel and he found that they were not the able bodied seamen they pretended to be. But they managed to get away with the work to Halifax, where the ship was careened and cleaned, and they returned to New York on the same smack.

I do not remember the name of this smack—or possibly, schooner. Jack Bangs came down with an attack of fever and went to the hospital as a charity patient. It seems the name of the hospital was Saint Anne's. I know it was a Catholic hospital. He then went to work in a shoe store on Bleecker Street, near Third Avenue, from which position he was discharged.

They saw the posters advertising the Boer War Circus and went out to the lot and asked for work on the strength of being actual soldiers from that war. This was about all they told us in the conversation in the woods. We told them where we had been and what we had been doing.

WE WOKE up about sundown and strolled back over in town. We made no attempt to slam any gates or batter any doors for food, but went up and hung about the water tank, waiting for a train. A freight went through without stopping for water. We were all rather hungry.

About nine o'clock Jack Bangs happened to think of a small locket he wore around his neck under his shirt on a tiny chain and he wondered whether he could get anything for it in one of the stores. He said it was a family heirloom and he hated to part with it, for his mother had given it to him when he was a child. After a time he made up his mind he would try, so he walked down to one of the stores and went in.

He got sixty cents for it, either from the merchant or one of the loungers, and bought some cheese and crackers, a box of sardines and some rice, which he said would, when boiled, feed us the next day. We ate the cheese, crackers and sardines as we squatted back of the tank.

Question: Is there a reader of this article who was one of the crowd in the store when this man came in to sell this "heirloom"?

It is an occurrence that might have remained in the memory. Perhaps the actual purchaser of this little chain and locket can be located. It was the night of April 30, 1905, the thing occurred. The town was Tarboro, South Carolina, and not the city of Tarboro, North Carolina.

We made a freight out of town about midnight and rode to the yards in Savannah, Georgia, and walked into town. We battered the main drag and picked up just barely enough to eat, and then caught a freight for Jacksonville that night.

It was hostile for vagrants all through that country. Eleven months and twenty-nine days on the rock pile or in the turpentine camp was the penalty for being "without visible means of support". Trainmen were on the alert for hoboes to turn over to civil officers in certain towns where they received a split of the fee. They searched the freights at all stops, but we could see their lanterns coming over the train and we hid until the train started again, and then we got back on. It made very poor time.

We got ditched the next morning and we started walking. It took us several days to arrive in Jacksonville. After we arrived there we found a much more hostile country. Tramps were being farmed out as peons on private jobs. It was easily the worst State in the United States in which to be on the tramp.

Jack Bangs and Bill Gotch went to a pawnshop and pawned their boots and got a pair of ragged shoes and a dollar for them. We were pretty desperate men when we started south from Jacksonville, or "Jack", as the tramps then termed it.

We caught a freight on the outskirts of the city as it pulled by and climbed up the side ladders to the top. Looking back, we saw lanterns bobbing along the tops of the cars and we knew that the crew was coming over on a search. The conductor was followed by two negro brakemen and he began to rail at us, telling us to "hit the grit". Each negro carried a pickhandle.

We got up and tried to explain to the irate conductor that a leap from the side ladder would be suicidal in the darkness. The train was doing forty miles an hour at least. He told his negroes to throw us off. He and the two negroes came for us. There was a sharp scrap for a few minutes up and down the top of the reeling car. The conductor and his black shacks came off second best. We chased the three of them back over the train for several cars and they did not stop running until they got to the caboose.

Question: Is that conductor among the readers of this article? If so, why did you lie in the message you sent to Baldwin Junction? You said six bandits stuck you up and robbed you, and for the sheriff to have a posse at the station when the train pulled in. There were only four of us and we did not rob you or your men of a cent. Further, we were not yet bandits.

WHEN the train neared Baldwin Junction we saw scores of lanterns bobbing along the track. We had seen the conductor drop off a telegram and we surmised he had notified the authorities by wire. We leaped off from the side ladders when the train checked its speed before getting to the flock of lanterns, and we ran into the woods. The train stayed there for about an hour while a search was made for us. We saw them searching, from a safe distance. When it pulled out there were lanterns going about for an hour as men ran back and forth along the edge of the track looking for us.

Question: Any of that posse among you? If you are, I will say that you finally all went home and went to sleep and at 2 A.M. a train rolled into the junction from the west and we climbed into a carload of crossties when it clattered over the crossover. We didn't know where it was going and at the time we didn't care, for we wanted to get out of the town. At daylight it brought us into Fernandino on the coast, the last place in the world we really wanted to be, for there was no getting out of it except by going back to Baldwin Junction.

We pulled off our shoes and, rolling our coats up for pillows, we went to sleep under an apple tree in a field on the outskirts of town. We slept until late in the afternoon and when we woke up some one had stolen my shoes. I know the man who stole them is not reading this. He was possibly some poor negro, for they were not very good shoes.

But there is a certain dentist who might be reading this. Jack Bangs went over in town and begged a pair for me from this dentist. He told the dentist he was the son of a well to do man in Jacksonville and that his pardner had been robbed. The dentist gave him the shoes and a handful of cigars. They were good shoes and several numbers too large for me. They surely were appreciated.

We caught a freight and got in an empty box car that night. Two negro brakemen caught the car and climbed in. They tried to bully us into giving them some money but we turned the trick on them and made the two of them get down on the floor and shoot craps with each other for what they had. It was pure bluff on our part. We had our hands in our pockets as if on guns and threatened them when they got tired. When the train stopped we chased them out of the car and told them if they got back in we would kill them. They did not tell the conductor, I imagine, for we rode into Baldwin Junction without further trouble.

When it became daylight we found a Western Union construction outfit lying on the siding where it had been set during the night. It was Sunday. The foreman fed us in the cook car. We told him the laws were rather hostile, and if anybody asked him, to tell them we were working in the gang. During the morning we sat underneath the interlocking tower and talked to a man who proved to be the marshal, or sheriff. We told him all about how we had been stringing wire with the gang and he told us about his duties. He waxed eloquent in telling of a gang of bandits who had held up a train on the way from Jacksonville. It took us several minutes to recognize this occurrence as the little fracas we had had.

I doubt whether he ever knew that the four quiet "construction men" who sat there on the bench with him that Sunday morning were getting an inward chuckle out of his yarn. He was not such an old man. Some one might show him this if he is still living. It was the latter part of May, 1905.

LATE that night we caught a freight headed west. We got ditched in Tallahassee the next morning. We had a hard time getting out of this tiny capital. The Seaboard Air Line was a very primitive railroad. They burned wood in small locomotives with big stacks. Every few miles they would stop to "wood up". The train would then be searched for possible riders. Eight or ten miles at a time was about as far as we could ride. We were starving and desperate. We begged and stole food, but we didn't get much at that. They didn't have it.

I never saw such a poor country in my life. It was only a sandbar with little shack towns around turpentine stills at intervals. The negroes worked for fifty cents a day and the foreman got a dollar. One of the station agents of the railroad told me he got twenty-eight dollars a month for twelve hours' work, seven days a week. He had a large family and said he was as hard up as I was.

There was a daily passenger train and a bi-weekly freight. We walked for days at a time. As we strolled along we usually paired off. Jack Bangs and I became quite friendly, and Joe Roselle and Bill Gotch became temporary buddies. This was not a split up between Joe and me. We had talked out months before.

ONE DAY when Jack Bangs and I lay in the woods resting he told me he was of royal blood, in fact a crown prince. He saw I did not believe it, so he sat up and reached inside his shirt and unfastened a string around his body and brought out a little leather case,

not much larger than a billfold or pocket wallet and said he would show me that he was telling the truth.

I am not saying that what he did tell me is the truth. I am asking questions. I am just narrating the things that happened. He showed me his discharge from the Boer army under the name of Jack Bangs, all due and proper. He had been a courier for General Cronje. Previous to this he had told me about old Oom Paul Kruger and other leaders and various battles up to the surrender at Pretoria. He was at the surrender and he took the secret oath with the Boers to the effect that they would not breed under British rule. The wallet was presumably made for the purpose of holding a passport. There was a passport, or identification, under a celluloid cover on the inside of one flap of the wallet. There was a small picture of the man to whom I was talking. But the name signed on the passport, or identification, was not Jack Bangs, or even John Bangs. The name was Albert Marie Meinrod. He told me that his full name was Albert Leopold Clement Marie Meinrod and made particular mention of the fact that one of his names—Marie—was a girl's name and that it was also his mother's name. I remember the name, because it was impressed on my mind at the time and during many years that have followed.

He showed me the picture of a man and a woman and four children and told me this was his father and mother. He said his father was Philip, Count of Flanders, and that his mother was Marie, Countess of Flanders, Princess of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. He was but a child in this picture, but he pointed himself out and also his brother Baldwin. His two sisters in the picture were twins, which he called "the twins." He said his brother had died since the picture was taken.

He showed me another picture taken when he was about nineteen, with his father and a man with a white beard. He asked me if I knew who the white bearded man was and when I said I did not, he told me it was King Leopold, at that time King of the Belgians.

The man then showed me a photograph, or snapshot, of a slender lady with soulful eyes, with a baby in her arms and another tot standing by her side holding her hand. He told me the lady was his wife. Tears came into his eyes when he told me this. He said her name was Elizabeth, a Bavarian duchess, and that he had married her in 1900. I asked him whether he had a split up with her and he said he had not. There is a bit of confidential stuff he told me I will not repeat. I will say though that at the moment he was talking he was deeply affected, or at least pretended to be.

He said he was the crown prince of Belgium and would be the next king of that country. Leopold had had a son, but this son was dead. The Count of Flanders stood next in line, but on account of ill health due to studious and sedentary habits he had renounced his right. The oldest son of the Count of Flanders stood next in line, but he had died at the age of twelve, or thereabouts. This was, the man claimed, his brother Baldwin.

THE MAN, talking to me then and during the many days afterward when we passed hours talking together, told me his entire history. He said he was born in Brussels and had spent his time either there or at their palace, the Château des Ameroys, in the southern part of the country. He told me of making trips with his father or his uncle Leopold to Russia, where he visited the Czar, to the funeral of the Empress of Austria, and to the marriage of Ferdinand of Rumania, and various other big affairs. He told me of his experiences in the military school at Brussels where King Leopold had personally taken him on the first day. His last promotion had been to captain, he told me. He mentioned names of instructors before this time when he had been privately schooled and told me of various experiences while a boy.

He then said he had been in the United States before. He had visited President McKinley at the White House, had been

entertained there as the "Count de Rehty" and had spent several months as the private guest of James J. Hill, the railroad builder, in a tour of the West. Several other Belgian youths were in the party.

He said, with a rueful grin, that there was quite a difference between then and now. There was no bragging about it. The man told it very quietly, almost apologetically. He also told me who Bill Gotch was. He was a relative of his wife's and was actually a Bavarian. I asked him if he objected to my telling my pardner and he said to ask Bill when he came up with them again. This I did and Bill repeated the story with additions.

Things got tougher with us as we slowly made our way across Florida. Mild adventure and several thrills broke the monotony now and then. We were attacked by wild hogs in a camp in the woods. We climbed down the side ladder of a box car and the four of us leaped thirty feet off a bridge into a swamp in the pitch dark. We were buried to our armpits. We showed fight with numerous trainmen when they tried to make us get off of running trains.

I remember we came into River Junction on a train on which we had scrapped with the conductor an hour before. We hid in the woods up a creek back of the yards for five days and nights. There was a dwarf telegraph operator working nights in the station. I got him to shut us up in a refrigerator car one night and we got out of town that way. But not far. About twenty miles out they searched the train and found us.

THEN we fell out among ourselves over a trifle. It is too trivial to mention. This was on the 2nd of July, 1905. Fighting talk passed back and forth, and we were armed with clubs to fight to the death. An officer happened along and separated us and took my pardner and me up in the town and told Jack and Bill to make tracks. The last words Jack Bangs said to me were:

"If I ever see you again I'll kill you!"

I do not believe the man hated me when he said those words. It was the cruel torture of hunger and thirst and lack of sleep that had all of us on the ragged edge.

It was easily the toughest hobo trip I ever made in the States. Joe and I hurried on into New Orleans and from there caught a banana train for Chicago. We went to St. Paul and hit the N. P. for Portland, down to San Francisco, to Los Angeles, and back over the S. P. to Texas. That is, I did. Joe quit me in Sacramento to go back home. We were the best of friends when we parted. I have not seen or heard from him since.

THAT is my experience with a man who claimed he was the crown prince of Belgium. It corresponds in every detail with the life of the present king, for I have checked up to find out. He became king in 1909. He was a world hero during the War.

I have looked at every photograph I could find anywhere. The pictures of the present king as a young man are a perfect resemblance of the man with whom I tramped.

I am not saying that that man and the present king of Belgium are the same man. I do say, however, that the man I was with had documentary and photographic proof of what he was saying. I have spent considerable money and time to check what he told me during the many weeks we were together against the early life of the king. It checks in detail. But when I wrote to the Washington embassy of the Belgian government, I got a reply that the king of Belgium was never in the Boer War and that he was not out of Belgium during the time I specify. Be that as it may, I know what I know.

And I'll say right here: If it was not Albert, then who was it who went to such great pains to fool a comrade of the road when there was nothing to gain by it?

Perhaps you will answer me yourself, King Albert! I have the nerve to put the question. Have you got the nerve to answer it?

A LAZY MAN'S POISON

A Story of the Lobo Trails

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

"PILLS" JOE LEVINE was a good trapper, but indolent. He caught muskrats and wolves with cold steel jaws till a day came when the lure of strychnine beckoned to him as the easy way to wealth. That was when he had grown a bit careless in the way he put his traps down in the feeding and playing grounds of his victims. When his catch began to fall off in his steel he refused to learn his lesson. He took to poison, then.

Joe took home a chunk of kidney suet and rendered it out into beef tallow which he poured hot into an inch deep earthenware pie plate. Then he took a safety razor blade and cut the cold, set tallow into squares, an inch each way. Then he bored a hole in the center of each cube and put into it two crystalline grains of strychnine. He plugged the hole on top the deadly dose with a ball of tallow, and sealed it fast with a hot knife blade. He called his cubes "pills."

He put these pills into a glass jar with a glass top, to carry them in his pack, ready for business. Throughout the whole work he talked to himself with disgust and nervousness, for in his heart he hated poison, feared it, disliked its results. He figured, though, that it was easier to put out poison than to go about the far more elaborate work of using traps, much less hunting with his .25-35 rifle, personally outwitting the wolves as they ran.

His talk was all an argument with himself for becoming a poisoner, declaring that because one old reprobate of a gummer-wolf had killed a few calves and proved too smart for the humans trying to find short cuts to his death, that he was perfectly justified in going after all the coyotes, wolves and other beasts of

prey in any way possible, especially any lazy man's way! Joe reckoned the scalp bounties justified any means to rid the range of coyotes and wolves, whether they were rogue stock killers or valuable destroyers of pasture varmints.

When Pills Joe had fallen into the habit of using strychnine other wildcrafters of course despised him more or less. Some were envious of his success in bringing in lobo, or gray wolf skins. At the same time the most of them took lessons from Pills Joe in their own steel trap and other reputable lines. Pills Joe could sit in the shadow of the Moonlight Store, or huddle over the stove inside in cold weather, and tell others the fine points of wildcraft, from making a warm bed to sleep off a blizzard, to setting a trail trap to fool a sly gray wolf. He knew, but did not use his knowledge.

About the use of poison, however, he was ashamed and reticent. He was using it for years before any one knew it. He used to take up a victim he had killed with poison, and hang a steel trap on the paw just to give the animal the look of having been taken in a square, wit matched way.

To make a good steel trap set would take Pills Joe a long time, even if he was after just an ordinary gopher, or prairie dog, or jackrabbit eating coyote or lobo. He knew that each coyote or wolf had its own favorite grub; that some would run almost to vegetarianism, some were bug eaters and some enjoyed shoal water fish. Only once in a while would a wolf deign to eat colt or calf. A crippled, aged or disease decrepit wolf can not be particular as regards its food—must take what it can get. And Pills Joe, using poison, felt that he was just as much a pariah as the wolf that kills, and especially eats, domestic stock when in the prime of life.

But sitting around, wishing it did not take two or three hours to set a cluster of steel traps, after spending a week or so finding where the traps ought to be set, Pills Joe yielded to the temptation of short cut methods. And he devised some of the most wonderful schemes for economizing in effort, even in the use of strychnine. When he found that even poison must be handled with care to obtain success, he grew more and more thoughtful, more and more cunning in means by which to trick his quarry into swallowing the deadly stuff.

HE ORIGINATED the wait-a-bit-poison-out method, for example. He would wait for hard times to come to the Rimrock country, where he generally worked. It was rough walking, and hard riding, but the Rimrock ridges had many coyotes and some lobos. When the February winds and colds came, and the food animals huddled in gaunt famine out of the gales in windbreaks, the beasts of prey would at last be driven out of their own dens and hiding places by their hunger. They would be ravenous, and if in autumn they had disdained to eat anything but what they had themselves killed, now in late winter they would assuage their appetites with frozen casualties of the cattle range. And if, perchance, they came upon a dainty tidbit of a mouse lying in a sage fork beside their trail, or if they found a frozen trout left on the sand, or among the cobbles when a stream shrank, they would look around to see if any one was witness of their shame—then gobble the stuff.

A dead sage hen sprawled on the ground in the hollows, a jackrabbit caught by inclement weather or some constitutional weakness, a prairie dog lost from its own village and a raven fallen from its juniper roost—when a wolf has been without food for a week he tucks away his pride in always eating warm, dripping meat, and gnaws it frozen to heat it in his own shrunken stomach. And Pills Joe, sharp enough mentally to match the wits of a lobo in its seventh year of ripe experience, slunk forth to let fall his poison. Had he used steel jaws he would have felt cocky and full of satisfaction.

So Pills Joe talked more about the fine points of putting down steel traps and used poison on the quiet. Other fre-

quenters of the Rimrock range found out yonder the carcasses of wolves and coyotes which apparently had been stricken by some mysterious ailment which stretched them, every muscle drawn into a hard knot, dead on the ground. No one in those parts had ever used poison, for it seemed a needless thing to do for men in their prime and wolves and coyotes plentiful enough for every one—to hunt and shoot, to trap or snare, to outwit the wise old ones, and trick the young and inexperienced.

But Harkey Watson happened to see Joe Levine sneaking up the Big Wind Draw one day. He watched to see what Joe was doing. Sure enough, Joe was throwing out cubes of tallow, one of which Watson recovered and examined. So they called the poisoner Pills Joe ever after. He was not proud of his nickname, and he resented it, especially when he had been drinking. At the same time, what could he really do about it?

With some mental effort he continued to talk grandiloquently about setting steel traps—a man's work, to pinch the toes of wolves. He tried to pretend that the poison pills was just an emergency proposition, excusable when one is in a hurry. But more and more Pills Joe left his traps hanging, and more and more he used strychnine. And he never made a batch of pills that he did not feel alarm and shiver with apprehension.

The strychnine came in tiny vials, holding an ounce. It was quite a trick to know how to buy the stuff. A man could not just go right into a store and say, "Gimme two-bits worth of p'isen". If he did, probably the store keeper would hand over a bottle of gingeree or some other drink. A man had to kind of stand in with a drug store and get himself down in the poison book as a buyer of strychnine. There it was—a Government record! It fixed a man's status forever, buyer of poison according to legal evidence!

Pills Joe could ask for poison any time, but always with a strut of bravado and a deepening of the tan of his features. He tried buying half a dozen bottles at a time, and he would buy a hundred or so gelatine capsules to hold the crystals. He would pack the poison with his knife blade into the capsules—he never used that knife blade for anything else.

STRYCHNINE was terrible stuff. It was ready to work in ten minutes or would wait ten years. It never lost its potency. Pills Joe would put his poison baits out, counting every one of the pellets. Then when he had made his catches and skinned his victims, he would go around to try to pick up all the pills which had not been carried away by unfortunate coyotes or hungry lobos. Having the exact count, he could be pretty sure of recovering all his poison—but not quite positive.

Sheep bands grazed the Rimrock range. All the sheep herders had one or two dogs. These were necessary beasts, and some were so valuable that five hundred dollars would not buy them. Pills Joe was careful not to leave out poison over the grazing season. But every once in a while some sheepherder would come in with loud dismay, declaring that one or another of his dogs had suddenly begun to act funny, and then, after pitching about a bit, had gone into a mortal spasm with lips drawn back from locked teeth. It was a dreadful disease—whatever it was. And Pills Joe hated to hear about those dead dogs. He swore to himself that he had not been careless.

In his dreams he was always picking up his pill box and, opening it like a box of candy, eating. He was so afraid he would walk in his sleep sometime and eat the poison himself, that he would leave it out from his camp to make sure he could not get at it some night.

He did not find all the coyotes and wolves he fed poison. The doomed animal would gulp a pill and then go wandering on a half mile or so before the tallow melted, the capsule dissolved. Then the poison began to work. Pills Joe always resented that word "work". The idea of having poison work in place of one's own genuine efforts embarrassed him.

Working, the poison would galvanize the beast into frantic efforts to rid itself of the anguish within. The beast died in horrible convulsions.

If Pills Joe did not miss his poison bait, or see which way the stricken animal headed, he would not find the carcass. Instead, other coyotes or wolves would come along and eat it. In the meanwhile, the poison had permeated the carcass of the victim, making it as deadly as the original capsule charge. And thus, perhaps, several others would be victimized.

It may be that Pills Joe did not get one coyote or wolf in six or eight that he killed. Thus, to obtain a six-dollar hide market value, he might lose fifty dollars worth—destroyed without return. And wildcats, mink, foxes and other furs were also killed off. The poison wiped out the carnivorous beasts—apparently not harming the birds which ate also of the carcasses.

Pills Joe worked far and wide in the Rimrocks. He thought after more experience with strychnine he would not lose so many of the animals he poisoned.

"Golly!" he declared, when at last he frankly admitted his poison specialty, "I wisht I could get a p'isen that'd knock 'em down suddent, like a bullet!"

"And one that don't spoil the hide, making the hair and fur shed, too," the storekeeper grumbled, for the strychnine poisoned skins were thirds or seconds at best.

"And one that don't keep on poisoning forty months after it's et the first time!" another wildcrafter said, bitterly. "Strychnine don't never quit."

THE dream of Pills Joe for a quick poison became an obsession with him. There must be some poison, he reasoned, which would act immediately. He began to acquire toxicological learning. He read books on the subject. He experimented with arsenic and all it did to the wolves and coyotes was stimulate them mightily, and they came back for more.

And then he heard of prussic acid, or cyanide of potassium. Two ounces of this stuff on a harpoon point, he read, killed a ninety-foot whale in two minutes. He heard that a drop of it on the tongue would kill a dog within a step. It was sure fire stuff—the stuff he sought.

Accordingly he hinted around that he wanted some of this cyanide. He wanted to try it on wolves, where it would be a benefit to humanity, equal in its service to extracting gold from native ores or in polishing silverware.

"Better look out—I wouldn't monkey with that stuff," the druggist warned him. "If you haven't had experience in handling deadly poisons, you better leave it strictly alone. Cyanide's sure one creeping death, always looking for somebody new to play tricks on."

"I've handled pounds of p'isen!" Pills Joe declared. "Why, I'm the champion wolf and coyote p'isener of the Rimrock range."

"Oh—all right; if you know about such things," the chemist hastened to withdraw his objections. "How much do you want?"

"Well, make it half a pound, say."

So Pills Joe headed for home, elated. He had the real stuff in genuine wolf and coyote calamity now, without attendant drawbacks such as the poison remaining potent over an indefinite length of time, thus endangering forms of life for which it was not intended. A job done, cyanide considerately vanishes to appear no more, except in reaction to chemical tracers.

Pills Joe stopped at Moonlight and exulted over his genuine "p'isen" for varmints.

"I'm goin' to s'prise you!" he told the store crowd on a Monday night. "Wait'll you hear the wolf news out of my cabin, now!"

"You've a real sure shot, sudden death, I suppose?" Mrs. Weyes, the postmistress, inquired.

"I sure have—it kills like calamity!" he grinned, his eyes fluttering, unable wholly to overcome his shame despite his satisfaction.

He headed southward bearing his pre-

cious burden of deadliness, spectators watching him curiously. To their minds it was inexplicable, the things a man will find pride in doing. They knew Pills Joe would surprise them. He kept his promises.

ABOUT ten days later Pete Dustin and Hi Leeds who had word that some of their cattle were working southward went down to the Rimrocks to locate the strays. Few visited the cabin of Pills Joe, for somehow, a poisoner's camp is a creepy, dubious place. In one, a hungry man could not really know what he was eating if he tried the food stuffs. One time a party used arsenic for baking powder and wondered what ailed their pancakes, they had such a queer taste. Bearing one's hunger till in some other kind of a camp or ranch was safer.

Pete and Hi did not intend to stay to dinner. At the same time Joe had not showed up the previous Monday at the store and they were wondering how he kept house. Accordingly they circled over to the spring in the juniper clump where the log cabin stood, with its uneven corral and unkempt look.

All was quiet. No smoke issued from the chimney and blue jays and camp-robbers were flitting around nervously. When the ranchers rode around in front they found the door partly open, and admired the heavy two inch split plank's balance on its hinges. Lying over the hewn, notched log threshold was the figure of a man, his head and arms outside, his feet in the building's shadow. Pills Joe's tawny head, sure enough, and by his posture, dead.

The ranchers swung down from their saddles to study the case. Within they saw a bench, end on to the fireplace. On the bench was a porcelain plate with a white mound on it. Over the floor were strewn a hundred one inch tallow pills, as many tiny capsules, and a jackknife.

Pete would have entered but Hi stopped him.

"Don't you do it, Pete!" he warned. "Smell it? That's the cyanide, I bet. Pills Joe was bragging it was sure death, an' now look at him! See the look on his face—he was s'prised himself same's he promised to surprise us. We better let the coroner do the sittin' on this. He'll know 'bout that danged heap of misery."

So the coroner, Dr. Dipsley, sat with a jury of six, went through all the legal requirements and rendered their verdict:

> We hereby declare Pills Joe Levine sure come to his end according to law and died of poison, superinduced by ignorance, hydrocyanic suddenness in a closed room without no airing to carry away the fumes of the same, so it got into his lungs and knocked him stone dead, pronto. And nobody is to blame but himself for he should of stuck to traps and guns in the first place. Hitting the down grade with strychnine to poison varmints which ain't necessary, but ornery laziness, he got his. So help him God, poor old Pills Joe!
>
> Yours truly,
>
> JOHN CUMMINGS, BILL BAXTER,
> DAN DUNNING, SAM WICKS,
> HANK FISTON, JOHN DITCH.
> RUDOLF DIPSLEY, *Coroner.*

The Mob

A story of gangs aud the slinking men who haunt the night of a great city

By HENRY LACOSSITT

IT WAS foggy, and a stealthy drizzle fell. A heavy car shot out of the dark patches of houses on to the boulevard and made furiously for the bridge. It reached the approach and turned. Up the long incline it sped, like an ascending meteor through a thin cloud. It came from the ugly flats on the east side of the river; it headed for The Town.

Four men were in the car; three in the front, one in the back. The driver was a big man and wore a derby. A cigar was clenched between his teeth. Just now he smiled, a pleasant smile. His eyes twinkled. Next to him a man sat with his head slumped forward on his chest. A cigar was also thrust between his teeth. His hair straggled from beneath his borsalino hat, which was pushed back on his head. His head rolled drunkenly with the lurching car. About his shoulders was an arm, and a hand was beneath his chin. From his mouth drooled what appeared to be juice from the dead cigar.

The arm and hand belonged to the third man in the front seat. This man was young, and, like the driver, he smiled; but his smile was not pleasant. His free hand held a pint bottle from which he drank, and occasionally he turned to look at the man in the back seat. This man was also young, but he was not smiling. His teeth were gritted, and his hands clenched. His face, which was handsome and delicate, was white, in contrast to the jaundiced face of the young man in front, the livid face of the man who slumped, and the ruddy face of the driver. His eyes were blue, and his hair, sneaking from beneath his cap, was black. In his eyes was an expression near to the hysterical.

Beneath them the river, black and dirty, moved sluggishly in the lights of The Town. It was barely discernible through the fog. The man in the back seat spoke.

"Chees!" He closed his mouth quickly to keep his teeth from chattering.

The young man in the front seat took a drink.

"Git some guts," he said, looking back.

"Gimme a shot," said the man in the back seat. The young man in front passed the bottle back and smiled his strange smile. The man in back put the bottle to his lips and gulped. He shuddered.

"Chees!" he said again.

"Gawd! Git some guts!" snarled the young man in the front seat.

The slumped man said nothing at all.

"Lay offa him, Jules!" said the driver.

He turned his head and smiled. The young man in the front seat turned quickly, took a drink and was silent.

They neared the middle of the long bridge. The driver throttled the motor down. The car stopped.

"Here!" said the driver.

"Here?" said the young man in the front seat.

"Not *here?*" said the young man in the back seat.

"Yeah, here!" said the driver, turning to the man in back with a scowl.

The driver looked at the slumped figure. He chuckled. He smiled at the young man in front. He turned and scowled again at the young man in back.

"Joe," he growled, "git out and help me."

"Jules," he smiled, "take his shoulders."

They dragged the slumped figure out. The big driver pulled the borsalino down to the man's brows. They stood him against the bridge rail. His pockets sagged heavily; his shirt bagged down with weight. The young man who had ridden in front kept his hand under the lax chin. There was more stain on the chin.

"Buck, you big boob," said the young man who had ridden in front, "how do you feel?"

He took his hand away from the chin and jerked out the cigar, most of which had been hidden. The mouth sagged open and drooled fluently. It was not tobacco juice.

"Chees!"

"Buck," said the driver, smiling, "you need a bath. You—"

"What you guys got—a drunk?"

The new voice came from the fog. The young man who had been in back stood rigid. The young man who had been in front whirled, and slunk into the darkness beside the car. The big driver smiled.

"Yeah," he said," a drunk."

A figure appeared out of the fog and drew close. Its blue uniform showed faintly in the misty lights of the bridge. It came closer. Suddenly a long light shot from it, outlining the slumped figure, the driver and the young man who had been in back.

"Well, git him home," said the new voice. The light fell on the face of the smiling driver. "We can't— What the hell! Big Dick!"

From the murk beside the car sprang another figure. It struck, there was a *crack*, and the newcomer dropped.

"Buck," said the driver, still smiling, "you sure need a bath. Over you go!"

With the aid of the young man who had been in front—which he did not need—the driver pitched the lifeless body over. There was a short silence that seemed long. Then a deep splash.

The mob had taken toll.

"Roll the cop outa the way, Jules," said the driver.

"Chees," said the young man who had been in back, staring at the river.

"For Christ's sake, quit snivelin'!" said Jules. "Chirp again an' I'll smear you!"

"You will not," smiled the driver. "Try somethin' with Joe, Jules, and you'll take a bath too. Git in the back seat, Joe," he added with a growl.

Joe got in the back seat. Big Dick and Jules got in the front seat. The policeman lay on the walk beside the rail, a blackjack cut in his scalp.

The car rolled on across the bridge, through the fog, into The Town and through deserted streets. A skyscraper clock tolled four. Joe, sitting in the back seat, drew blood from his lip, but did not scream.

OUT OF the sticks had come young Buck Clancy, and up from Carrie Patch by the Mill Creek tracks had come young Joe Riley. Simultaneously they had appeared at Pete's pool hall on the corner of Grand and Olive Streets. Eager, they were, as two pups, and as dumb. Big Dick saw them; Big Dick who, next to the chief himself, was the boss of Hugo's mob. Grist there for Big Dick—grist for Hugo, grist for the mob. And Buck and Joe, eager as two pups, hit the racket. They came into Hugo's mob, fledglings.

Under Big Dick's wing went Joe, and became Little Joe. Buck was more independent. He lashed out like a veteran. He ran with Jules, known as the Fox. He shot a cop. He killed a cashier. And that was no way to act. You can get too hard for a mob, even. The mob felt the pressure of Buck's boisterous doings, and the mob didn't like pressure. They were hard guys themselves, and they were a little jealous, as well as annoyed.

So Big Dick, who usually was gruff and morose, came to smile on Buck—a wide, genial smile, that Buck basked in. And then, from Hugo's mouth dropped the word, and Big Dick's smile grew wider.

"Take Joe along," said Hugo. "He needs it. Take Jules, too; he might."

"Buck," Big Dick had said that very night, "come along. We're goin' over to Madison. I gotta tip. You too, Joe, and you, Jules."

Both Joe and Jules knew. The whole gang knew, and Jules laughed his strange laugh. Joe turned a little pale. But Buck didn't know.

He climbed into the front seat beside Big Dick and revelled in the wide smile. Jules, in the back seat with Joe, smiled too. Joe did not smile. He did, however, feel a little proud. He had stolen the car in which they rode. He had stolen others, too, but the mob was using this one. But he forgot about the car.

Out of The Town they rolled, across the big bridge, to Madison, and to Billy's saloon.

"We'll git a drink, first," said Big Dick.

They unloaded, then, and trooped into Billy's. Through the barroom to the back room. Through the back room to the door leading to the cellar stairs. Down the stairs to the cellar, where Billy brought them a drink. It was Billy's private room. He belonged to the mob, too. He also knew.

They drank.

"Buck," said Big Dick, "you gotta gat?"

"Yeah."

"Les' see it," said Big Dick with his broadest smile.

Buck drew from his hip pocket a forty-five automatic. He handed it, butt foremost, to Big Dick, who grasped it.

"It's a good gat, ain't it, Buck?" said Big Dick, almost laughing. "It works, too, don't it?"

He emptied it into Buck's heart. Jules laughed and pushed Buck's head back as he fell forward.

"Joe," said Big Dick, and he was gruff again, "don't never git too wise and too hard. Buck did."

And then they had given Buck his bath.

THE MOB had a roadhouse just out of The Town. It was out of The Town for political reasons. Hugo owned it. It was a speakeasy and dance hall, and was not very large. Its only patrons were the mob and their women, hangers-on from the town and newspaper men. Hugo liked these latter.

And it was to this roadhouse, called the Exclusive Club, that Little Joe Riley went the next afternoon. (The mob usually went about The Town as they pleased. They had political influence.) His panic of the night before had vanished, and he felt rather proud of himself. He walked along the streets and watched the people with a superior stare. He felt, somehow, apart from them, a bit individual, and very powerful. He swaggered.

He boarded a trolley and rode to the end of the line. But he did not buy a paper. He was saving that thrill. He wanted to see it at the Club, and he wanted to look at it casually in front of

the mob. He knew the cop the night before had recognized him along with Big Dick, and his name had been linked with that of Big Dick several times in the newspaper columns. Big Dick and Little Joe! It was quite a combination, and the papers made much of it. It did not matter that, concerning the actual case, the two adjectives were exact.

When he reached the end of the line Joe hailed a cab. He rode to the Club. Entering, he sauntered into the barroom, where he found the mob. They were talking and drinking, and the room was full of smoke. They watched him as he strolled to the bar. Big Dick and Jules were there. Before them lay a paper. Joe, appearing not to notice, ordered a beer. He drank slowly. Big Dick looked around and saw him.

"Joe," he growled, "come here. You got written about."

Joe looked. The paper was one of those afternoons that use small amounts of large type effectively. The headlines were heavy, and Joe thrilled to them, but he passed them up quickly. There were no names in them. He hurried to the body of the story. It read:

> Patrolman Marin Gaselli early this morning was slugged by two or three thugs and left in an unconscious condition on the Free Bridge, when he attempted to investigate what is believed to be the latest of the Hugo gang murders. His attackers escaped in an automobile.
>
> Gaselli was walking his beat which runs from Eighth Street, north, to Sixteenth Street, south, along Front Street, and had just strolled out on the bridge, when he saw a car drive furiously from the Illinois side out on to the bridge, and stop. He ran to the scene. Coming to the spot, he was blinded by the headlights, but noticed a group of men standing by the rail.
>
> He hailed them and, as one of the men appeared to be intoxicated, asked if they had a drunk. One of them replied in the affirmative. Gaselli then threw his flashlight on the group. He says he is positive two of the men were Big Dick Gibson and Little Joe Riley, of the Hugo gang, and believes the third, who he thinks had been murdered, was Buck Clancy, of the same gang.

There was more, telling of the attack on Gaselli by Jules, and speculation concerning the identity of the fourth gangster. But Joe was not interested in that —much. His name appeared no less than eight times with Big Dick's.

He looked up at Big Dick and smiled. Big Dick scowled at him. He looked at Jules and smiled. Jules leered at him.

"You git lots o' credit, don't ya," said Jules. "But you don't do no work."

"The hell ya say." Joe was very cocky, now.

Jules glared.

"Listen, yellabelly," he said, "don't git wise with me. Don't—"

"Pipe down, Jules," said Big Dick, looking at neither.

"The hell!" said Jules. "This lily ain't doin' nothin' an' he's gittin' high hat. He'll—"

"He'll what!" said Joe. "Can it, guy. And don't drop no more about yella, either. I don't wanta *prove* you're a damned liar!"

Jules started for Joe.

"Jules!" It was Big Dick and he smiled.

Jules swore, turned and walked into another room, where there was a crap table.

"Joe," said Big Dick, "that guy don't like you. I don't like him. Sometimes I think that's the reason I like you. Have a drink."

THE AFTERNOON wore on. The mob came and went. Hugo arrived. Near midnight the mob gathered. Hugo kept an account of stolen cars, license plates, serial numbers and general descriptions. The mob reported and gave their information. Hugo repeated the numbers after them. The cars already had been taken across the river to be worked over.

They were in the midst of this work when Hoppy, the lookout, burst into the room.

"De bulls is outside!" he yelled.

"Dick," Hugo's voice commanded, "you, Joe and Jules beat it. Lay low. This is about last night."

Quietly and swiftly, the gang took their places about the room at tables. Quietly and swiftly, Joe, Big Dick and Jules went

behind the bar. The bar slid open, revealing a stairway. They descended this stairway to a passage. Through this passage they hurried to another stairway. This they ascended. Cautiously, Big Dick pushed up, and a trap, covered with sod and brush, opened. They emerged in a clump of trees.

"Scatter," whispered Big Dick. "There's cars behind those woods a ways down."

He was gone.

Joe stole to the edge of the copse and looked out. Across the road by the Club stood several police. He watched for a moment, and was about to go, when a push from behind sent him sprawling out into the road. Behind him, Jules hurried back, opened the trap and disappeared.

The police saw Joe. They yelled. He scrambled to his feet and dived into the trees. He ran through the copse and to the field beyond. The police followed. He ran across the field. The police burst out of the trees. They fired, but they were running and Joe was running. Joe fired back once, but he fired high.

He bolted out of the timber and across another field to a stone wall. He jumped over this. It marked the boundary of a large estate. Across the neatly groomed lawn he saw the house. He ran toward it, dodging among the trees. When he slunk along in its shadow until he came to the rear steps. He climbed these and entered the screened porch. Looking back, he saw the first policeman climb the wall. There was a light inside the house, but Joe did not think of that. He burst into the door and closed it, then turned and leaned against it, listening.

He remained so, for a time. He heard his pursuers run around the house. Relaxing somewhat, he suddenly became aware that the room was lighted. He was in the kitchen. Leaning against the door, he sighed. Suddenly, at a light step behind him, he whirled.

Before him stood a girl. Joe was vaguely disappointed that she did not seem frightened.

He stared at her for a while and she stared back. She was the housemaid, and she had just come in. And she was pretty. She was rather small, with impudent eyes that were blue, and a little pug nose, rowdy bobbed hair and firm little chin. And, far from seeming frightened, she appeared defiant.

Joe, however, became professional again. He noticed the gun in his hand, flipped it, twirled it and pocketed it. He lit a cigaret and, with arms akimbo and legs apart, regarded the girl, as he allowed smoke to dribble from his nostrils. He leaned at ease against the door jamb.

The girl, however, was not impressed.

"Well, what ya want?" she asked.

Joe smiled. He sprinkled ashes on the linoleum.

"What's it to ya?" said Joe.

"Listen, kid," said the girl, "ya look like a fair egg, an' I don't mind ya runnin' in with that cannon if ya wanta play burglar, but don't get wise with me or I'll throw ya out."

"Say, sister," said Joe, "ya know who I am?"

"Sure. Lindbergh with a face lift."

"What the hell, sister!"

"What the hell, kid!"

Joe decided to be masterful.

"Listen, sister," he said, "I'm a hard guy, get me? I'm tough. You've heard of me, sister. I'm Little Joe Riley."

"What kind o' Joe Riley?"

"*Little* Joe Riley."

"What do I do now, bust out an' cheer? Who's *Little* Joe Riley?"

Joe's knees almost buckled. He jerked the cigaret from his mouth and stared at her.

"Chees, sister, don't ya read the papers?"

"Yeah, but not the funny ones. What'd you do—win a marble tournament?"

Joe got mad then.

"Say, sister," he said, "I told ya I was hard. Don't kid me. I'm Little Joe, o' Hugo's mob. That's me!"

"Who's Hugo?"

"My God!"

Joe sat down. He looked at the girl and

his big blue eyes were puzzled. Then he glared.

"Hugo!" he popped. "Hugo's the biggest gangster in this town. I'm a gangster. Hard guy. Tough—"

It was rather lame, and it would have been more so, but the girl interrupted him by laughing violently.

"Gangster?" she gasped. "Gangster? That's hot. You a gangster! You! With that face an' them eyes."

She leaned against the gas range. Her own eyes were wet.

Joe burned. He became furiously indignant. He thought of many retorts. He thought of physical violence. He thought he would get up and leave. This last idea he abandoned because he remembered the policemen. So he stared at the laughing girl and fumed futilely. But presently his resentment died. The girl was pretty when she laughed, and Joe was Irish. Finally he grinned. At his grin her laughter increased. Soon he was laughing too.

"You a gangster!" she said after a while. "Listen, Irish, you big dumbell, don't make me laugh any more. You're too good lookin' to laugh at."

"What's your name?" asked Joe.

"Millie O'Dowd."

"Any kin to Jimmy O'Dowd o' the Cass Avenue Athletic Club?"

"He's m' uncle."

"Chees. I know Jimmy well. He taught me to box."

"Yeah? I'll tell him I met ya."

"All right. No—" Joe stopped short. He did not go to Jimmy's since coming to Hugo's. "No, don't do that."

Millie looked hard at him.

"Say, kid," she said after a moment, "just what was the idea o' your bustin' in here. I saw ya an' thought I'd get the old man and the butler, but I took a look at your face an' says to myself, 'That kid's O. K.' So I come in to see. If it hadn't been for your face, kid, you'd 'a' been in the cooler sure as hell. What's the idea?"

"I told ya straight. Honest t' God I'm a gangster. Belong t' the toughest mob in town. Want me to beat it?"

"Yeah?" Millie ignored his question. "Well what do you know about that? Do ya dance?"

"Sure."

They talked a long time. Millie made Joe a ham sandwich and a cup of coffee. She listened to his exploits with some show of interest. When he got up to go it was almost morning.

"Come around again, Joe," said Millie, when he said goodby to her. "We'll catch a dance somewhere. You know, kid, I think I'm goin' t' like ya even if ya are a gangster."

"I hope ya do, sister. I'll be around."

THE MOB, like all mobs, had a stock of alibis and alibi agents, and in three days Big Dick, Joe and Jules were able to go about again. They discovered they had been miles away when Patrolman Marin Gaselli was blackjacked and Buck Clancy murdered. Buck's body had been recovered from the river. The mob gave him an elaborate funeral.

When Joe was clear of suspicion he immediately made a date with Millie. They met at the corner of Delmar and Taylor.

"Where to, sister?" said Joe.

"Anywhere, kid," said Millie.

"Tony's?"

"O. K."

They went to Tony's for dinner and dancing. The food was good and the music better. Millie had dressed for subdued lights.

"Kid," she said, "ya dance like Ted Shawn."

"Yeah? You ain't so rotten yourself."

"I know, but I gotta have good company to be good."

Joe liked that. They had returned to the table.

"Joe," she said, "how's the mob?"

"O. K."

"Don't the cops ever git any of ya?"

"Yeah, but they don't keep none of us."

"Why?"

"It's arranged."

"Who arranges?"

"I don't know, but it's arranged."

"Suppose one time it wasn't arranged?"

"It's always arranged."

"Yeah, but suppose one time you was on a job an' it wasn't arranged?"

"Aw hell, what ya tryin' to pull?"

"Nothin'. Let's dance."

It was a waltz. Millie followed Joe as if she were part of him.

"Kid," she said suddenly, and looked up at him, "you don't look like a gangster."

Things were quiet for a spell with the mob, and Joe saw Millie often. There were more nights at Tony's. There were nights at other places.

"Joe," she said once, as they were dancing, "Uncle Jimmy's gone to Florida to grow pineapples."

"Yeah?"

"It's nice down there. Warm an' nice."

"Yeah," said Joe, looking at an artificial palm. He danced with unusual fervor. "Millie, you're a sweet kid."

"Joe, you're a sap."

She left him abruptly and went to the table.

"What the hell—"

ONE DAY Joe turned up at the Exclusive Club. He had not been around so much as before he met Millie.

Big Dick and Jules were there. Since the night of the raid there had been increased enmity between Joe and Jules. Joe had told Big Dick about the push from behind; Jules had told a straight story about tripping and falling and accidentally shoving Joe. Hugo and the mob took it all right, but Big Dick's smile was broader than ever when he saw Jules. Jules, moreover, was getting out of hand. He bullied the mob and once he had flouted Hugo, and the mob murmured. But Jules was a fine gunman. Mobs will stand a lot, sometimes.

As Joe entered, Big Dick scowled at him, and Jules smiled his strange smile. Jules greeted him.

"Hello, kid," he said. "How's your skirt?"

"O. K."

"Gimme a tumble, sometime. She's a likely little frail."

Joe looked up sharply.

"Take it easy, guy," he said. "I kinda like that jane."

"Yeah? I'll say ya do. Since ya met her ya been goin' softer'n ever."

"What's it to ya?"

"Nothin'. If it was, I'd scramble you and take her. But hell! She's just another broad."

Joe hit Jules squarely between the eyes. Jules fell back against the bar. He sprang at Joe, but not with his fists. His automatic came out. Joe reached for his. Jules shot, but as he fired, Big Dick caught his wrist. The bullet went into the floor.

"Jules," chuckled Big Dick, "if you'd 'a' croaked that kid . . ."

Jules turned and left the club.

"Joe," said Big Dick with a frown, "the more that guy hates you, the better I like you. Have a drink."

Joe left a little later. He had a date with Millie. He took her to Cafarelli's Gardens for dinner and then they went to the Arcadia, a tremendous dance hall, where nightly gathered the more uninhibited of The Town

It was a garish affair, with a floor the size of half a block, which was surrounded by a mezzanine upon which were tables. It cost six bits for a single man, a dollar a couple, and a dime for unattended girls. There were a lot of unattended girls.

The jazz band was large. It had to be, because of the size of the place and the conversation. It was led by a tall man with a loose face and a pair of weary eyes that seemed all tired out from looking. His face was bloated, but his body was well built. He played six hours straight every night, and the exercise he derived from swaying and stamping was beneficial. He played the violin, and his cavortings were inspiriting to the dancers.

When Joe and Millie arrived the place was packed. It was about nine. The leader was working himself into a frenzy. A crystal ball sprinkled colored lights about

the floor. The band moaned and blared, wailed and shrieked. The cadence was slow, tantalizingly slow, and the music, although blatant, was sleek.

"Chees," said Joe, "ain't that hot?"

He swung Millie out on the floor, and they began a slow, swaying stomp. They could do nothing else. The crowd did that, and the crowd was very large.

"Joe," said Millie after a while, "why don't you quit that racket?"

Millie had never put it that way before. Joe was appalled.

"Chees, Millie, I couldn't."

"Why?"

"Why— Watch your dogs, ya big bum! I just couldn't."

"Sure you could, Joe."

"Gawd, sister, ya don't know. They'd bump me off."

"Aw hell, Joe."

They were silent then, as they passed close to the band.

"Lissen, Joe, I wrote Uncle Jimmy the other day. He says you was a good kid, but a damn' fool. Says he used to like ya. Says he'd give ya a job if ya sneaked away an' come down. You ain't no gangster, kid. You're—well, you're just a sweet boy."

Joe tightened his grip on Millie.

"I know it," he said, and was surprised at his words. But he went on. "I can't stand the gaff. But hell, sister, I wouldn't wanta go if I had to leave you."

"No?" shouted Millie as they passed close to the band.

"No!" shouted Joe.

The music stopped. They clapped violently, looking at each other.

"Why?" shouted Millie as the band started again. They swayed away.

"Because I'm crazy about ya, sister. I been for a long time. Honest to God I been, sister."

He bent over and kissed her hair.

"Chees, Joe," she said. "Ya big sap, why didn't ya say that before? Ya big, big Irish boob! I told ya I liked ya the night I met ya. You're silly, but you're sweet as hell."

Her eyes were brighter. Joe almost lifted her off the floor.

"If I sneaked off, would ya go along?"

"Sure."

"My Gawd, honey, I—"

He stopped short as a hand gripped his shoulder. He turned, and stared into the face of Big Dick. He quit dancing and released Millie. Big Dick nodded to Millie.

"Joe," he said, "come here a minute."

Joe left Millie and walked away a few steps.

"Joe," said Big Dick, "be at the club at one. Hugo's put a sign on Jules."

He turned and walked away. Joe stood, his hands hanging limply at his sides. He stared at the floor. The crowd, milling around him, made him dizzy. He turned, when Millie touched him, and danced mechanically.

"What's the matter, honey?" said Millie.

"Nothin'. I gotta go after this dance."

"Joe—"

"I gotta!" said Joe fiercely.

They were silent for the rest of the dance. When the music stopped they got their coats and hats. The music began again. As Joe went out the door, something made him look back. It was the leader. He had stopped, his tired eyes fixed in a vacant stare, his bow raised. Joe followed his stare. He saw Jules pass, dancing with a frowzy blonde. Jules was laughing, and his laugh was pleasant.

THE ROOM was stifling. Smoke hung in strata. All of the mob were there except Big Dick and Jules. There were two or three at a table and the tables were in a semicircle facing the bar. Hugo lounged against the bar. No one spoke. The silence, heavier than the smoke, was broken only by the sound of glasses striking the tables.

They watched the clock. It was a quarter to one.

Joe was there. He sat directly across the room from the middle of the bar. Two other men were at his table. Their eyes were fixed on the clock. Joe's eyes wandered from the clock to their faces. Their

faces were flushed, and their eyes were brilliant.

Slyly, to all of them, the ticking of the clock became audible. Slowly it grew louder. The minute hand jerked. A man shuffled. Others shifted in their chairs. Hugo turned and surveyed his mob. Then he turned back and faced the bar.

It was five minutes of one. The minute hand jerked again, again, and again.

The brakes of a car screeched, and the men started. A motor roared, and then was silent. There was the slamming of two metal doors. The door to the front room of the club opened and the mob heard steps and voices. Some one sighed. The tension relaxed a little.

Through the door to the barroom walked Big Dick and Jules. Both were smiling, Jules his strange smile, and Big Dick his broadest one.

"Hello," said Hugo.

"Hello," said Big Dick and Jules.

"Hello," said the mob, all except Joe. His throat was dry.

"Been dancing, Jules?" said Hugo.

"Yeah. Met a swell moll."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Jules—"

It was Big Dick. Jules turned. The men shifted their positions. As soon as Jules' back was to him, Hugo slipped across the room to one end of the semicircle. He drew his gun. So did the rest of the mob. So did Joe.

"Jules," said Big Dick with a pleasant laugh, "what I was going to say was, 'Look around'."

Jules looked around, and Big Dick slipped across to the other end of the semicircle.

Jules stared stupidly. His arms were spread behind him, resting on the bar. One heel was hooked over the rail. He looked as if he were crucified.

He looked at the faces, one by one. He looked at the arc of guns. He looked at Hugo. He looked at Big Dick, who was laughing softly.

"God Almighty—" he shrieked.

The semicircle blazed until the automatics were empty. Jules jerked many times and fell. The smoke was choking. A man coughed. Joe put his still loaded automatic back in his pocket.

"Open the windows," said Hugo.

"Git a mop," laughed Big Dick.

The windows were opened and some one got a mop. Joe stared at the bar. The men rose and walked over to drink. Some one put a record on the gramophone. Joe started violently at the blare of a muted trumpet.

"Joe!"

Joe Riley looked up. Big Dick stood above him.

"Joe," said Big Dick, "let's have a drink."

They walked to the bar. A man was behind it now, whistling.

"Joe," said Big Dick with an expansive smile, "that guy hated you. He's gone, now. You don't have to worry about him no more."

"Say Joe," said Big Dick, "don't git gone on that skirt. You'll be gittin' soft, and when guys git soft they ain't no good."

Big Dick smiled pleasantly at Joe. Joe mumbled his thanks for the drink and walked out to the crap table. But he did not stop there. He went out.

Again he ran across the field and through the timber, and out into the next field. Again he jumped the wall. He rang the bell to the house furiously. A sleepy butler finally answered.

"Millie!" said Joe. "I gotta see her."

The butler looked at Joe and called Millie. She came down in her kimono. The butler, somewhat annoyed, left.

"Millie," cried Joe, "will ya go? Will ya go right now?"

Millie took Joe by the arms and held him from her. She searched his face. She kissed him.

"As soon as I'm dressed, honey."

DIGGER FOOL BRUNN

By DEX VOLNEY

A LARGE flaming candle shed a wavering light over the green and violet colored rock walls of Drift No. 13 in the Apollo Mine. It flickered, too, in a sinister fashion, upon a lanky, pale faced young man with coal black hair and small, deep set, sensual gray eyes, who was driving a roaring air drill into a steeply sloping wall of greenish quartz incrusted with small kidneys and stringers of gleaming virgin gold.

The young miner was clad in dirt stained yellow khaki trousers and coat, and heavy brown leather boots. His face was thin and worn, and his lips were bitter. Behind him, two strong bodied, dark complexioned men with picks were loading chunks of the green, gold inlayed quartz into a small iron car that ran on a crooked steel track.

When they had filled the car with the rich ore, they began pushing it away into the drift. The car clanked and squealed, shrilly, but these sounds could hardly be heard through the thudding roar of the air drill.

As the two miners shoved their load down the gallery toward the distant main tunnel of the mine, a candle burning on the moving heap of rock dwindled to a small bright point, like a tiny star, and then vanished.

Charlie Brunn, shutting off his air drill, turned and watched the ore car disappear. There was a hard glint in his small, deep set eyes. Through the rocky walls of the drift came the clanking and squealing of other cars, accompanied by the low, vibrating rumble of pounding drills.

"It's going out," muttered Charlie Brunn, in a harsh, rasping whisper. "It's going out every day—thousands of dollars' worth. It's mine, all mine!"

Weird, grim and intensely dramatic is this novelette of Alaskan gold and a man's fanatic quest of a lost mountain lode

Pulling his seven-foot drill steel out of the sloping lode of quartz that blocked the inner end of the low roofed tunnel, the spare young miner picked up half a dozen sticks of dynamite from a newly opened box that lay a few feet behind him. He began pushing the explosive roughly into one of the seven holes he had drilled that day. Then he unfolded the waxy paper inclosing one of the yellow sticks of nitroglycerin soaked sawdust; punched a deep hole in its end, with a soft wooden spike; and inserted a length of fuse which was sheathed with a copper firing cap. Lashing up the fuse firmly, he pushed the firing charge down into the drill hole, on top of the other five paper cylinders of explosive that he had already rammed into place.

He quickly loaded, similarly, the six other holes in the sloping wall of gold interlarded quartz. Pulling out a nickel cased watch, he saw that the time lacked ten minutes of five. He leaned wearily upon the bed of fuses, which looked like sinister black vines flourishing in the darkness. His thin fingers rested on a small kidney of gold in the rich dark green rock. About the size and shape of an almond nut, it gleamed dully in the murky light of the yellow flaming candle that was stuck in a steel holder at his elbow.

But Charlie Brunn hardly saw it; for he was gazing into a pair of passionate, violet black starry eyes that were set in a smooth oval face—a face framed in masses of glossy black hair, in which sparkled a gem studded amber comb.

"You she-devil!" he muttered bitterly.

With a startled gesture, he glanced at his watch. Three minutes to five.

The two muckers returned with their clanking car. Charlie Brunn helped them load his heavy air drill into it, and they

again departed, wheeling their last load for the day.

Taking the flaming candle from the violet colored wall of the drift, the lanky young miner applied it to the end of one of the black, vine-like fuses. For a second or two it smoked and sputtered; then it began shooting out a thin stream of hot red sparks.

INSTANTLY, from behind the emptied dynamite box, there scrambled out, with a loud scratching noise, a small lop eared, coppery red dog. He started to scamper at full speed down the gallery; then abruptly halted and turned back, gazing, with an appealing whine, at the miner.

"Take it cool, Dynamite," said Charlie Brunn quietly, as he transferred the blazing candle to the next fuse.

In response, the shaggy little red dog dashed up to his master and, seizing him by his khaki trousers above the tops of his brown leather boots, tried to drag him away from the loaded holes. Charlie Brunn reached down, with a long bony hand and patted the little animal on its head.

"Take it cool, Dynamite," he repeated.

Soon all the seven fuses were shooting out jets of sparks, with a chorus of menacing hisses. A thin bluish white haze of smoke dimmed the yellow light of the candle in the young miner's hand; and the pungent odor of burning gunpowder struck his nostrils.

Charlie Brunn swayed toward the smoking fuses, as if he were inclined to sit down and meditate among them for a while. There was something startlingly like that in the gesture. The coppery red dog, who was quivering in every limb, must have observed it, for he whined, and snapped sharply at his master's leather encased ankles.

Charlie Brunn turned and walked, in a stooping manner, down the low gallery. The shaggy little dog, hurrying ahead, paused every few moments to look back and bark over his shoulder at the man, urging him to hurry up.

Coming to the outer end of the drift, where it debouched into the large main tunnel of the mine, Charlie Brunn fell in behind a few other bearded men with candles in their hands, who were walking out. They spoke to one another, in tired voices; but the gaunt young man walked alone and said nothing at all.

Emerging into the dying daylight at the mouth of the tunnel, he stopped. He was standing immediately above the weather blackened roofs of a large stamp mill and a number of other unpainted wooden buildings that nestled on the gently sloping flank of a white shouldered mountain, whose higher peaks approached a cold, steely sky. Far below him lay a snow rimmed, pear shaped little bay which gleamed like dark platinum in the falling dusk. Three miles to the southward, where it met the slate colored waves of the Pacific Ocean, there was a cluster of red roofed and white walled houses, comprising the Alaskan island town of Unga.

A series of heavy booming roars, like the peals of distant thunderbolts, came rolling out of the black mouth of the tunnel.

"More ore for the stamps tomorrow," muttered the thin young man harshly to himself. "There's millions there—all mine!" His voice cracked like a whip.

The little coppery red dog raised his muzzle and gently licked his master's boots.

IT WAS some time in the early Nineties, when Digger Fool Brunn—then just plain young Charlie Brunn, and quite fresh from England—had climbed up on to the flank of Unga Mountain, the highest thing on the two-by-four island of the same name, and discovered an outcropping stringer of quartz that assayed sixty-five dollars a ton on the very surface.

The young Englishman, in company with his lop eared, coppery red dog, had climbed and dug, regardless of the scoffs and sneers of the mob down on Gold Hill, where preliminary strikes had been made

that showed gloriously rich on top and turned into nothing but sticky yellow clay ten feet down; while the stringer up on the side of Unga Mountain, whence one may see the snow robed ranges of the Alaskan Peninsula looming to the northward like the spired walls of a great white fortress, became the famous Apollo Mine, with a mill of forty stamps, and an assay record of five thousand dollars a ton. It was, and is, the only real mine on the mountainous, sea cannonaded island of Unga.

Though it was speedily confessed by the mob on Gold Hill that Charlie Brunn had struck something, at that time no human being on the island, not even the young miner himself, dreamed of the millions in dull red gold that lay in the heart of Unga Mountain. That is, no human being but one—a moon faced Swede with round blue eyes, and fingers as smooth as polished glass, who had quietly come to Unga from nobody knows where.

The Swede had evidently had enough to do with gold mines to become convinced that fifty-two glossy, new, easily bent and easily slipped playing cards were better gold dust getters than the best miner's pick on earth.

He had seen some of Charlie Brunn's samples in the assay shop. He had also looked over the lay of the land. Then he had spoken a few words, in a low voice, to Pallocki Razumov, the most beautiful of the moths in the Golden Palace barroom, and had handed her four twenty-dollar gold pieces.

He showed Pallocki Razumov ten more of these coins, at which her lustrous black eyes glittered avidly, and she smiled, drawing her enticing red lips into a straight, cruel slit.

"It will be very easy," she had said softly. "He's in love with me."

The moon faced Swede nodded.

Meanwhile, a big, black browed young Russian-Aleut had looked on from a seat in a far corner of the barroom, his face dark with the stupid, jealous rage of the misconstruing lover.

CHARLIE BRUNN could hardly remember anything, afterward, except those seductively passionate black eyes and a gem studded amber comb sparkling in a sea of lustrous black hair. Those eyes, aided by a low, sensuous Central Asian voice, had induced him to drink, and then to sit and play poker with a small moon faced Swede with round blue eyes and fingers as smooth as polished ivory.

The Swede sold out the Unga Mountain claim the following spring for enough money to buy himself the most fashionable night life café in San Francisco, which he still owns, and which, in view of his present advanced age, he probably considers an even better gold dust getter than a deck of glossy, new, easily bent cards.

Pallocki Razumov was found in her shabby hotel room, the morning after the game, with a black, powder ringed bullet hole in her temple and a small chamois skin poke containing fourteen twenty-dollar gold pieces jammed between her beautiful teeth. Her black eyes were wide open, shining like two frozen stars. A mocking, taunting expression lurked fixedly in them. Her amber comb still sparkled gayly in her blood soaked black hair.

No one had heard the shot. Charlie Brunn had slept drunkenly all night on the floor of the Golden Palace barroom, which took up the lower part of the same building; but nobody suggested examining the tall young miner's six-shooter to see whether a cartridge had been fired. It was most unwise to go around asking embarrassing questions in Unga, in those turbulent days.

Black Alf, the Russian-Aleut lover of Pallocki Razumov, had taken passage to the mainland during the night, on a cod-fishing schooner. He was never seen again in the Shumagin Islands; and so the murder was more or less publicly laid to him. Uncertain word came to Unga, years later, that Black Alf, dying of the flu in the Cold Bay country, had owned up to the crime.

A grave was blasted through six feet of

perpetually frozen rock, on the hill above the town, in the cemetery, full of white painted Russian crosses. From the Apollo Mine on Unga Mountain, these crosses looked like a little cluster of daises. The miners laid Pallocki Razumov in the hole and filled it up; and then the Russian-Aleut women of Unga planted another three barred cross over the new grave. Charlie Brunn helped at the blasting, and he painted the cross—jet black. He used a can of stove enamel from the Alaska Fur Company's trading store.

After that, when Charlie Brunn looked at a woman, she felt as if she had a knife in her breast. So the women all said . . . But the dogs in the town licked his hands.

II

CHARLIE BRUNN worked for the syndicate that tunneled horizontally into the flank of the mountain, built the mill of forty stamps, and took out ten million dollars' worth of gold, in the course of twenty-five years. The tall, black browed miner saw the whole ten million go out through the tunnel to the stamp mill, in the small iron cars. Every dollar of it was a sort of knife stab in his thin side.

"It's mine—all mine!" he would bitterly whisper to himself, every day.

Charlie Brunn became the superintendent of the Apollo, after having held successfully almost every job in the mine, from mucker up. The fact that he was the original discoverer of the rich gold bearing stringers in Unga Mountain became a fading legend, as he never mentioned it to anybody.

The San Francisco syndicate that owned the Apollo at length stripped it of its gold, except for one incredible vein of quartz deep in the heart of the mountain, which seemed inexhaustible. Its values slowly rose from six to ninety dollars a ton, even with the crude amalgam process of recovering the gold that was then used; and it daily grew richer. The Santa Claus Lode of Drift No. 77, it was called. Working on the vein, the miners occasionally ran into kidneys of pure, nugget-like gold, gleaming dully in the emerald hued quartz, kidneys that sometimes weighed as much as half a pound.

One night the drillers pulled up their steels, loaded half a dozen holes with dynamite, spit the fuses and came out of the mine. There was no cage or hoist; they simply walked out of the mile-long horizontal main tunnel. The rumbling, cavernous roar of the exploding charges followed them out, sounding like a low growling of distant thunder.

The next morning the muckers walked in with their picks and bars and found the treasure vein in Drift 77 a thing that no longer existed. The shots of the previous evening had blown out a mass of the rich rock, leaving at the inner end of the tunnel a vertical wall of gray, barren granite of supreme hardness. The six foot lode of green, gold interlaced quartz had simply ended. The news, spoken in startled tones over the mine telephone, sped to the ears of Charlie Brunn, in the high, gloomy superintendent's house.

Charlie Brunn was now a tall, commanding looking but skeleton-like man of about fifty, with iron gray hair and long, thin wristed white hands that were shaped like spears. His features were as sharp as a razor. His narrow chin was covered with a short cropped dark beard; and his small, deep set eyes looked like the glittering points of two drill steels under his thin penciled brows, which were still quite black.

WHEN the epochal news from the mine came in, he was sitting alone at a small table covered with a snowy linen cloth, eating his breakfast of buttered, delicately browned toast, and drinking a cup of richly aromatic coffee. A gleaming silver percolator stood on the table. He was attended by a nondescript Aleut woman, who watched him motionlessly from the door of the adjoining kitchen. A little fuzzy white puppy lay between his feet, chewing industriously on the toe of one of his russet leather boots. Poor lop eared Dynamite,

of course, had long since gone the way of all dog flesh.

"The Santa Claus Lode in 77 has faulted, Mr. Brunn," said Peter Hake, the overseer, a small shrimpish squaw-man who could be trusted to do his work. He shifted uneasily, standing at the table before the superintendent, and ground the run down heels of his leather boots into the floor.

Charlie Brunn had left off eating. He was staring, like a crystal gazer, into the polished surface of the glittering silver percolator on the table. Veins often faulted. The faulting was caused by the mountain's having shifted in sections in some past age, thus breaking off the strata and layers in places. It had never been very hard to relocate a faulted vein in the Apollo Mine. But this one remaining lode was something different again. It had never faulted before at all.

Peter Hake looked more and more troubled, as if he divined his superior's thoughts.

"The vein is clean gone, Mr. Brunn," he declared hesitatingly. "We've come to a dead granite wall. There ain't nothing to show which way to drill—" He paused, and then added dismally, "There ain't a thing."

Charlie Brunn abruptly glanced up at a big clock on the wall. Its black hands pointed to half past eight.

"Wait in the office, Peter," he said, in a cold, steely voice.

The overseer willingly left the room, without saying anything more.

Charlie Brunn drank his coffee. Then, getting up from the table, he walked into a large, cold front room. It had a high ceiling, bare, pictureless walls of yellow shellacked fir, and very lofty curtainless windows. It was as bare as a barn, except for a magnificent, darkly gleaming baby grand piano that stood, together with a mahogany bench, almost exactly in the middle of the freshly scrubbed wooden floor.

Charlie Brunn stood before the piano. The fuzzy little puppy circled about his feet, yapping excitedly at the unconquerable russet boots. The man's thin body was as spare and straight as a vertical steel bar. He sat down at the instrument, and his white, rod-like fingers touched the keys.

A low, plaintive Russian air floated from the piano, and abruptly died away, with a sharp, questioning note.

"Six millions!" whispered Charlie Brunn, with fierce intensity. "Six millions—above all costs of operation! Paintings . . . music . . . blazing lights . . . people!"

Turning about toward the door to glance at the big clock up on the wall of the dining room, the miner's glinting deep set eyes rested for a fleeting instant upon the rather stupid featured Aleut woman who was bending over the breakfast table, with some half raised dishes in her worn brown hands. She was staring at him, with large, round frightened black orbs. Shuddering, she lifted up the dishes and moved noiselessly away, into the kitchen.

The little fuzzy white puppy, which was now curled up at its master's feet, raised its head and licked the bony fingers of one of Charlie Brunn's spear-like hands, which hung down over the end of the piano bench.

AT NINE O'CLOCK, Charlie Brunn walked into the mine office, a small wooden structure near the stamp mill. Peter Hake was waiting there. The superintendent passed into the adjoining assay room. Here a few bottles of chemicals stood on a rude, acid stained wooden bench. Many other bottles were clustered above it, on a heavily loaded shelf that was spiked to the rough board wall. Before the assay bench, a brick based charcoal furnace, blown by compressed air, was glowing hotly. Upon it was mounted a long handled heavy iron ladle, which was partly filled with pulverized ore.

Over this exceedingly hot affair hovered a frail limbed little man, whose weak and almost chinless face was partly hidden under a sparse straw colored beard. His

wet looking hair, which was also of a pale straw color, lay thin and failing on his small bumpy head. His sore looking, red rimmed eyes were the color of slightly muddied blue seawater. They moved about unceasingly from one object to another. He wore a frayed blue serge coat that was very much too large for him, and a pair of brown, tight fitting corduroy trousers that were too small. There was something startlingly bat-like about him; perhaps because of his ill fitting garments, and his huge protruding ears, which sometimes seemed to quiver delicately.

"Horsville, have you the assays of yesterday's dumpings?" asked Charlie Brunn in his cold, metallic voice.

The weird looking little assay chemist quivered slightly, as if he had been scratched with a piece of sharp pointed steel. Setting down a small glass bottle, from which he was releasing a few drops of yellowish acid into the iron ladle, he turned to some soiled, much thumbed leaves in a record book on the rude bench.

"Cars yesterday morning—ninety-four dollars. I haven't finished those of the afternoon, but they're going to run way over two hundred dollars a ton." He spoke in a husky, whispering voice, which had occasional gasping sounds in it, such as a fish sometimes makes when it has been jerked out of the water.

Peter Hake, who had come to the door of the assay room, emitted a low whistle.

"Two hundred dollars a ton—and then gone like that!"

Charlie Brunn's gaunt, khaki clad figure seemed to stiffen suddenly. Without speaking, he turned around and walked out of the assay room. A pair of blinking eyes the color of muddied seawater followed him, waveringly, from under pink, pale lids that were almost devoid of lashes.

THE SUPERINTENDENT of the Apollo Mine and his overseer rode into the main tunnel on a car drawn by a low, flat cheese box of a compressed air locomotive. The tunnel was lagged with timber for the first few yards; then it became a burrow through solid rock. A third of a mile within the mountain, the two men got off the car and walked up a slightly rising drift, in which there was a hand car track of two diminutive steel ribbons bolted to small iron cross stringers. The miners each carried a large flaming candle, which cast swaying shadows on the black and violet colored stone in the drift.

Charlie Brunn had to stoop, in order to walk in the low galleries, causing him to take on a strangely aged and tired aspect, in the wavering candlelight. The two men at length reached a debouching drift, from which emanated a faint, pungent odor of recently exploded dynamite. On a board posted at the entrance of the drift was the number 77, painted in rude black figures.

This famous gallery had been cut higher than the others, owing to the amazing thickness of the horizontal Santa Claus Lode; and Charlie Brunn was able to stand up straight again. The look of weary age vanished from his figure. He moved like a tall iron automaton beside his stumpy squawman overseer. The miners stood aside to allow a clanking ore car pushed by two men to pass by; then they went on, to the inner end of the drift.

A quantity of rich, gold laden quartz broken out by the shots of the night before still blocked the gallery; but nearly all of this stuff, as if shoved by a giant hand, had been forced by the explosions to a distance of four or five feet from a solid gray granite wall which looked as if it had been abruptly placed across the inner end of the tunnel by some Titan of the mountain. Here a number of candles blazed in fissures in the walls, and a few men worked with dully clinking bars and picks at the loosened mass of lode rock on the floor of the gallery.

Climbing over the emerald colored quartz, Charlie Brunn rested his hard fingers, with a light, tentative gesture, on the massive granite obstruction that cut straight across the drift. There was something distinctly cautious and ex-

pectant in the movement of his tapering hand. Slowly, he turned to his overseer.

"Peter, have you ever seen any of this same stone before, in any part of the mine?"

The peak faced little overseer stuck his fingers into his curly auburn hair and then shook his head energetically.

"No, sir. That's th' mystery—nothin' to tell us where to look for the vein. It's just like God or somebody had sliced half the mountain off, along with our Santa Claus Lode, an' then put in its place a piece of some other mountain made of this gray rock."

Charlie Brunn's long hand, with its outspread sharp pointed fingertips which were lightly touching the cold granite, abruptly dropped to his side.

"Peter, what do you know about God?" he demanded in a dead, icy voice.

The little squawman started in surprise, both at the strange tone and the startling question.

"Why—er—nothin' much," he replied confusedly.

"I don't believe in any," Charlie Brunn announced, still in the same harsh voice. "That is, not in any three dimensioned, conscious God."

"I don't know about his dimensions," muttered Peter Hake uncomfortably.

"You spoke of half the mountain having been sliced off," said the tall, gaunt superintendent coldly. "This gray granite is part of Unga Mountain. Mountains are raised by the contraction of the cooling globe. This mountain, in the raising, was split in two; and one half of it has slipped a long way across the face of the other half. It's a gigantic fault. That's all. Don't bring God into it any more."

"I ain't a-goin' to!" exclaimed Peter Hake, shuddering in spite of himself at the cold, severe tone of his superior.

Charlie Brunn stood, tall and gaunt and rigid, staring into the granite obstruction. In his small, sensual, deep set gray eyes there was a bright glint. He seemed to be boring with those orbs, like the points of drill steels, into the dense rock.

Peter Hake would have been enormously astonished if he could have known that his superintendent was gazing into two big black passionate eyes in a smooth, oval face—a face framed with masses of rich black hair, in which an amber comb studded with imitation diamonds sparkled in the flickering candlelight.

"Six millions—all mine!" he muttered in a harsh, bitter whisper. "You she-devil!"

He turned to his startled little overseer.

"Peter, run the ore in the hoppers through the stamps. Then shut down the mill, pay off the men and give them their homeward passage money."

The spare superintendent paused. Then he spoke again:

"But don't pay off all the miners. Keep their cook shack open. Find work for a dozen of them—overhaul the compressed air and the water turbine pipes. I'm going to San Francisco."

CHARLIE BRUNN walked back out of the mine and up to his high, gloomy house. Passing through the dining room, where the small table with its snowy cloth was already set for his midday meal, he went into the big room with the yellow fir ceiled walls in which stood the shimmering piano.

He sat down, as straight as an iron bar, before the instrument. Suddenly he leaned forward, and through the empty house sounded a series of powerful, swelling chords. There was a menacing roar in them, like a challenge to battle. The Aleut woman in the kitchen listened, and hugged herself with terror.

The sounding of the chords ceased. The next instant there burst through the big bare house the glorious notes of an Italian opera. The voluptuous swell of the music grew louder and louder till the walls quivered and the shimmering piano seemed to writhe, as if in pain. The Aleut woman came through the door and stood listening, like a wild bird snared by a serpent. There was a terrific, jarring crash on the keys. Charlie Brunn stood up, with the suddenness of an uprising

steel spear. His eyes passed, icily, over the woman. She shuddered, as if struck by lightning or a sword, then vanished.

III

CHARLIE BRUNN went to San Francisco. His entry into the Olympia Hotel, the newest and most gorgeous structure of its kind in San Francisco, drew a prolonged murmur of interest from among the luxurious lobby chairs, which were filled with soft, richly dressed bodies. The tall, gaunt man, as thin and hard as a steel rail, with small gleaming, deep set eyes, his limbs clad in khaki and russet leather, was of bizarre and striking aspect in those luxurious surroundings. He looked as if he might be an European aristocrat in disguise. Later, in a black suit, his small dark beard trimmed to a sharp point, his feet in narrow shoes, and his thin fingered, spear-like hands gleaming whitely against his dark garments, the gaunt newcomer was again the object of innumerable startled and wondering glances.

Charlie Brunn ate his first meal in the Marine Room, a magnificent, richly carpeted dining salon of the hotel. About its frescoed walls were hung a group of oil paintings of a striking sort. Charlie Brunn gazed slowly at all of them, with an intense glitter in his deep set eyes. An obsequious, bald pated, fat waiter, as unctuous and gross as a great sleek white worm, was mystified at the noticeable shudder that passed through the spare frame of the stranger when his rod-like fingers came into contact with the massive silver vessels in which his food was brought. The meal was served under the soft glow of a small lamp with a rose colored shade, which accentuated the sharpness of the miner's ridgy features.

Charlie Brunn gazed, with bitter look on his thin face, at the expensively dressed patrons of the salon. A tall young woman in a leopard skin coat, walking by with a man in full evening dress, crossed glances with him. Instantly, she staggered slightly and caught at her breast.

"That strange man's eyes stab like a knife!" she murmured, with a faint gasp, to her companion as they passed out.

THE DAY after his arrival on the stinking codfish schooner *Maweema*, Charlie Brunn called at the private office of Louis Greenwood, the man who had cleared the six millions out of the Apollo Mine. His office was on the twentieth floor of a new, glossy tiled skyscraper. Through the large windows one might gaze out upon San Francisco Bay, lying like a huge sparkling bowl of silver among the city studded California hills. The office was furnished with a massive mahogany desk, of extraordinary size, and a rich crimson colored Turkish rug.

Charlie Brunn, his face as grim and stony as if he were going into battle against a mortal enemy, quivered a little, when he walked over that luxurious rug. He sat down, near the massive desk, face to face with a short, thick set old man, who had large cherry red lips, and silky white hair that looked like a little flurry of wind driven snow above his rugged forehead.

"So No. 77 has faulted badly," remarked Louis Greenwood, in a gruff voice that had surprising strength in it, for such an old man.

"It has," replied Charlie Brunn coldly.

Louis Greenwood fixed his two large brown eyes, fringed with snow white lashes, on Charlie Brunn's thin face, as if he would have liked to look the gaunt miner through and through. The superintendent of the Apollo sat as rigid as a steel post.

"Can it be found?" the short, heavy bodied old man asked suddenly.

Charlie Brunn rested his whitely gleaming bony fingers lightly on the edge of the mine owner's desk. The dark, polished wood felt as cold and hard as the granite obstruction in the heart of Unga Mountain.

"It can," he replied grimly.

Louis Greenwood ran a short, thick hand over his large, cherry red lips with a quick wiping gesture. Then he held his

fingertips motionlessly over his mouth, planting his elbow on his massive desk for support. A big diamond sparkled on one of his short fingers. It looked like a sort of seal upon his lips. He swept Charlie Brunn with his large clear brown eyes.

"How long will it take, and how much will it cost?"

The words seemed to have issued from the glinting diamond on the old man's short finger.

"I don't know. It might take twenty-six years—and cost six million dollars."

Louis Greenwood continued to sit quite still.

"Would that be worth while?" he suddenly demanded.

"No man could answer that question," said Charlie Brunn raspingly.

The tigerish old speculator who had cleared the six millions out of the Apollo Mine again wiped his lips with a quick movement of his hand.

"Do you believe it would be worth while?"

The question seemed, to Charlie Brunn, unmistakably to have proceeded from the diamond that glinted on the short, thick finger pressed over Louis Greenwood's mouth. It was a startling illusion. The superintendent of the Apollo Mine revealed a surprised gleam in his hard eyes.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

"Do you believe it would be worth while to spend twenty-six years and six million dollars trying to relocate that lost vein of gold bearing quartz?"

There was the question. Charlie Brunn did not feel he could evade it; it loomed as big as Unga Mountain itself.

"Yes!" he almost shouted, and then instantly looked as if he wished he had been born without a tongue.

Louis Greenwood did not start, or give way to any movement of surprise. Instead, his large cherry red lips curled, with a slight expression of disgust.

"Charlie Brunn, you are a damned fool," he said.

The gaunt superintendent of the Apollo Mine gazed beyond Louis Greenwood's broad shoulder, which was clad in a rich gray imported cloth. He seemed to be looking out of one of the airy windows of the old man's office at a magnificent white and green ocean liner that was dropping down the bay. The water on which the big steamship was moving glinted in the sunlight, like a great jewel of rich blue colored quartz set in a ring of cities.

But Charlie Brunn hardly saw all this. He was gazing into a pair of gloriously shining black eyes, set in a smooth oval face—a face framed in black hair, in which sparkled a gem studded amber comb.

He nodded his head slightly toward Louis Greenwood, as if in assent to the old man's harsh statement.

The snowy haired, thick bodied owner of the Apollo Mine again swiftly brushed his hand over his large red lips.

"Charlie Brunn, we'll look for that lode."

The gaunt miner's thin fingers, resting on the edge of Louis Greenwood's desk, stiffened instantly. The tigerish old speculator detected their movement.

"How long?" asked Charlie Brunn grimly.

"Until I say stop. You'll honeycomb the mountain."

The strong, harsh voice once again seemed to come from the diamond. An imperceptible breeze appeared slightly to ruffle the white, silky hair on his rugged head.

IV

CHARLIE BRUNN returned to Unga. Putting on his usual force of miners, he drove a downward sloping tunnel a thousand feet east, and another a thousand feet west, along the face of the granite mass that had cut off the Santa Claus Lode. At the same time, he sank a vertical shaft exactly at the point where the vein had ended. He drove it down, until, extending far below the level of the sea, it became impossibly flooded at the bottom with salt water. The hard granite face of the fault persisted.

In the early summer, twelve months after Charlie Brunn's return to Alaska, Louis Greenwood cancelled all his business engagements in San Francisco and came up to Unga on a codfishing schooner, accompanied by two mining experts.

Charlie Brunn took his visitors into the heart of the mountain. He showed them the drift running east and the drift running west, and the vertical shaft, all starting from the place where the treasure vein had ended.

"What are you doing this for, Brunn?" demanded Louis Greenwood.

The tigerish old speculator was standing at the junction of the three subterranean excavations, with his two experts at his back like watchful but uneasy bodyguards. A flaming candle which the superintendent of the Apollo bore in a steel holder threw a flickering yellowish light on the dark blue, pin striped expensive suit that covered the mine owner's short, fat body, and produced sparkling flashes in the diamond ring that glinted on one of his fingers.

"I'm getting ready to honeycomb the mountain," responded Charlie Brunn, in a voice that rasped like a saw biting into a sheet of iron.

The gaunt superintendent took the two mining experts into every gallery and cross cut in the Apollo Mine. He walked them back and forth, up and down, and around and around, in the heart of the mountain, for three hours. Then he led them, like a pair of cowed children, out of that frightful maze of burrows, and guided them up to the high, gloomy superintendent's house.

He left them there with Louis Greenwood, who was waiting for them, sitting on an old chair in the uncurtained, high ceilinged room in which stood the shimmering piano. They came before the rugged old man, looking sheepish, and a little frightened. They both wore brand new olive green outing suits, and had their feet shod in fresh white rubber soled mushers.

A little white rag bag of a dog with a lot of hair hanging over his eyes scampered from corner to corner of the big room, snarling angrily at the company of intruders. He seemed to understand, somehow, that they were dangerous enemies.

Louis Greenwood swept the two mining experts with his large brown eyes. The big diamond on his finger glinted as his hand moved with a quick brushing movement over his full cherry red lips.

"Well, Mr. King and Mr. Simpson, are you ready to proceed with your agreement to operate this mine for twenty per cent. of the net yield? Can you put your finger on that missing lode?" The speculator spoke in a loud, strong voice. At the sound of it, the little ragged, hairy faced dog ran under the piano, with a savage bark.

The two experts both stared down at the bare, clean scrubbed wooden floor.

"The infernal thing appears to be completely gutted," said one of them cautiously, as if he were feeling around in the darkness of one of the Apollo's cross drifts without a candle.

He glanced at his companion, in gloomy expectation of confirmation of his words, but the other evidently did not feel called upon to bother even with talking about such a hopeless chimera as that scraped out gold mine.

"I'd never seen anything like this mountain," the first expert went on carefully. "Most of the strata are completely broken and shattered. Such rock is entirely outside of our experience." His voice fell to a low mumble. "If you care to advance—"

Louis Greenwood quickly wiped his lips with his hand, and grimaced slightly, as if he had tasted something nasty.

"Will you proceed in accordance with our proposed contract?" he demanded again, suddenly, in a still louder voice, which brought an angry growl from the little ragged white dog under the piano.

The expert who had been speaking again glanced at his taciturn colleague. The latter shoved his hands into the pockets of his olive green outing suit and slightly hunched his shoulders, as if his coat did not fit him.

"No!" he spat, in a tone of rage, suddenly turning on Louis Greenwood.

The mine owner's plump right hand dropped from his full red lips to his knees. The big blue white diamond on his finger glinted like a falling star.

"That supposed missing lode may actually not exist at all," the first expert volunteered in smooth, even tone, like a softly sounded cornet. "And, if it does—"

"Charlie Brunn is the only living man who can ever find it, eh?" the owner of the Apollo Mine abruptly finished for him, roughly.

The two experts said nothing. One of them, relaxing unconsciously from his stiff, hunched attitude, looked with sudden interest at the green felt hat which he held in his hand. The other absently pulled out a thin gold watch and glanced at it, as if he were about to catch a train.

The tigerish old speculator got up from the hard backed chair on which he had been sitting. The blooming tuft of silky white hair that looked like a flurry of snow on his rugged head waved slightly, as if breathed upon by a gentle draft of air.

"Of course! Of course!" he said, gruffly. "He found it—threw it away on a dance hall—a woman. He's seen every dollar's worth of ore that ever came out of it. And he'll see all that ever will."

The little white dog under the piano growled, ominously.

The chubby old man walked with quick, heavy steps toward the shimmering piano that stood in solitary glory in the center of the high, bare room. For a long while he stared at the sheets of complicated music on its rack. An understanding glow became visible in his brown eyes. Quickly he wiped his cherry red lips. Then he extended the stubby finger on which his diamond ring glinted and struck one of the lower keys of the piano. A deep, rich vibrating sound burst from the instrument. It was like the call of some magnificent golden Oriental gong.

AS IF in response to an imperative summons, Charlie Brunn came in from the mine office. Walking into the front room of the gloomy old house, he found Louis Greenwood seated on his piano bench.

The feet of the fat bodied speculator hardly reached to the bare wooden floor. He sat with his back to the piano. One of his thick arms, encased in expensive pin striped imported blue cloth, was lying across the keys of the instrument. The tigerish old man looked as if he had declared himself in possession of the piano and was resolved to bar Charlie Brunn from it forever.

He brushed the fingers of his other hand over his large, cherry red lips with a gesture like that of a squat brown bear licking honey from its paw.

But Charlie Brunn received a somewhat different impression.

"Like an old iron jawed bulldog in a manger," he thought. "Yes, just that," he decided, immediately.

He stood before Louis Greenwood, in his frayed khaki suit, as straight and gaunt as a taut steel wire. His glinting, deep set eyes looked as hard as the costly diamond on the old man's finger.

Rushing out from under the piano, the little white dog came and lay at the miner's feet and looked up at him with an uncannily sympathetic glance through the tangle of hair that hung over his beady black eyes.

"Charlie Brunn, is that lode deep—or very near?" demanded Louis Greenwood, in a loud voice.

The little dog at Charlie Brunn's feet glared up at the speaker, angrily.

The gaunt, hollow cheeked miner pressed his thin lips tightly together for an instant. He had not even glanced at the two silent experts who stood a little aside, staring intently at him.

"If you had the power to put me on one of the racks used by the tyrants of the Middle Ages, you wouldn't be told, Greenwood," he replied coldly.

The owner of the Apollo Mine slightly lowered his large, snow white head. His

right arm was still resting on the piano, but he drew it toward him a little, uncovering some of the gleaming keys. He accidentally pressed one, setting up a low, prolonged, trembling note. He swept the gaunt man before him with his big brown eyes.

"Charlie Brunn," he said severely. "Charlie Brunn, I'll give you a five-year lease on the Apollo Mine for a dollar—and you can have ten per cent. of all you take out."

The little white dog gave vent to an indignant snarl. He evidently hated the gruff voice of this thick, ugly old enemy.

The spare miner in frayed khaki, standing in front of Louis Greenwood, gave way to a short laugh. Yet it was hardly a laugh; it sounded like a saw ripping into iron. His whitely gleaming, rod-like fingers, lying straight and close together, made his thin hands look like two downward pointing spears. He took a step forward and leaned over the old man with the glinting diamond on his finger.

"I'll see you in hell first!" exclaimed Charlie Brunn, raspingly.

Louis Greenwood did not budge.

"Well, I can afford to shut up the shop," he said, in an exceedingly loud voice. It sounded like a strong lunged boy shouting into an empty barrel. "I've gotten enough . . ."

THE RAGGED little white dog was now barking frenziedly, as if he were choking with rage. Charlie Brunn stooped over and caressed the snarling animal on the floor.

"Take it cool, Fuses!" he muttered.

The dog licked the man's spear-like hand, and lay silent. The miner straightened up. His gaunt frame looked as straight and rigid as a steel bar.

"You haven't gotten enough," he said coldly to the heavy set old man sitting on the piano bench. "You've cleared six millions out of the Apollo Mine—and there are twenty or thirty millions still in the mountain."

Louis Greenwood's thick arm slipped off the keys of the piano, striking them as it went, with a muffled crash. The two experts stared with redoubled intensity at the thin, hard mouthed man standing rigidly before the mine owner. The latter slowly dropped his plump hands to his sides and involuntarily rubbed them on the pockets of his pin striped coat. The big diamond on his finger glinted, like a greedy, angular eye.

"What do you want, Charlie Brunn?" he asked, in a strangely lowered voice.

The skeleton-like superintendent of the Apollo Mine bent over the tigerish old speculator.

"I'll tell you what I want!" he exclaimed, his small, deep-set eyes blazing like two steel cutting torches. "I want my whack out of the mountain. I found the Apollo. I've worked in it twenty-six years, and I'm ahead—by a few thousand dollars. I've spent some money for books—stories of luxurious aristocrats and their gorgeous wealth. Those books tortured me so that I threw them all into the fire. It took me two days to burn them up. And then I have this three thousand dollar piano, which seems a living part of me.

"I've parched my soul, longing for the things that would make life worth while for me—splendid houses, costly rugs and pictures, tours in fifty thousand dollar steamship suites, operas, the sparkling lights of the boulevards, fascinating people! Instead, I've toiled through my youth by candlelight, in the heart of a mountain, and grown older to live in this big gloomy house and eat my meals alone off a pine table that I am lucky to have covered with a white cloth. I almost committed murder to get that white cloth. I took my squaw cook by the throat—She keeps it white, now.

"Without ever touching a pick or a lump of ore, you've cashed in on the Apollo, to the tune of millions. I've never cursed you for that. I had it all in my hands. I let it slip through my fingers, gazing into a pair of passionate, lying black eyes and listening to a seductive Central Asian voice. Like a drunken

lout. It was your luck, and my emotional foolishness. The emotional foolishness of youth. Such things everlastingly happen; but I've suffered more than most people would.

"I've waited twenty-six years for my chance—for a real chance, as genuine and indisputable as the steel armor of a battleship. I've always expected it, exactly in the manner it has come. Only it's late. I'm going to have eight or ten millions and live as I have wanted to live, in New York or Paris. I plan to ruin the lives of a few beautiful women with lying eyes—and go out in a shower of sparks."

Charlie Brunn abruptly ceased speaking. He stood quivering a little, like a ship's topgallantmast in a gale of wind.

Louis Greenwood's thick arm was back on the piano keys.

"You can't do it, except on my terms, Charlie Brunn," he said. "Unless I say the word, you will be nothing but a soul starved miner until the day you die."

The gaunt man laughed, harshly. Then he pointed one of his spear-like hands straight into the middle of the mine owner's thick body.

"Greenwood, I'll give you thirty per cent. of the takings—and I want a twenty-year lease."

Louis Greenwood's full red lips expanded slightly. He quickly wiped them with his diamonded finger. His fluffily waving silk-like hair looked more than ever like a little flurry of snow on his rugged head.

"Never, Brunn! Never! It's ridiculous!"

"Then listen," said Charlie Brunn swiftly, in a clear, icy voice. "You can bar me from the gold, you old fat tiger; but you can't dictate to me how I'm going to die! You get away from that piano!"

From under his frayed khaki coat the hard lipped miner whipped out a heavy blued steel six-shooter with a remarkably long barrel.

The thick set old speculator slipped heavily off the piano bench, and stood up.

"Don't try any coercion, Charlie Brunn!" he exclaimed harshly.

"I'm not," returned the other instantly. "But you go and stand over there!"

He pointed with the long gun barrel toward a spot on the bare floor, at the rear of the shimmering piano.

LOUIS GREENWOOD swept his mutinous superintendent with his white lashed brown eyes. They clashed with the blazing gray orbs of the tall, thin bodied miner. Dropping his rugged head slightly, he walked quickly over behind the piano. His silky hair still waved, as if it were being gently breathed upon. The miner, without speaking aloud, signed to the two speechless experts to go and stand beside the tigerish old speculator. They hastily obeyed.

Charlie Brunn seated himself at the piano. Cocking his heavy revolver, he laid it on the bench beside him. He glanced at the large clock up on the wall of the adjoining dining room. It was visible through the door. Then he turned his ghastly, hollow cheeked face straight ahead, over the top of the piano, toward Louis Greenwood.

"You have five minutes in which to decide whether my offer is worth taking up!" he said in a voice that cracked like a whip. "If it isn't, I'm going to cash in my checks with a bullet through my brain—and half a million tons of green and purple quartz that has enough gold in it to buy you three times over will stay in the heart of Unga Mountain until the end of time!"

His fingers descended caressingly upon the ivory keys of the piano. As lightly as an angelic sigh, a dreamy aria filled the high, gloomy room. It floated through the air with a subdued, but entrancing swell, and seemed a lullaby such as one might play to bring slumber to a tired, feverish little child. The delicate and lovely notes welled slowly stronger; then diminished and died away, in a whisper.

The owner of the Apollo Mine was

staring raptly at the large face of the clock up on the wall of the adjoining room. He looked like a short, fat statue in a pin striped blue suit. But, as Charlie Brunn's right hand dropped swiftly to his cocked revolver, the tigerish old speculator suddenly threw himself forward, half way over the piano, his large red lips swelling wide, and his plump hands involuntarily clenched, palms upward, into two small equal cups of flesh.

"Make it fifty per cent, Charlie!" he cried, his voice jarring and rumbling like a lot of loosened stones tumbling down a mountain side. "Make it fifty, and I'll lease the Apollo to you for life!"

Charlie Brunn sat quite still, with his cocked revolver under his hand. He was gazing at the rich wood of the piano, above its ivory keys—into two lustrous, passionate black eyes in a smooth, oval face. He saw the sparkle of imitation diamonds in an amber comb.

"At last, you she-devil!" he whispered bitterly, under his breath.

Aloud, he said coldly—

"All right."

V

IT WAS later, in the ramshackle office of Dopey Driffin, the sleepy judge, dentist, photographer and government commissioner of the town of Unga, that Louis Greenwood signed a lifetime lease on the Apollo Mine to its original discoverer, in a thick, heavy handwriting in which all the letters were formed like triangles. He pocketed the round silver dollar that was made the consideration of the lease, and then swept Charlie Brunn with his clear brown eyes.

"Would you have—fired?" he asked, with a slightly cynical expression on his large rugged face, above which his silky white hair still waved fluffily, like a flurry of snow.

"Yes—a bullet through your head, first," replied Charlie Brunn, in a voice that cracked like a whip.

"That's what I thought," declared Louis Greenwood, brushing his chubby, diamond ringed hand rapidly over his full red lips, with a grimace as if he had again tasted something nasty.

Late that evening, when low hanging masses of threatening clouds had cast a gloom over the rocky, sea battered island, Charlie Brunn was seen by some of the inhabitants of Unga standing motionlessly in the cemetery up above the town. He was beside the grave that was marked by a black painted, three barred cross.

A few small progeny of Unga's cod-fishing squawmen who crept up the hillside to stare inquisitively at this spectacle related afterward that the bony, khaki clad miner kicked at the stones on the grave and gave way to a ghastly voiced curse that sent the little ones tumbling pellmell down into the town in panting terror.

Some time after dark, the ex-superintendent of the Apollo Mine walked into the general merchandise store of Soapy Komedal, a plethoric, lynx eyed, sandy faced Norwegian, who had a wife short and fat enough to be a circus wonder, and eleven children of assorted sizes. He was accounted the richest man on the island, although Charlie Brunn could remember clearly when he had quit mucking ore in the Apollo Mine to sell gaudy silk shawls and other similar trash from behind a rude six-foot counter in a tumble down shack to the Russian-Aleut wives of the Unga codfishermen. Now Soapy owned a great rambling, amorphous store, a poolroom, dancehall, and many gasoline boats. He habitually spoke of a vague intention to go "outside" to buy a farm in the States, and retire. For five years, however, he had held the prized contract for supplying foodstuffs to the cook shack of the Apollo Mine; and he was waiting . . .

"YOUR CONTRACT with the Apollo is ended, Soapy," Charlie Brunn announced, in his cold, steady voice, standing before a large counter that was completely cluttered with hams, boots, oilskins and cheese. "Fix up a statement for the month, including today, and send it out to the mine office at once for a voucher. I'm closing

the cook shack tonight—paying off everybody, except one man. If any of the miners owe you anything, you'd better catch them, before they drift away to the four corners of Alaska. I've warned you, so don't come whining to me afterward with a lot of claims against them."

"I'll catch 'em—they got to leave on my boats," replied Soapy Komedal, with a transient gleam in his greenish, lynx-like eyes. He rubbed his hands over one of the hams lying on the counter and looked down at it, attentively.

"So old Gold-Shark Louis is closin' th' Apollo, huh, Mr. Brunn?"

"Louis Greenwood no longer controls the mine," replied Charlie Brunn, in his hard, cold voice.

At this moment, a wolfish muzzle and two yellowish-green eyes were thrust in through the half opened outer door of the building. They entered the store, followed by the powerful body of a huge gray malemiut dog. The short eared, savage looking beast, which had a ruff of white tipped fur around its neck, padded silently up to Charlie Brunn. With a slight wag of its bushy, fox-like tail, it flickered a long red tongue across the back of one of the man's cold white hands.

Soapy Komedal glanced irritably at the wolf dog. Then he suddenly stared upward at the ex-superintendent of the Apollo Mine, as if something startling had just occurred to him.

"I hope you haven't tooken that scraped out mountain on to your back, Mr. Brunn!" he exclaimed, in a tone of alarm.

Charlie Brunn was scratching the flat head of the malemiut, which was standing motionlessly close beside him. At the storekeeper's impulsively spoken words, the miner's fingers abruptly ceased moving on the animal's skull.

"You'll see the Apollo a bigger mine than it has ever been since the day I found it!" he whipped out harshly. A withering blaze flashed for a second in his small, deep set eyes. Then he again began drawing his thin fingers through the gray fur of the wolf dog, which remained close to him.

"I'll continue to need a few groceries and things, Soapy," he informed the storekeeper coldly. "After this, they are against me, personally."

Soapy Komedal rubbed his hands over the ham on the counter and examined it very closely, as if there were something wrong with it.

"I don't think I wanta carry the Apollo no more, Mr. Brunn," he said slowly, in a sort of mumble, as if his mouth were full of warm soup. "Bigges' contrac' I ever had; but y'see, I'm sellin' out—buyin' a farm— State of Washin'-ton."

"Don't mumble around like that at me, Soapy!" rasped Charlie Brunn, in a voice like a saw striking a nail. "You'll not lose a red cent." The gaunt man's long, thin fingers flickered from the gray furred skull of the wolf dog to his trousers pocket and whipped out a small chamois poke. He slung it on the counter, among the cheeses and boots, where it struck with a muffled, metallic clink. "There's five hundred dollars. When it's used up for supplies, just let me know over our telephone wire, Soapy. You'd better count it before I leave."

Soapy Komedal regarded the outside of the small deerskin bag with a sly, appraising eye.

"'Sall right, five hundred," he said cheerfully. "I'll take your word for it, Mr. Brunn."

Turning on his heel, the gaunt man strode toward the door. The wolf dog remained standing by the counter, gazing steadily after the miner, with his unblinking yellowish green eyes.

Charlie Brunn abruptly paused, and turned half around.

"Soapy, is that your dog?"

"No. Black Alf's," said Soapy Komedal surlily, from behind his cluttered up counter. Then, as Charlie Brunn fixed on him a strange glassy stare, he hurriedly added, "No relation of that Black Alf who shot Pallocki Razumov. A big Russian-Aleut, though. Bad man an'

bad dog. Comes here every night an' gets a pouch of tobacco fer the fellow. Black Alf's damn' bum pay, but if I didn't give the dog the tobacco, I guess he'd go for me. He's a cunning, ferocious beast."

The wolf dog's unblinking eyes were fixed steadily on the storekeeper's sandy featured face, as if he understood every word.

"That's a fine dog," said Charlie Brunn; and he strode out of the store.

The malemiut and the lynx eyed storekeeper were left alone facing each other across the long counter cluttered with merchandise. The beast, which stood almost as high as the counter, drew back his lips, uncovering two appalling rows of long, awe inspiring white fangs. From his gray furred throat issued a husky, savage snarl.

The merchant, tightly grasping Charlie Brunn's little deerskin bag of gold in his porcine fist, stared at the dog through a pair of sharp, narrowed eyes.

"I'd put a bullet down your wolfish red throat—if I wasn't in business in this God forsaken country," he hissed, as if he were addressing some scoundrelly human being. He glanced at the chamois poke in his fist. "I'm tryin' to scrape up a few dollars," he mumbled.

The malemiut twitched his short gray ears a little. He evidently had heard those puzzling words about the dollars before.

Reaching up to a merchandise laden shelf with his empty left hand, the storekeeper plucked down a package of tobacco and tossed it over the counter to the dog. The beast caught it in mid-air, with a silent, lightning swift movement of his powerful jaws. For a moment he stood motionlessly, gazing at Soapy Komedal from out of his unblinking yellowish green eyes; then he turned and stalked out soundlessly through the door.

The next instant, the storekeeper had dumped the gleaming yellow contents of Charlie Brunn's deerskin poke on to the counter, among the hams and boots. He began counting it, eagerly.

CHARLIE BRUNN walked back up to the Apollo Mine, in the starlit darkness. He followed a trail that lay close along the rocky beach of Delarof Bay. Two miles from the town, which had always clung grimly to the surf battered outer shore of the island, he reached the gently rising flank of Unga Mountain.

Here a dilapidated wharf, with two or three old mine scows moored alongside it, loomed vaguely in the blackness. From the ramshackle wharf, a narrow gage railroad track ran up a steep grade to the great mine, which now lay silent and invisible up on the mountain side.

Charlie Brunn went on a short distance up the track. Coming to a spur, he turned off and followed the little branch line about a hundred yards, where it abruptly ended in front of the mouth of a cave, which was barred by a heavy padlocked wooden door.

Striking a match, Charlie Brunn lighted an old fashioned safety lamp that was lying in a box spiked up beside the weatherbeaten cave door. Hanging the lamp on his bony left arm, he unlocked the door with a key from one of his pockets and swung the heavy timber affair open.

The rays of the safety lamp flashed into the cave, revealing a corridor with walls of damp, black rock. On both sides of the narrow aisle there were long, orderly-stacked tiers of bright, new looking small wooden boxes.

"Dynamite—and the strongest stuff there is," whispered Charlie Brunn. "It means more to me than bread."

He ran his thin fingers lightly over the soft wood cases, which were stacked almost as high as his shoulders. The tiers extended inward, beyond the farthest beams of light shed by the safety lamp. There appeared to be enough nitroglycerin soaked candles of sawdust cased up there to blow the whole of Unga Mountain into dust.

Charlie Brunn had, for years, been continually keeping his magazines of explosive not only chock full, but over-

flowing profusely into several wooden outbuildings. It had seemed a most irritating idiosyncrasy to those of his miners who had learned prudence. On this momentous day, when he had broken Louis Greenwood's hold on the mountain, he possessed seventy tons of hard-rock dynamite, to work with under his lease, that did not show on the closed books of the Apollo Mine. He had, to that extent, at any rate, bested those full red lips and the big diamond that glinted like a greedy, angular eye.

"Better than bread to me," he repeated, in a whisper. "But it'll take bread, too. And everything costs like hell in this country."

He had walked to the inner end of the cave, where part of the wall of black, seamy rock was exposed. Pulling out his old six-shooter, he tapped carefully on a piece of fissured stone until it became loose. He removed it, and then lifted another large piece of rock out of the wall, revealing a little recess, in which lay an old, grimy looking dynamite box.

The box was nearly a third full of twenty-dollar gold pieces. They gleamed dully under the rays of the safety lamp that Charlie Brunn grasped in his spear-like hand. Many years before, after a nearly successful attempt of a black bearded, slippery eyed lone miner to dynamite the company's ingot vaults, the superintendent had provided this hiding place for his comparatively small private hoard. There were no banks nearer than Valdez, a thousand miles away.

"Twenty-six years work in the black heart of a mountain," Charlie Brunn muttered, in a bitter, icy voice. "A fortune to all sorts of men— It would never buy the paintings in Louis Greenwood's hotel! Thirty thousand dollars."

Reaching out with his thin, whitely gleaming right hand, Charlie Brunn began picking up some of the gold coins. He counted out a hundred of them, carefully, and dropped them into his pockets, which sagged under their weight. He would be paying the bills of the Apollo, now.

THE NEXT morning, Charlie Brunn cooked his own breakfast of toast and coffee. He had already descended to an oilcloth covered table on which to eat his meals; for he had dismissed the Aleut woman, who had taken her voucher and gone, with a thankful shudder.

Leaving the few dishes on the table unwashed, the ex-superintendent of the Apollo Mine walked into the high ceilinged front room of the silent, gloomy house, and sat down at his shimmering piano. His fingers had hardly touched the piano keys, when he heard a cautious rap at the side door of the building.

The miner's little ragged white dog jumped out from behind a pair of black rubber boots lying in a corner and began to bark angrily.

In response to Charlie Brunn's sharply spoken command to enter, he heard the side door swung open and then carefully closed again. Horsville, the assay chemist, came shuffling, like a Chinese, into the big bare room. His oversized blue serge coat hung like a pair of clumsily folded wings about his frail, bat-like limbs.

With a savage growl, the little white dog ran straight across the floor and snapped at Horsville's ankles. The assay chemist kicked the animal in the head; whereat he redoubled his attacks, yelping with rage, until a sharp command from Charlie Brunn sent him scurrying back behind the rubber boots in the corner, where he lay emitting low, gurgling snarls at the new comer.

After the treasure vein in the Apollo Mine had faulted, Charlie Brunn had discharged the company bookkeeper and replaced him with Horsville. This new job had evidently not agreed with the assay chemist. His small, red rimmed eyes, which were the color of muddied blue seawater, looked painfully sore, and seemed to be flooding incessantly with a secretion of briny moisture. They peered, with a troubled gleam, into the thin face of Charlie Brunn, and then slipped away, as if they could not be fixed upon anything.

"I paid off the miners last night, and balanced the books, Brunn," the bat-like chemist announced, in a husky, whispering voice. "The men have left for town with their things."

"That's good," said Charlie Brunn.

"Peter Hake, the overseer, was greatly hurt at your order to pay him off with the men," continued Horsville, in his husky whisper.

The gaunt man seated at the piano struck a short note with his long fingers.

"I neither need nor can afford an overseer—until we find the lode," he said in his cold, steady voice.

Horsville started violently. His two huge thin ears, which protruded from the sides of his small bumpy head, seemed to twitch a little.

"I don't—I don't think you'll need me any more, Brunn," he ventured huskily.

Charlie Brunn gazed coldly into the straw bearded, chinless face of the assay chemist. The latter drew one of the loose sleeves of his blue serge coat across his red rimmed eyes, and tried again.

"There'll be nothing for a chemist, or for a bookkeeper either, until you find it."

Charlie Brunn's gaze remained fixed upon the skinny, bat-like creature hovering before him.

"Brunn, I've saved a few dollars working here—enough to stock a little drug store," said Horsville, in a husky, pleading whisper. "There's room for me down in the town."

The gaunt miner at the piano sat as motionless as if he were part of a sinister picture. His small, deep set eyes drilled inexorably into the assay chemist.

Streams of salty water began to start from Horsville's sore, red eyes. He quivered, like a sick butterfly impaled on a long steel hatpin.

"I could do an assay for you, once in a while, down in the town, if you should run across some ore. That would be cheaper—" He stopped, with a faint sob. A look of futile desperation settled over his chinless face.

Charlie Brunn, sitting as rigid and motionless as some gaunt, steely eyed Asian idol, had not spoken a word. But now his thin, hard lips began to move.

"So you want to get back into the drug business, Horsville? How would you do it—with your pharmaceutical license canceled, and you wanted by the Canadian federal government to serve a twenty year sentence in the penitentiary for some of your shady doctoring. That's what I found in one of the Secret Service circulars that used to come to the Apollo Mine from time to time. There was a strikingly good picture of you in it, in your striped suit. Millitt—alias Horsville!

"I suppose you would get an Alaskan drug license in Valdez, under your new name, eh? You've got a lot of nerve and cunning, in your small, dinky way, behind those tearful red eyes of yours. But I've got the drop on you."

The words shot from Charlie Brunn's thin lipped mouth with a sound like a cracking of whips.

The bat-like jailbird had covered his chinless face with his small, scrawny hands; and, while Charlie Brunn spoke, he kept rubbing his flabby cheeks as if they were being mercilessly lashed with a rawhide thong.

"I've never given you up," rasped Charlie Brunn. "I've always expected that a time would come when I could make some use of you. You've known that. Well, that time has come!"

THE DRUGGIST reeled a little, and grasped at the piano for support, like a drowning spider struggling toward a chip. The gaunt man sitting at the gleaming instrument struck Horsville's outstretched skinny hand a quick swooping blow with the long barrel of his swiftly drawn revolver. The bat-like creature fluttering before him screamed softly between his teeth, and caught his hand to his breast.

"Horsville, do you think I have an idea where that missing Santa Claus Lode is at?" demanded the miner.

"No!" fairly shrieked the watery eyed druggist, nursing his red streaked hand.

"Of course not," said Charlie Brunn coldly. "All in the world I know is that the obstruction in Drift 77 is a mass of interposed volcanic rock that has come up from the bowels of the earth, like a sort of giant knife, and cut Unga Mountain almost in two. The devil only knows the thickness of that wedge of granite; maybe it's half a mile. We've got to tunnel straight through it, and then drift and cross drift, maybe for a year, to pick up that lode away over on the other side.

"I've sunk a deep shaft and driven a couple of thousand foot cross cuts at Greenwood's expense. We'll dump our mucked rock into those. That's going to save us the work of wheeling it out into some of the farther galleries. Horsville, do you know what it would cost to drift a mile and a half through that mountain paying wages to drillers and muckers?"

The druggist reeled and looked as if he were going to pitch forward on his face.

"About forty-five thousand dollars," resumed Charlie Brunn, in his cold, clear voice. "I haven't even got that much. You and I are going to find the Santa Claus Lode. We're going to tunnel until we get to it—or drop dead. But we'll get to the lode. It's there. Then you'll get fifty dollars of the first run of the mill for every day you've worked in the drift. Fifty dollars a day. You'll have enough to buy a drug store in New York—or Paris, rather, since the Secret Service would get you in New York. Fifty dollars a day, Horsville."

The druggist's chinless face had taken on a sickly, leaden white hue, as if he were a convicted murderer receiving a sentence of death before a steely voiced judge.

"Brunn, I'm too weak and ill to muck rock," he gasped huskily. "It may take years—and there may be no gold."

He quivered like a speared bat.

Charlie Brunn struck a few powerful, swelling chords on the piano. Then, abruptly, he closed the instrument and locked it with a key. He stood up, tall and gaunt, and deathly pale.

"It's there! We'll drill and blast until we find it!" he rasped harshly.

VI

THE FIRST year, the two men drove horizontally a scant seven hundred feet into the mighty wedge of granite that blocked the inner end of Drift Seventy-seven. It was the toughest kind of drilling.

The compressed air for the work was pumped from a shack far down at the foot of the mountain, where a self-governing water turbine turned ceaselessly. The necessary water was brought in a great rusty pipe from a crystal clear stream that tumbled headlong down the flank of Unga Mountain.

Charlie Brunn raised the air pressure to a dangerously high point, and fed it to a powerful brute of a drill which he wedged into successive positions in the drift with massive jackscrews. The machine roared like a Maxim gun; drill steels broke or grew almost red hot, under the terrific battering into the pale granite that loomed everlastingly ahead in the flaming candlelight.

Every other evening the miner and the druggist fired a dozen heavy shots; and spent the intermediate days mucking out the backward hurled masses of cracked and shivered rock. They dumped their mucked stone into the thousand foot shaft which Charlie Brunn had sunk for that purpose at Louis Greenwood's expense.

The miner cut the drift low, for the sake of speedier progress through the fearfully hard rock—barely four feet—so that it was necessary for him to remain continually bent over when working in the narrow gallery. By the end of that first year he had begun to grow stoop shouldered.

Horsville had assumed, more than ever, the appearance of a bony, repulsive looking, half human bat, whose sore red eyes blinked painfully in the brightness of the outer daylight and streamed profusely with watery tears.

As his predecessors had done before him, the little ragged white dog daily followed Charlie Brunn into the galleries of the mine. Lying down in the drift,

always close to his master, he would keep his beady eyes, which were half hidden under a tangle of dirty white hair, alertly fixed upon the bat-like druggist. He also attended to the preparation of the dynamite charges; and when the fuses were lighted he would stand shivering and whining with fear, at Charlie Brunn's feet, almost articulating his frantic pleas to his master to hasten out of the gallery.

The two men both cooked and slept in the high, gloomy superintendent's house. Charlie Brunn took the precaution of locking his bedroom door at night and of sleeping with his revolver under his pillow. He did not point out to the chinless creature whom he had virtually enslaved that it would be almost impossible to commit a murder and get away from the mountainous island without leaving a glaringly conspicuous trail; but Horsville probably realized this well enough. Alaska was no longer what it had been in the days of Charlie Brunn's youth.

The bat-like druggist once raised his steel pick, while the two men toiled in the flaming candlelight, in the heart of the mountain, as if to drive its sharp, cruel point deep into the nape of Charlie Brunn's neck—only to allow it to fall heavily between his feet, with a shudder of despair. The little ragged white dog, leaping instantly toward his master, had tugged sharply at his khaki trousers, causing the miner, who was making an adjustment on his silenced air drill, to turn swiftly around.

For a few seconds, Charlie Brunn's eyes burned like the points of hot steel rods into the quivering chinless face of the druggist, who was leaning, as if very ill, on the handle of his implement. The miner glanced down at the snarling dog, which was circling round his leather booted feet.

"Take it cool, Fuses," he said grimly.

He returned his gaze to the skinny creature with the pick. Then, with an almost imperceptible shaking movement of his head, he opened the throttle of his air drill. Its thudding mechanism instantly filled the drift with invisible, deafening waves of roaring sound.

DURING the second year of the terrible labor in the mountain, a ghastly ailment began to fasten itself on Charlie Brunn. It first took the form of supremely realistic dreams in which the miner always found himself walking in caverns bearing a gigantic candle in his hand that blazed like a star and shed brilliant rays of white light upon translucent masses of gorgeous green quartz composing the walls and roofs of the grottoes, which were all profusely imbedded with kidneys and wavy runners of gleaming virgin gold. He could never find an exit to these subterranean caverns of fabulous quartz; he was a prisoner in them.

These dreams soon assumed a more sinister aspect. He next found himself clinging to a powerful air drill, with which he bored through interminable miles of granite, in suffocating darkness, like some grotesque, stone piercing slug. Invariably, the rock grew harder as he progressed, until at length he became unable to advance a hair's breadth, and lay encased immovably in the mountain. The stone pressed upon him, seemingly with a weight of millions of tons, torturing him fearfully. At this critical juncture he would wrench himself from his pillow, sweat streaming from every pore, his parched tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, and his muscles quivering and jerking convulsively throughout his whole body.

When he awoke in this condition, he always found the little ragged white dog up on the soiled gray bedclothing, licking his face and whining. After such nights, the little animal's hatred of the bat-like druggist manifested itself in paroxysms of snarling, ungovernable fury.

The miner's thin, razor sharp face began to assume a deathly bluish hue. He suffered from a numbness in his hands and feet, in the mornings, that was inexorably creeping up his limbs. He grew unable to prepare his breakfast, which task devolved upon Horsville. Entering the mine, Brunn would at first be hardly able to hold a drill steel. When this horrible

numbness began to pass off for the day, excruciating, knife-like pains would shoot through his gaunt body.

With the blind, unreasoning preoccupation of a man ruled by a single idea, Charlie Brunn refused to believe himself ill.

The Apollo Mine had by this time become a place that was avoided by everybody on Unga Island. The aspect and demeanor of Charlie Brunn effectively kept every one away. His ghastly bluish face was, indeed, almost appalling enough to startle a fiend.

Besides, a weird story about the Apollo Mine had sprung into existence. One night, after a shooting fracas and a killing in one of the Unga dance halls, the victor of the gun battle, a fox eyed halfbreed, eluded the town marshal and fled up the side of Unga Mountain, where he hid himself in one of the upper galleries of the mine.

Before he had been there long, he was startled and frightened by the sound of some person working with a miner's pick. This was at about the hour of midnight. A little later, a glowing spot, like a tiny star, appeared in the infernal blackness of the low tunnel. It came toward the terrified Aleut, who soon saw that it was the wavering flame of a candle. It was gripped in one of the skinny hands of the assay chemist. The frail limbed night prowler carried in his other hand an old brown gunny sack which contained something that was evidently rather heavy.

His dirty blue oversized coat flapped loosely upon his body, which was as frail and shriveled as a piece of dried parchment, in his tight fitting, faded brown corduroys. He looked like a hideous winged ghoul skulking through a black, subterranean crypt with a bag of booty, lighting his way with a small flaring torch. In two sunken black holes in his knobby head, his sore, red rimmed eyes gleamed ferociously, with a faint greenish color, like those of a savage cat; and from his chinless mouth issued a low continuous stream of frightful curses.

At the approach of this fearful apparition, the terror stricken Indian leaped to his mukluk clad feet and fled as soundlessly and swiftly out of the gallery as if he were possessed of the winged heels of Mercury. The Aleut narrated his ghastly experience to the marshal and three or four deputized sourdoughs, when he was captured next day, lurking in an abandoned shack on the outskirts of the town. His tale was talked over that evening in Soapy Komedal's general merchandise store.

"It can't be gold he carries in th' gunny sack," asserted the lynx eyed storekeeper, rubbing his hands uneasily over a small, lean ham lying on the counter. "If there was any gold up in them galleries, Charlie Brunn'd know it."

"There's nothing in those top drifts but a few measly stringers of galena, with a little zinc an' lead in 'em," declared one of the deputized sourdoughs, who had once worked in the Apollo Mine.

"That ugly, sore eyed little bird of a chemist sticks to Digger-Fool Brunn like a burr," remarked another sourdough. "Sixteen hours a day mucking rock, and then tramping around in the galleries all night. He's worn himself skinny as a bat. I wouldn't do it for fifty dollars a day."

AFTER that, nobody on the island felt that he had any occasion to go near the Apollo Mine, particularly after nightfall, when Unga Mountain loomed dark and brooding up at the head of Delarof Bay, inclosing its sinister mysteries. It was only with the aid of heavy bribes that Soapy Komedal managed to get some of the youngsters of the Unga codfishermen to carry groceries up to the high, gloomy house on the flank of the mountain, where they would drop their burdens on the kitchen floor and flee, as if for their lives. Charlie Brunn telephoned, over a wire from the mine to the store, for what he required.

Awaking in the middle of the night after an unusually agonizing dream of being buried in a mountain, Charlie Brunn staggered from his tumbled bed,

quivering and perspiring, with a frightful sweet taste in his mouth, and a burning thirst.

He reeled to a water faucet in the kitchen and gulped down a great quantity of the icy mountain water that streamed from the black iron pipe above the sink. Charlie Brunn realized at last that he was seriously ill. He didn't know what to do. The nearest thing there was to a doctor, down in the town of Unga, was a Russian midwife.

The bare floor of the big silent house was checkered by rectangular splotches of silvery moonlight that streamed in through the high, uncurtained windows. The gaunt miner gazed out upon the moonlight bathed mountain. Far below, the water of Delarof Bay shimmered and sparkled, looking like an irregular black rimmed tureen of glinting liquid silver. A lonely light shone feebly in the town of Unga, away down on the outer shore of the island.

Charlie Brunn remained for several minutes, twitching spasmodically with shooting pains that stabbed like knife thrusts through his bony frame, staring out upon the moonlit scene of dream-like, silvery beauty. Then he started at the sight of a formless black object which was moving stealthily down the side of the mountain from the black mouth of the mine tunnel toward the small, dilapidated structure near the stamp mill that had been used as an office and assay room.

For a moment, Charlie Brunn thought it was a shaggy animal, perhaps a huge dog. As the thing moved slowly over the gray, treeless rock, the miner suddenly became aware that he was watching a man. The night prowler seemed to be bearing some heavy burden, cautiously, in a sack. There was something startlingly familiar about his movements, Charlie Brunn fancied.

The gaunt miner abruptly turned around and walked, unsteadily, but swiftly, to the door of Horsville's bedroom. It was locked. A loud rapping brought no response. Charlie Brunn got a heavy bladed hatchet out of a woodbox in the kitchen. Returning to the locked door, he burst it open, splitting out a great sliver of the heavy fir casing.

The stale smelling room was brightly lighted by the moonbeams streaming in through the windows. It contained little but a small white iron bed covered with tumbled gray blankets. The druggist was not in it.

"The devil!" cried Charlie Brunn, in a terrible snarl.

Hastening back into his own room, he jerkily pulled on his frayed, dust laden khaki garments and a pair of cracked leather boots. He took his long barreled six-shooter from under his grimy pillow and stowed it inside his coat. In his thin hand he gripped the heavy bladed hatchet with which he had broken into Horsville's bedroom.

THE MINER quietly let himself out at the side door of the house. His woolly dog, who was wide awake and intensely excited, attempted to follow him, but Charlie Brunn gently thrust the little ragged animal back through the door with his fleshless hand.

"Take it cool, Fuses!" he said in an icy voice.

Charlie Brunn slipped among the dark mine buildings toward the office, a low, one storied affair standing alone on the sloping ground, near the great silent stamp mill. Its windows looked black and cold in the moonlight.

As Charlie Brunn came up to the building, however, he espied a thin, vertical strip of yellow light issuing from one of the windows of the adjoining assay room. Creeping up noiselessly to this window, the miner discovered that it was shrouded inside the glass panes with a thick blanket. The roar of the compressed air driven furnace in the assay room came clearly to his ears.

Raising his spare frame upright, the miner lifted the heavy bladed hatchet in his hand and drew back a step, as if to strike through the blanket curtained window. For several seconds he stood there, in the silvery moonlight. Then he

let his weapon drop, without a sound, to his gaunt side.

"I've got to take it cool!" he muttered.

Stooping down, he unfastened his heavy leather boots and pulled them off. With his feet shod only in ragged socks, he slipped silently around to the locked door of the mine office, at the opposite end of the building, and let himself in stealthily with his keys.

The mine office was separated from the assay room by a rude partition of rough fir boards spiked up vertically. There were large crevices between the boards, which formed vertical stripes of light in the darkness. Charlie Brunn tiptoed across the floor toward them. Resting his convulsively quivering gaunt body on the cold, clammy surface of an iron safe that was backed against the partition, he shut one eye and applied the other to one of the larger crannies in the dividing wall.

The vertical chink through which he peered afforded him a spectacle that caused him to snap his teeth together with a click.

A single candle was burning on the bench in the assay room. The place was walled with rude blackened boards, which had great battened crevices between them. Cobwebs hung thickly among the dark unceiled rafters overhead. Horsville, in his loose-fitting dirty blue coat, was bending silently over the hot assay furnace mounted on a brick pier beside the bottle laden bench. A smelting heat was being generated in the furnace by a pot of whitely glowing charcoal blown up by a blast of compressed air, which emitted a low, hissing roar.

On a trivet over the furnace rested a long handled, red hot iron ladle, in which lay a big chunk of silver colored ore. Some spots on its surface gleamed in the wavering candlelight like the surface of a mirror. Charlie Brunn instantly recognized it as lead bearing galena from the upper galleries of the mine.

In a square iron tray on the assay bench beside the furnace lay a small heap of some gleaming, sugary, silvery looking chemical. The druggist was spooning some of it into a glass jar, in which there was a quantity of pale liquid.

The galena ore in the red hot ladle over the furnace began to throw up a dense white smoke. Arising in rolling clouds, it set the baggy cobwebs up among the dark rafters of the assay room to swaying slightly.

Horsville looked terribly like one of the half mythical saturine alchemists of the Middle Ages, leaning over his sinister paraphernalia, his thin, bony wrists protruding, like the claws of a bat, from his big flapping blue coat. Two small rivulets of briny liquid ran from his sore, red rimmed eyes down his chinless face. Some of his failing light gray hair lay flat and damp on the top of his knobby head and some hung down about his enormous ears in dirty strings. His lips moved unceasingly, as if pronouncing some fiendish incantation. He was only cursing, horribly. He coughed a little in the white smoke that was arising from the iron ladle over the furnace.

CHARLIE BRUNN drew a deep breath through his tightly clenched teeth and leaned heavily on the clammy iron safe underneath him. He gazed tensely at the sugary, silvery element in the jar, which was clouding the liquid into which it had been dropped.

It was lead—some fiendish compound of lead. A taste of fiery, metallic sweetness suddenly filled the mouth of the gaunt miner, and a feeling of awful nausea gripped him. Lead poisoning, this was, of a cunning and diabolical kind. Charlie Brunn knew of it, vaguely; he had read something about it in his book of chemistry for assayers. Lead poisoning, with its trail of visions and muscular spasms, ending at last, in a devasting stroke of paralysis that left a man a living, speechless statue of moveless flesh and bones.

Charlie Brunn reflected thankfully that he had found out in time. He felt that he was near the stage in which he would

have received the final terrible paralytic stroke. Perspiration streamed from every pore of his long, thin body. Scintillating lights flickered before his eyes. Then, suddenly, his sight cleared; the spasmodic tremors left his lean frame; and his skin grew cold as ice.

His half numbed fingers closed fiercely over the butt of his heavy six-shooter. Wrenching it out from under his coat and raising it level with his glinting, deep set eyes, he noiselessly stuck the muzzle of its long barrel to the largest chink in the partition between himself and the druggist. He aimed it into the middle of the frail body of the bat-like poisoner who was hovering over his devilish acetate compound, stirring it assiduously with an iron spoon.

The hammer of Charlie Brunn's big blued steel revolver moved very slowly backward, until it seemed on the firing point. For a second the gaunt bodied miner lay forward over the cold iron safe in the mine office, with his gun levelled through the chink in the wall at the chinless creature bending over the jar of liquid on the assay bench. He did not fire. Instead, his bony finger slackened on the trigger; and the hammer of the revolver moved soundlessly forward again.

"I've got to take it cool," he whispered to himself. "He must dig . . ."

Suddenly he shifted his aim on to the glass jar under the poisoner's skinny hands and pressed sharply on the trigger. A long, startling red tongue of flame shot out into the dark walled assay room from the partition, with a terrific roar. The vessel over which Horsville was bending flew to pieces, in a spattering shower of glass and yellowish liquid. The bat-like druggist screamed. Clapping one of his frail hands to his right eye, he doubled up, in a sort of knot, beside the hot assay furnace. His big dirty blue coat flapped about his wizened body, like a pair of half unfolded wings.

Seizing the latch of the door in the partition, Charlie Brunn tried to wrench it open. It was securely barred. The gaunt miner caught up a small iron letter press standing on a table beside the safe and threw it against the door. It burst open, with a loud crash of breaking wood, which was followed by the jarring thud of the letter press falling to the floor.

As he plunged into the assay room, Charlie Brunn saw a hissing, serpent-like stream of silvery liquid hurtling at him through the air. The druggist clutched the handle of the red hot ladle that had been resting over the assay furnace. The miner instinctively dodged the flying streak of molten lead; but part of it struck him in the side, instantly setting fire to his coat, and he felt a searing burn.

Lunging forward, he struck the bat-like druggist a crunching blow in the mouth with his steely knuckles, knocking his small limbed antagonist to the floor. He seized a bucket of water standing on the bottle cluttered bench beside the roaring assay furnace and slopped its contents over his smoking garments.

With a flapping noise, Horseville scrambled to his feet. He still clutched the handle of the red hot ladle in his skinny hands. His right eye was bleeding; in it glistened a big piece of broken glass. The other one streamed with briny tears.

"I'll kill you! Oh, I'll kill you!" he panted huskily.

He raised his dangerous missile and swung it at Charlie Brunn's head. The blow was feeble, although he struck the fleshless man on the temple with enough force to knock him into a sprawling heap on the floor. A seared red crescent shaped wound gleamed above the miner's left ear.

Again lifting the massive ladle, which looked like a huge purplish red pomegranate on a long iron handle, the druggist swung it down over Charlie Brunn's with such force that it would have crushed his skull had he not quickly squirmed aside. The ladle struck the floor, with a loud, splintering thud. Charlie Brunn's thin hands closed over the hot part of its handle, which was nearest him. He hung on to it, unyieldingly,

while Horsville tugged with all his might at the other end. Thin bluish-white wisps of smoke curled out from the miner's palms. A groan shot out, hissingly, from between his tightly clenched teeth. He held on to the hot ladle with grim desperation.

"I'll kill you! Oh, I'll kill you!" Horsville sobbed.

Suddenly letting go of the heavy ladle, he threw himself, like a scratching, flapping bird of prey, on top of Charlie Brunn. The next instant, the miner felt the sharp teeth of the bat-like, chinless creature he had enslaved biting and tearing at his throat. Blood from the druggist's destroyed eye spattered on the miner's face, in warm, wet drops. Charlie Brunn gripped the bony shoulders of his attacker and pressed his steely fingers into the base of Horsville's neck until the frail druggist raised his head, writhing and screaming huskily in agony.

RISING to his knees, the gaunt miner lifted the poisoner by his shoulder blades and threw him down violently on the hard, blackened floor. The back of the druggist's head struck the grimy planks with a loud thud, and he lay half stunned. Blood from his pierced eye was smeared over his scrawny, chinless face. He was a frightful looking object.

Charlie Brunn swayed on his bony knees. A burning, sweet thirst and a feeling of horrible nausea was again attacking him, completely driving into the background of his consciousness the aching pain of his burns. The flaming candle on the rude bench near his head cast a dim, enormous shadow on the opposite wall, which looked like a grotesquely gaunt, kneeling giant engaged in prayer.

The assay furnace roared steadily.

Charlie Brunn's feeling of deathly sickness gradually passed off, leaving him as cold as ice, and half numb. He again became aware of his numerous burns, and of the seared wound on his head. He got unsteadily to his feet. Stooping over, he picked up the massive iron ladle that lay smoking on the floor.

The druggist writhed a little, and sobbed out a filthy curse. Charlie Brunn gazed down at the tattered, chinless creature.

"Horsville," he said in his cold, hard voice, "I'd smash your head in with this smelting ladle, only you've got to dig in the mountain . . . You've got to dig!"

"Yes—until I kill you, Charlie Brunn!" whispered Horsville, huskily.

He lay still on the floor. The gaunt miner stood over him, leaning on the long handle of the iron smelting ladle. In the wavering candlelight there was a dim shadow outlined on the wall, of a gaunt, spectral giant resting upon a bulbous club.

VII

FOR A MONTH after that, Horsville lay a sick prisoner in the high, gloomy, superintendent's house. Word got down into Unga, by way of the Aleut youngsters who occasionally carried up the groceries ordered over the mine telephone, that the chemist had lost one of his eyes and that Charlie Brunn had been quite badly burned, as the result of a mysterious explosion in the assay room.

The town was also provided with a piece of peculiar news by Soapy Komedal, the lynx eyed and loquacious storekeeper. Charlie Brunn had taken to calling for inordinate quantities of the highest grade toilet soap on the merchant's shelves. It was a pure white glycerine soap.

The report of the chemical explosion and the destruction of Horsville's eye speedily passed into the limbo of historical fact; but the matter of the soap became a widespread scandal. There was an adequate reason for this.

"Digger-Fool Brunn is eatin' this soap!" Komedal had exclaimed one day, in a tone of awe to a group of sourdoughs and codfishermen in his store, as he wrapped up half a dozen cakes of the

glycerinated, semi-transparent stuff. He had taken to keeping a stock of it on the counter among the hams and boots. "He sent back some sweet smellin' pink bath soap I had the boys take up there, an' said over the telephone it tasted bitter as bile. Then he stopped, like he'd let somethin' slip. So I've ordered two cases of th' glycerine soap by the next mail schooner, 'specially. He's eatin' it for somethin' that's wrong with him."

There had followed an astonished silence.

"Tapeworms, maybe," ventured one of the sourdoughs, known as Panicky Smith, with a shudder. "Do you think it?"

"He's managed to get a couple of Aleuts to give him a hand muckin', while his little pardner's laid up with his eye," Soapy Komedal informed the assembly. "They told their squaws, who told my wife, that sometimes he gets down on his knees in the drift, alongside his big air drill, an' spews up white foam. Clouds of it. Then he gets up an' goes right back to work. Looks like a piece of iron rail wrapped in some dirty khaki. And his face an' hands are the color of a blued steel gun barrel."

From under the boots and hams lying on the counter the gossiping storekeeper dragged out a much thumbed record book with black, greasy edges. His lynx-like eyes intently inspected its pages.

"Lotsa money to his credit," he muttered, half audibly. Then, seeing two or three of the sourdoughs eyeing him grimly, he said in a louder tone, rubbing his hands over the greasy covers of the book. "He'll never find no gold."

"It's a Santa Claus, all right—that lode," announced Panicky Smith, as gloomily as if he had been digging after it himself. "It ain't there. Do you think it?"

"Brunn's afraid somethin's goin' to get him," resumed Soapy Komedal, addressing his listeners confidentially. "The Aleuts told their squaws, who told my wife, that he's putting iron bars in the windows of that big ugly old house—makin' it look like a jail. An' the Siwashes say he's got a bolt made of a piece of drill steel, on the inside of his bedroom door. They've barred the windows of the mine office, too; an' that prowlin' flappy night bird of a little chemist pardner of his has tooked to livin' in there, by himself. Guess he can't stand the damn' piano. He sure sticks tight to Brunn. But why does he want to put himself behind iron bars, too, like he was in a jail?"

"They're both goin' crazy up there, maybe," said Panicky Smith hollowly. "Do you think it?"

"They might be going to hoard a lot of gold on the quiet," suggested a codfisherman, who obviously knew nothing about the technicalities of quartz reduction. "They might of found it, an' be plottin' to beat old Gold-Shark Louis out of his slice."

"I wisht I knew if that mine is really goin' to come back," mumbled Soapy Komedal, agonizedly, rubbing his hands over one of the hams on the counter. "I'm thinkin' of sellin' out an' buyin' a farm— State of Washin'ton. But I'm waitin'. I'm tryin' to scrape up a few dollars."

AFTER a few weeks Charlie Brunn discharged his two Aleut helpers and took Horsville back with him into the mine. It was true that he had barred some of the windows of the high, gloomy superintendent's house with rods of drill steel. Upon emerging from the mine tunnel at night, he drove the druggist to the mine office, the windows of which were also heavily barred, and bolted his prisoner in. Horsville, supplied by his keeper with food supplies and a few cooking utensils, now prepared his own meals on the assay furnace.

Charlie Brunn had about recovered from the effects of the diabolocal slow-acting poison the druggist had administered to him. The bluish hue had gone from his steely, razor sharp face. He ceased eating glycerine soap as a counteractant to the drug. Soapy Komedal, who was left unexpectedly with two hundred

unsalable bars of that comparatively expensive article on his hands, was so discomfited that he sold out to a stranger representing a codfishing and trading company, and left Unga Island forever.

After eighteen months of blasting and mucking, Charlie Brunn and his prisoner got through the interposed wedge of igenous granite in the heart of Unga Mountain. They had burrowed more than eleven hundred feet through the hard stone. Entering the softer rock on the other side, they began a horizontal cross drift along the seam. As they had filled up the deep shaft in Drift Seventy-seven, they now had to wheel their mucked rock down into the debouching galleries and dump it there. They wheeled this rock by hand, in small cars that rolled on thin steel rails which they had laid in the long low tunnel through the hard granite.

After his recovery from the frightful battle in the assay room, Horsville had made no further trouble. Under the eyes of his jailer, he acted as if he had learned his lesson. But Charlie Brunn knew that this attitude was feigned. The bat-like druggist was only waiting for his chance.

The two men maintained a watchful silence. They almost never spoke. In the murky depths of the drifts, nothing ever interrupted the powerful thudding roar of the air drill, or the creaking of the muck car.

When Charlie Brunn's back was turned, the druggist frequently bent upon him a weird, deadly look from out of his red rimmed eye. That single teary orb the color of muddied blue seawater was a hideous thing, under its pink, lashless lids. The man's chinless mouth would quiver violently; and his dirty, loose fitting coat would flap about his skinny body like a pair of rustling blue black wings.

At these sinister manifestations of murderous passion, the little ragged white dog who was always lying somewhere near Charlie Brunn would snarl throatily; or, if the air drill was roaring, he would spring swiftly toward his master. His diminutive black eyes glittering beadily under his tousled hair were fixed incessantly upon that hated bird-like man with his dangerous steel pick.

Horsville, because of the watchfulness of the little animal, was never able to get within a dozen feet of Charlie Brunn, except when the two toilers were face to face and had their eyes on one another, like a pair of wary, stooping specters in the flaring candlelight.

ONE NIGHT in the middle of the second winter of Charlie Brunn's burrowing search for the Santa Claus Lode, when the flank of Unga Mountain was thickly robed with snow and a cold northwest wind moaned weirdly under the eaves of the dark, iron barred superintendent's house, the gaunt miner lying under his soiled blankets imagined he saw the utter blackness of his chilly bedroom giving way to a faint, mysterious aurora of light. As Charlie Brunn lay wondering at this phenomenon, he fancied he saw one of the ceiling boards in the wall above his head move soundlessly aside, revealing a long vertical black slit. From it there slowly emerged a thin arm terminating in a small skinny hand that clutched a piece of heavy steel bar about a foot long. The bony arm was stealthily upraised above Charlie Brunn's head, as if to deal him a skull smashing blow.

Making a sudden violent effort to leap out of the bed, the gaunt miner found himself unable to move a limb. The realization that he was suffering from a realistic nightmare flashed quickly through his mind. The steel club in the hideous hand came plunging downward. With a terrific wrench of his whole body, Charlie Brunn threw his head aside. He imagined that he felt an icy current of air whisk upon his face, and that the piece of steel struck his pillow, with a muffled thud.

The next instant, Charlie Brunn found himself sitting up, wide awake, in the blackness of the room, which was bitterly cold. The steel springs of his bed were still vibrating from his convulsive lunge

Involuntarily, he felt on his pillow for the piece of steel bar. There was nothing there but the depression that had been made by his head. It had been a most alarming dream.

His little dog, who slept in a pile of rags under the bed, was scampering around on the floor, whining with fright. He was acting exactly as if he were among the lighted, sputtering dynamite charges that Charlie Brunn set off every other evening in the Apollo Mine.

"Take it cool, Fuses," said the miner.

But the little creature's terrified whimperings increased. He began tumbling madly about the room, setting up a weeping clamor in the pitchy blackness.

An inexplicable feeling of consternation striking through him, Charlie Brunn pulled his heavy six shooter from under his pillow, cocked it for a quick shot and lighted a match which he had gotten with his left hand from his trousers lying beside him on a chair.

The yellow flame of the match revealed nothing but the little white dog leaping frantically about on the floor. The ragged animal suddenly snatched Charlie Brunn's khaki trousers off the chair on which they were lying, pulling them toward the bed. Then he stood still and stared up at his master, quivering in every limb of his small body, until the match flickered out.

Darkness again enveloped the room. It was so intense that it seemed to fall over the bed like something solid. The miner struck another match, and lighted a piece of candle in a holder that stood on a broken chair. Shivering in the bitter cold, he reached for his trousers.

Suddenly both the gaunt miner and his scampering white dog ceased their movements and listened. From the other side of the bolted door there had come a slight, but distinct creaking of the floor boards, as if they were being stealthily walked upon. Charlie Brunn became aware of a sinister hissing. The little dog instantly set up afresh his terror stricken whines.

The miner leaped to the door. Freeing it of a steel bar, he fumbled for the knob of its lock and wrenched it. He could not open the door. Stepping back from it, he espied the ragged little white dog become rigid at his feet. From the animal's throat issued a low, warning snarl. He was glaring at the single, iron barred window of the bedroom. Wheeling about, Charlie Brunn caught a fleeting glimpse of a hideous, chinless face pressed against the iron bars, down in the lower corner of the high window.

With a darting movement of his spear-like arm, the miner snatched up his heavy six-shooter from the bed and fired point blank at the diabolical and spectral looking creature that was staring in at him with its single, red rimmed eye. The gun roared in the room like a cannon.

A pane of glass in the window flew to pieces with a loud crash, followed by a jingling tinkle. The little dog yelped with terror. Charlie Brunn knew that the face of the druggist had vanished an instant before he had fired. An icy blast of air swept into the room, chilling the miner's gaunt, thinly clad body, and nearly blowing out his flickering candle.

In the silence that followed the roar of his revolver, Charlie Brunn heard distinctly the sinister hissing that came from the other side of his bedroom door. The ragged white dog again leaped and barked frenziedly.

Throwing the blankets and mattress off his bed, Charlie Brunn wrenched one of the horizontal steel rails out of its frame. Leveling the bed rail, he charged with it into the door, shattering one of the panels with a crackling report. The pungent smell of burning gunpowder filtered into the room. Putting his narrow face to the splintered hole in the door, the miner saw a thin stream of red sparks spurting viciously into the darkness from a point on the floor directly in front of him.

Charlie Brunn thrust one of his long, spear-like arms through the smashed door panel and felt for the outside handle of the lock. His hard fingers struck against a drill steel wedged under the knob. Its sharp lower end seemed to be

jammed into the floor. He jerked the steel loose, and it fell down with a loud thud. Throwing open the door, he almost stumbled over what looked like a large, tightly lashed bundle of big yellow candles. It was a huge bomb, in which there were at least thirty sticks of dynamite. From it protruded a hissing, vine-like black fuse.

THE LITTLE DOG whined, weepingly; and snapped at Charlie Brunn's motionless ankles. Bending down and snatching at the burning fuse, the miner tried to jerk it out of the bundle of explosive. It was securely lashed in. The nitroglycerin laden sticks of paper cylindered sawdust were so tightly bound together with hard cord that Charlie Brunn could not pull them apart.

Lowering his head, he bit into the snaky fuse, at the point where it entered the bomb. He had almost severed the strong black, gunpowder cored braid when he felt a hot shower of sparks scorching his tongue and the roof of his mouth. The flame had already burnt down into the lower end of the fuse. It was near the firing cap.

Carrying the gigantic bomb with him, Charlie Brunn sprang through the darkness toward the outside door of the kitchen, in which he was standing. He kicked aside chairs and unaccountable rubbish, smashing his bare toes. He found the door standing wide open.

An icy blast of snow laden wind whirled about his thinly clad legs, but he hardly felt it. Drawing back a step, grasping the huge bundle of dynamite in his hands, he hurled it out into the blizzardy darkness. He threw it with all his strength. It exploded in mid air, with an instantaneous burst of flame, like a sheet of lightning, and a mighty thunderclap.

The high, dark house was shaken violently, from its roof to its foundations; and every pane of glass in the building fell from the windows, in a tremendous symphony of crashes and tinkles. Charlie Brunn was propelled backward, as if under the thrust of a mighty hand, and thrown flat on the floor of the kitchen. He was stunned, but he was not completely knocked unconscious. He was aware of a loud ringing sound in his ears, which produced a sensation of intense pain.

The little ragged dog ran about in the darkness, whining and yelping, and muzzling his gaunt ribs. Charlie Brunn could hear him very faintly, as if the animal were down in the bottom of a deep ravine. The suffering miner wondered, with a cold, sinking feeling of despair, if his eardrums had been broken.

DAYBREAK brought a clear sky and an icy calm. It was nearly nine o'clock when the sun arose out of the Pacific, beyond the island of Nagai, a southeastward lying, sea girt barrier of tumbled mountains, which seemed to float upon the ocean like a great frosted cake. The sun's horizontal, reddish rays shone with heatless brilliance on the snow covered buildings of the Apollo Mine, and struck through the glassless windows of the superintendent's house, brightly lighting up the dirty, unswept rooms.

His lean body motionless and rigid, Charlie Brunn sat at the shimmering piano in the high ceilinged front room of the house, in which hung an icy chill. He was sharply striking all the keys of the instrument, one after the other, with a single bony finger, and listening intently. Upon his thin face was a grotesque, stony expression. The higher pitched notes of the piano came distinctly to his ears, though as if from an immense distance in space; the golden toned bass keys registered only in a low, grinding rumble, like a faraway muttering of thunder about a tropical mountain peak. There was a persistent ringing noise in his head, and a numbing pain.

"It's only temporary," muttered Charlie Brunn, in a tone that carried a note of terrible fear. He could hardly hear the words he spoke.

The spare bodied miner closed the piano and stood up. Limping out into the kitchen on his bruised toes, he stood for a moment staring at the door through which Horsville had forced an entrance into the house. A circular row of small overlapping holes had been bored in one of the panels near the lock, cutting out a rough-edged apreture perhaps six inches in diameter. Reaching in through that hole, the druggist had easily managed to free the inside bars on the door; while the soughing of the wind sweeping down the mountain side had probably rendered inaudible the few sounds he might have made.

Pulling on his leather boots and a rudely made fox fur coat, Charlie Brunn went out to the mine office, in which he had for several months kept Horsville imprisoned at night. He discovered that the druggist had escaped from that building with the same tool he had used to get into the superintendent's house. He had bored around the lock until it had dropped out.

Charlie Brunn reflected that Horsville had very likely managed to snatch up a bit and a brace and to conceal them in his flapping dirty blue coat, while helping to sharpen drill steels in the machine shop of the mine. The dynamite he must have stolen, a stick at a time, from the boxes of explosives the miner wheeled into the drifts every alternate day.

Charlie Brunn observed that most of the clothes and various small personal articles which he had supplied his prisoner were missing from the assay room in which the druggist had been jailed. The miner silently wondered if the chinless creature had resolved to go down to the town and himself inform the marshal that he was an escaped convict. Perhaps he had determined to give himself up to his twenty-year penitentiary sentence in the States, rather than remain bound any longer to the fearful toil deep in the bowels of Unga Mountain.

"It's possible . . . I doubt it," muttered Charlie Brunn.

TWENTY MINUTES later the miner had picked up the druggist's half obliterated footprints in the deep snow that whitened all the side of the mountain. He followed them rapidly down the slope. Reaching the pear shaped bay at the foot of the lofty mountain, whose water, owing to its saltness, was unfrozen, and lay, deep, steely blue within its white shores, Charlie Brunn pressed on over a freshly broken trail that he found was taking him straight toward the town of Unga. Doubts began to assail him. Perhaps Horsville had . . .

About half a mile from Unga, which clung, almost buried under an undulating mantle of snow, to the edge of the sea battered outer coast of the island, Charlie Brunn came upon an unexpected and astonishing spectacle.

Up on the top of a black boulder about the size of a prospector's cabin, Horsville was crouched, motionless. He was bareheaded, and his garments were torn. In his flapping, tattered rags, he looked like some sort of dilapidated, hideous bird perched up on the big snow capped rock on the shore of the bay.

Approaching the boulder, Charlie Brunn saw a huge iron gray wolf dog with a bushy ruff of white tipped fur around his neck; the dog was walking ceaselessly on the snow about the base of the rock. At intervals he gazed upward at his bird-like prisoner on the boulder and drew back his lips, revealing his frightful white fangs.

Rearing on his hind legs and resting his forepaws on the black pillar, he stretched his lithe, sinewy body upward, like a rising serpent, bringing his flat skulled, short eared head within half a yard of Horsville crouching above him. When the brute attempted to reach his prey with one of his outstretched paws, the druggist kicked downward furiously with his feet. The bat-like refugee clung tightly to the top of the boulder with his bony talons; and appeared to ruffle his tattered, blue black plumage hostilely.

The gray beast dropped back on to the

snow and resumed his stalking about the rock. He walked with the short, springing steps of a timber wolf.

When Charlie Brunn came near, the animal turned and gazed at him, with a pair of unblinking, yellowish green eyes. Then, wagging his bushy, silver tipped tail a little, he dropped his big head slightly, as if in token of submission, and noiselessly approached the miner, his pink tongue drooping from his powerful red jaws.

Charlie Brunn scratched the beast's flat skull with his hard fingers.

"Take it cool, big fellow," he said quietly. He stared up attentively at the druggist, who was still crouched motionlessly on the snowy top of the angular black boulder, looking like a tattered, sick, enormous bird.

"Come down, Horsville," the miner called out.

The druggist ruffled his ragged feathers slightly.

"You shoot that mongrel wolf!" he shrieked. His voice sounded as far away to Charlie Brunn, as if the chinless creature were up on the skysail-yard of a tall ship. The furry ruff on the wolf dog's neck bristled. He again drew his lips back from over his terrible gleaming white fangs.

"Down, big boy! Quiet!" Charlie Brunn softly commanded the ferocious beast.

The dog turned toward the miner, with a slight wag of his bushy, silver tipped tail.

"He won't hurt you, Horsville," Charlie Brunn called out to the motionless object on the rock. "Come down from there."

The druggist refused to budge.

Charlie Brunn stepped up beside the boulder. Swiftly reaching up with his long emaciated arms, he snatched Horsville by his retreating ankles. The druggist came tumbling down, flapping like a captured vampire with ragged, monstrous wings.

The wolf dog instantly laid back his short ears and crouched, as if to spring at Horsville's throat.

"Take it cool, big fellow!" repeated Charlie Brunn, in his cold, steady voice, shaking a finger warningly at the dog, who at once dropped down on his belly in the snow and lay motionless, with his yellowish green eyes fixed unblinkingly upon the druggist.

"So you were going to give yourself up?" Charlie Brunn rasped, in a voice that sounded like a saw ripping into iron.

Horseville wiped his sore, red rimmed eye with the back of his skinny hand, which was purple with cold. His tight fitting brown corduroy trousers were ripped down the left leg, and soaked with blood.

His lips began to move. Charlie Brunn, with great difficulty, caught parts of what the chinless creature was saying, through the persistent metallic ringing in his own ears.

". . . at the marshal's door . . . didn't go in. I was on the way back to the mine. I knew, of course, I hadn't got you. I can't face that other . . . twenty years . . . this beast came at me . . . I jumped on the rock."

CHARLIE BRUNN looked at the steep side of the black boulder which loomed two or three feet above Horsville's head. It must have been a desperate leap, for him. An image passed quickly before Charlie Brunn's eyes of the terrified druggist hurling himself upward on to the rock, like a great fluttering bat, barely wrenching himself free of the murderous white teeth of the wolf dog, which had lacerated one of his frail legs.

"So you went into a funk at the marshal's door," observed Charlie Brunn harshly. "Twenty years in stripes . . . You'd be dead!"

"Yes," whispered Horsville huskily. "I'd be dead. When I've killed you, maybe I can get away. I'm going to try."

Charlie Brunn could not hear the druggist's throatily spoken words; but he was not far from divining their meaning. With his spear-like arm, he pointed up the trail that wound along the snow whitened

shore of the bay toward the Apollo Mine.

Horsville began to limp painfully along the path. Charlie Brunn followed him, at a short distance. Looking down, he discovered the big gray wolf dog stalking silently beside him. The miner bent over and patted the beast's flattish head.

"Fine dog!" he murmured.

In a few minutes, Charlie Brunn's hard eyes began to glint like the points of drill-steels. Again he bent down over the husky, and pointed a thin finger at the back of Horsville, who was limping slowly ahead in the snow.

"Watch him, big boy!" he commanded the savage animal. "Watch him sharp!"

The short eared beast gazed intently at the bat-like creature floundering along the trail. Then he drew his lips back from over his frightful white fangs, in a sort of silent, understanding snarl.

Upon getting back up to the mine, Charlie Brunn ordered Horsville to walk into the superintendent's house. The silent building was swept with fitful icy gusts of wind that entered through the shattered windows. From one of the gloomy rooms came the shivering whine of the little white dog, which was suffering from the cold.

At the sound of footsteps in the side door, the tiny animal came scampering out into the kitchen. Catching sight of the gigantic wolf dog following the two men into the room, the little creature instantly stopped short and emitted an affrighted yelp. Trembling in every decrepit, woolly hair, he stared at the savage looking intruder, in an attitude of terrified awe. The gray husky glanced at him, and then opened his powerful red jaws, in an indifferent yawn, revealing his terrible fangs.

The little white dog howled and tried to jump between Charlie Brunn's legs.

The miner threw open the door of a bedroom adjoining the high, cavernous room in which stood the closed piano. It was the same room the druggist had occupied before Charlie Brunn had jailed him out in the mine office building.

"From now on, Horsville, you sleep here. There'll be no more locks and bars."

The miner's hand rested on the flat skull of the wolf dog.

The druggist limped into the bedroom, and threw himself upon the soiled gray blankets of the bed that stood there.

"There'll be no more locks and bars," repeated Charlie Brunn. He gazed at the gray furred husky. "Sit down, big boy!" he commanded the beast. "Watch him! Watch him sharp! I'm going to town."

The wolf dog wagged his tail slightly. He at once lay down on his belly before the wide open door of the druggist's bedroom. His unblinking yellowish green eyes were fixed watchfully upon the small bat-like man lying on the bed.

The little ragged white dog crept out from behind Charlie Brunn's heels and stood gaping at the wolfish animal crouched on the floor, as if he could hardly believe in the existence of such an appalling beast.

Horsville suddenly started up from the soiled gray blankets in which he was huddled. He peered, with a convulsive look of terror on his chinless face, at the wolf dog lying in the doorway.

"Don't you leave me alone with that beast!" he shrieked.

Charlie Brunn stooped over and lightly touched one of the powerful paws of the husky, who looked up at him inquiringly.

"Keep him on that bed!" he commanded the gray furred brute. "If he moves, tear his throat out!"

THAT AFTERNOON the town of Unga received a surprise. Charlie Brunn came down into it, in person, for the first time since he had leased the Apollo Mine. Sourdoughs and codfishermen stared silently at the miner's gaunt, khaki clad figure, which they hardly recognized, as he strode along among the scattering white walled and red roofed houses.

He came to a stop in front of the town's principal pool hall—one of Soapy Komedale's former possessions. Pushing open the door, he abruptly walked in.

Men in red and blue checked mackinaws and brown fur caps leaned with their cues over green topped tables, in a blue haze of tobacco smoke.

"Is Black Alf in here?" Charlie Brunn called out, in an icy voice that cracked like a rawhide whip through the low hum of voices and the clicking of parti-colored ivory balls. A wave of startled silence swept over the smoke hazed room. Men wheeled about swiftly, to stare at the tall miner, who was standing rigidly among the tables.

A broad shouldered young Russian-Aleut with glossy sable colored hair and enormous slinking eyes the hue of jet started with astonishment. A frightened glitter appeared in his black orbs.

"What you want?" he demanded, in a tone of empty belligerence, staring across a dark green table strewn with gorgeously colored balls, which separated him and the gaunt ex-superintendent of the Apollo Mine. In his brown skinned hands he nervelessly clutched a tapering yellow cue.

"I've come to buy that big ugly dog of yours. What is he worth?" was the startling answer.

The games in the pool room had stopped. Every one stared. The half-breed's big frightened black eyes flashed, with a gleam of astonishment.

"Kill-Man!" he exclaimed.

"So that's his name, is it?" said Charlie Brunn, in his hard, icy voice. "How much do you want for him?"

The big limbed young Russian-Aleut hesitated for an instant. He would have been glad to let Charlie Brunn have that inimitably clever but inconceivably savage beast for nothing. Every day he expected to find the animal shot to death, for leaping on some one; and probably to have a fight on his own hands into the bargain.

"Hundred dollars!" he exclaimed loudly, in a tone of grotesque bravado.

The bystanders drew deep breaths. One or two mouths started open. Such colossal cheek!

"Here's fifty!" said Charlie Brunn gratingly. He threw two gold twenties and a ten dollar piece on the green felt of the pool table that stood between them.

The Aleut reached out for the coins and greedily pocketed them.

Turning on his heel, Charlie Brunn strode toward the door.

"You no can harness him. Only for leader," Black Alf called after him in warning. "Him kill!"

Charlie Brunn paused in the doorway. Slowly, he turned around and faced the crowd of codfishermen and trappers in the hushed pool room. His small deep set gray eyes glinted, hard and cold.

"I'm not buying him to pull a sledge," he returned harshly. "I'm going to train him to police the Apollo—to jump on the back of any prowler!" His voice cracked like a whip.

VIII

FROM that day, until the end, Horsville lived under the gleaming eyes of Kill-Man. The big gray brute lay every night in the open doorway of the druggist's bedroom. At the slightest move of the skinny, bat-like creature in the bed, the savage beast was instantly wide awake. He would indicate that fact by emitting low, bass-like growls. These invariably aroused the woolly little dog under Charlie Brunn's bed and sent him into paroxysms of terror.

At meal times, the wolf dog squatted a short distance behind Horsville's chair, closely watching every movement he made. When the druggist grasped a knife with which to cut his food, the gaze of the animal became exceedingly alert and menacing.

The strain of having those ferocious yellowish green eyes unceasingly fixed upon him began to produce a nerve shattering effect on Horsville. He seemed to develop, more and more, the aspect of a captive, black winged, sinister bat quiveringly awaiting the slightest chance to pierce the throats of his jailers and drain them of their blood.

Once, when he was sitting alone, before

a litter of emptied, unwashed dishes on the kitchen table, with his gray furred keeper squatting behind him, he suddenly sprang to his feet and whirled around upon the wolf dog, his loose fitting dirty blue coat rustling about his spidery body. His chinless face was convulsed by an emotion of insane desperation. In one of his skinny hands he clutched an iron table knife.

The wolfish beast six feet away continued to sit motionlessly on the floor. Then, slowly, he drew his lips back from over his terrible white fangs, in a sort of leering snarl. His greenish, unblinking orbs were fixed on the writhing face of the crazed looking druggist.

As if pushed on his chest by an invisible hand, Horsville backed away from the blazing eyes of the great savage dog, until he bumped against the table, almost upsetting it. A scream burst from his twitching lips. He let go of the dull knife in his claw-like fingers. Throwing himself back into his chair, he dropped his head upon his small bony arms and began to sob.

Kill-Man's lips curled a little, as if in a sneer. He flicked his long salmon pink tongue across his tusk-like teeth.

CHARLIE BRUNN sat sharply striking the keys of the golden toned piano, in the high, gloomy front room of the house. He had been doing this every morning since the night his ears had been injured by the explosion of Horsville's bomb.

Beginning with the higher octaves, he moved downward, striking the gleaming ivory keys successively. When he had progressed about two-thirds of the way along the keyboard, he stopped. He always stopped there. He could not hear a note below that point.

He sat staring into the slightly dimmed mahogany surface of the beautiful instrument with a tone like gold Oriental gongs, which he could no longer hear. In its mirror-like surface the reflection of his gaunt, stony features, on which there was an expression of appalled despair, became transformed into a pair of big lustrous black eyes in a smooth oval face. He seemed to see the sparkle of imitation diamonds in an amber comb.

"You she-devil!" he cried out. His spear-like hand, clenched so that it looked like the blunt end of a drill steel, crashed into the shimmering, richly colored wood of the piano. Then, abruptly, he stood up and slammed the instrument shut.

The gaunt miner walked out into the kitchen, pulling on his frayed khaki coat. The wolf dog turned his powerful, slightly opened jaws toward him, and thumped his bushy tail once or twice on the floor.

Stooping down, Charlie Brunn scratched the beast's flat skull with his steely fingers. He glanced at the shuddering figure of Horsville, who lay slumped over the table, with his head among the soiled dishes. The chinless creature's husky sobbing came to him, very faintly.

"Watch him, Kill-Man," he said in his cold, clear voice to the big dog. "Watch him sharp!"

He rapped the druggist on the shoulder. "Come along, Horsville!" he called out. "Time to dig!"

The wolf dog, peculiarly enough, would not follow Charlie Brunn and Horsville into the Apollo Mine. The first morning the two men had entered the outer tunnel, after the miner's purchase of the animal, he had accompanied them in for a distance of about a hundred feet. Then, as the daylight waned and the intense blackness of the subterranean passage closed in about the humans and the dogs, like a threatened deluge of some inky fluid that was warded off only by the wavering yellow beams of flaming candles, the big gray brute turned around and stalked quietly out again.

Not even the low voiced calls of Charlie Brunn could induce him to reenter the mine. He only wagged his bushy, silver tipped tail a little, and stood gazing into the tunnel mouth with an uncanny and disconcerting air of superior knowledge about those rock ribbed, Stygian depths.

After that, he stalked behind his prisoner every morning, from the superintendent's house to the mouth of the mine; but there he would lie down and wait, as if at a rat hole, until the druggist came shuffling wearily out of the bowels of the earth at nightfall. Then he stalked him back to the high, gloomy house.

Charlie Brunn's woolly little white dog was immensely proud of his own peerless courage with respect to the black labyrinths of the Apollo Mine. Each morning, as he marched into the mouth of the main tunnel, close behind the leather encased ankles of his master, he turned to stare with supercilious awe at the great savage brute who squatted quietly on the stones at the entrance of the mine.

As long as Horsville was in the mountain, the husky would never budge from the mouth of the tunnel. Once, in the month of January, an Alaskan blizzard came shrieking suddenly over the island. It beat powdery, needle sharp crystals of snow into the wolf dog's fur and formed frosty, cupped rings of ice around his yellowish green eyes. When the toilers in the mine emerged from the main tunnel long after dark, with lighted oil lanterns in their hands, he looked like some ghostly, white shrouded wolf demon crouched in a roaring inferno of flying snow and ice.

Not even the blizzard had sufficed to drive the animal to seek shelter in the mine.

The next morning Charlie Brunn built him a rude kennel of boards, at the mouth of the tunnel, in which he could lie while the men were in the drifts.

IX

NEAR the beginning of the fourth year of drilling for the lost treasure vein, Charlie Brunn abandoned a nine hundred foot horizontal drift eastward along the seam of the fault, beyond the titanic wall of granite that he and his enslaved helper had pierced. He turned back and began to tunnel in an opposite, westerly direction.

The miner's search for the Santa Claus Lode was growing increasingly difficult and fraught with danger. In the old part of Drift No. 77, the roof of the tunnel had been perilously loosened for a distance of two hundred feet or more by an earth tremor; and only the prompt and judicious placing of strong vertical timbers under the crumbling rock at several strategic points had prevented a disastrous cave-in. Many of the other old galleries in the mine had fallen.

In the fifth year of his hunt for the missing lode Charlie Brunn gave up his westward drift, after burrowing twelve hundred feet. He once more headed east with another cross drift, thirty feet above the first one. Before the end of it all came, he had completed seven drifts along the fault.

In all these years of fearful toil in the black heart of the mountain—eight dark, dreadful years—Horsville did not die; for such is the ghastly persistence of the strange force called life. Neither did he find an opportunity to murder Charlie Brunn. There was always a gleaming eyed, snarling dog on guard . . .

The woolly and dirty little Fuses had not died, either, though he had grown so old and stiff that his master had to carry him in through the maze of galleries to the working tunnel, and out again at night.

It was owing to the decay of this senile little creature that Horsville's chance finally came, though the drilling in the mountain would have soon come to an end, anyhow; for Charlie Brunn had exhausted the stock of dynamite he had acquired with his lease on the mine, and his little pile of gold was rapidly dwindling away by reason of his purchases of costly explosives.

The lode seeker and his captive were now both worn to unearthly looking specters—one a fearfully gaunt and stoop-shouldered skeleton; the other a blue and gray colored spidery bat with a hollow red socket in one side of its hideous

chinless face, and a tear dripping, red rimmed eye the color of muddied blue seawater in the other. Their skins were like withered parchment, and their hands were hardly anything more than bony claws.

One afternoon, when Charlie Brunn's air drill was roaring its thudding song in the drift, Horsville, who was mucking rock into an iron handcar, observed that the miner's ragged little dog was showing signs of going to sleep. The animal was lying on the floor of the low tunnel, about a yard from its master's feet.

As Horseville watched the drowsing creature, it quickly opened its bead yeyes, which glittered like two black steel buttons under a tangle of dirty white hair, and crossed glances with its life-long enemy.

The druggist continued his work of lifting rock into the iron car. Emitting a low whine, the woolly dog licked its stiffening, grimy furred limbs.

Thereafter, Horsville often saw the little animal doze in the drift, though only for a few seconds at a time. A murderous smile hovered on the thin, sunken lips of the captive. The ragged little dog, quickly awaking, would whine feebly.

ONE DAY, when Horsville was breaking up a chunk of seamy slate with a pick, he espied the dog's head lolling. He continued to wield his pick, and cunningly turned his back to it. The woolly creature gazed sleepily at the toiling figure of the druggist. Slowly, it lowered its head to its dirty paws and closed its weary eyes. In a few seconds it lay buried in slumber.

Horsville glanced stealthily under his arm at the sleeping dog. He did not leave off working with his pick. Charlie Brunn was standing about ten feet away from him, holding a piece of rock in his hands that bore slight indications of gold.

After a few seconds, the miner stepped toward the single candle that was burning in the drift. The candle was in a steel pronged holder that had been punched into a fissure in the violent black wall of the low tunnel. Charlie Brunn apparently wished to examine the piece of rock in his hands more closely. He had turned his back to Horsville.

The silence of the drift was broken only by the occasional slugging thump of the druggist's pick, and the bat-like rustling of his garments. The flickering yellow candlelight silhouetted a gaunt skeleton with its head drooping over a piece of stone that it clutched in its bony hands.

The sound of Horsville's pick ceased. Its simitar curved steel head was raised above the druggist's backward twisted shoulder, and its murderous, gleaming fluke, which looked like the beak of some hellish bird, was aimed at the back of Charlie Brunn's leathery neck. A deadly smile hovered upon the sunken lips of the chinless captive.

Charlie Brunn dropped the piece of rock in his bony fingers with a low, disgusted curse. The falling stone struck upon the upper edge of one of his heavy leather boots. It produced a sensation startlingly like one of the warning tugs of his little dog.

Involuntarily whirling about, Charlie Brunn saw a gleaming, beak-like piece of steel darting straight toward his eyes. It seemed to be shooting from the eyeless socket in Horsville's chinless face, which was convulsed with an insane, grinning smile.

The miner jerked himself sidewise, instinctively hunching his right shoulder, as if to shield his head. The hurtling steel pick struck him in the right arm, near the shoulder blade, stabbing through yellow khaki, and flesh.

The grinning druggist wrenched backward on the hickory handle of the pick. The muscles in the miner's arm were half torn from his shoulder. A startled groan burst from his lips.

The woolly dog awoke and began snapping and yelping helplessly about Horsville's ankles.

As the steel pick ripped loose the tendons in his arm, Charlie Brunn

seized it, near the head, with his left hand. At the same time, he raised one of his heavily booted feet, to kick at his insanely grinning attacker.

Horsville suddenly let go of the handle of the pick; whereupon it fell, and hung from the miner's arm like a captive anchor. As Charlie Brunn, his teeth tightly clenched, jerked the steel head of the pick free of his half shattered limb, the druggist snatched up a piece of jagged black slate and dealt the gaunt miner a smashing blow in the chest with it.

A wheezing gasp started from Charlie Brunn's lips, as if all the breath had been knocked out of his lungs. He swayed, drunkenly, like a broken mast, and collapsed sprawlingly on his back, on the floor of the drift.

Horsville kicked the snarling and yelping little dog in the head, hurling it against the rocky wall of the gallery. It landed upon a black slab of slate, and lay there, whining. Drops of blood dripped from his mouth.

Again seizing the bloodied pick lying on the floor of the tunnel, the druggist raised it menacingly over Charlie Brunn.

A crimson stream flowed from the miner's ripped right arm, soaking the torn and dirty yellow cloth of his coat sleeve. He lay panting, hoarsely, as if he had croup. Bloodstained, filmy bubbles swelled from his mouth.

Observing that Charlie Brunn was helplessly prostrated, Horsville lowered the pick in his skinny hands. The druggist's chinless face, which was partly covered with a scraggly, straw colored beard, still wore a demoniacal grin. He seemed to flap and rustle like a bloodthirsty bat.

"I've got you, Charlie Brunn!" he screamed.

THE GAUNT miner sprawled on his back at Horsville's feet only groaned. His right side was soaked with the blood that streamed from his wounded arm.

Bending over the lode seeker, Horsville lightly took hold of his injured limb and inspected it, in the wavering candlelight.

"The artery's not cut," he said huskily. "But you're bleeding bad."

The druggist straightened up. He pulled off his loose coat, and then his small dirty blue overshirt. Slipping the coat on again, over his ragged gray undergarment, he proceeded to tear the shirt into strips.

"You're about to faint from loss of blood, Brunn," he professionally informed the motionless miner, who lay gulping in his breath with a hoarse rattle. "If I don't bind up your arm you'll bleed to death."

The druggist had soon stopped the rush of blood from Charlie Brunn's wound, by bandaging his arm with the strips of the torn up shirt.

He grinned hideously at the maimed gold hunter. He looked like a huge starved bat rustling over its crippled prey.

Kneeling down, he put his lips close to one of Charlie Brunn's ears, so that the half deaf miner could hear his words.

"I used to think, Brunn, that when this time came, I would tie you, hand and foot, and pull our your fingernails with a pair of pincers," he whispered huskily. "Cut off your long fingers, joint by joint, with an ax; and then chop your damn' spear hands off at the wrists. I was going to heat a drill steel white hot and burn out one of your eyes. But the other one I was going to tear out, first, with my bare fingers, and pinch it to pieces with my nails!"

Raising himself up, the druggist grinned in the miner's face. Then he once more put his lips close to Charlie Brunn's ear.

In the flickering yellow candlelight, he looked as if he were some sort of fantastic, laughing, bird-like demon whispering priceless secrets to a glinting eyed, fleshless bodied man sprawled on a bed of violet black rock.

"After that, I thought I would put one of your air drill jackscrews on your stomach, and block it from the roof of the drift. I was going to screw it down on you—a half a turn an hour."

The druggist paused and wiped on his sleeve the teary drops of fluid that exuded from his red rimmed eye the color of unclean seawater.

The candlelight silhouetted a frail, kneeling black figure that seemed to be weeping bitterly over a dead body.

"A half a turn an hour," repeated Horsville huskily.

Charlie Brunn stirred a little. He was breathing more easily now. Observing this, the druggist warily backed away and seized the handle of his bloodied pick.

"Don't move, Charlie Brunn!" he shrieked, as loud as he could, in his thin, strident voice. "I'll drive this through your neck!"

AFTER a few watchful moments, he again bent over and placed his lips at Charlie Brunn's ear.

"That would all be nothing," he informed the wounded miner. "You'd be in pain for a few hours and then you'd be dead. You've kept me buried in this black mountain, like a blind mole, for eight years. Eight years you've kept me here, mucking and wheeling stone for you, you slave driver! You and your ragged watch dog, and your mongrel wolf! Damn you, you gold hunting fiend!"

The druggist's words ended in an agonized scream. Gradually, he grew quiet again.

"I could never get square with you, Brunn," he whimpered huskily. "I never could. I'd be a fool to try."

The druggist stood up. The candlelight flickered unsteadily on his hideously large bat-like ears, and upon his chinless, scraggly bearded face, which had become almost vacant in expression.

He walked over to a case of dynamite that Charlie Brunn had intended to use for loading ten holes which he had completed that afternoon. The miner's long drill steel was still protruding from the tenth hole in the sloping masses of violet black rock in the drift head. The drilling mechanism, together with its supporting tripod, had been pulled back out of the way.

Picking up a stick of explosive, Horsville unfolded the stiff, waxy paper, at one of its ends. Getting a few cartridge-like firing caps from the air drill work box, he slipped one of these small cylindrical copper tubes, with its nitroglycerin loaded end, over a piece of fuse, and crimped it fast. He inserted the copper headed fuse into the end of the stick of dynamite and tied the waxy yellow paper of the explosive firmly around it. Then, picking up three more sticks of dynamite, he lashed them tightly into a bundle, together with the stick that he had fused.

He had manufactured a sort of bomb.

Laying it on the floor of the drift, he knelt beside Charlie Brunn, and once more put his mouth close to one of the miner's ears.

"Charlie Brunn!" he called out. "Charlie Brunn, we've drilled ten thousand feet of tunnel in this mountain. Nearly two miles!"

Getting up, he prepared another explosive charge, exactly like the first one. After lashing the four yellow sticks of dynamite into a bunch, he once more stooped warily over the faintly gasping miner.

"I've helped you wheel out thousands of tons of stone, Charlie Brunn," he asserted. "Enough stone to load a big steamship . . . in a little squeaking iron car on a crooked track!"

The little ragged white dog was beginning to revive. It groaned piteously. Horsville glanced at it.

"Eight years, Brunn!" he screamed stridently. "Three thousand days—at fifty dollars a day!"

Horsville had six explosive charges of dynamite prepared, before he again approached the maimed gold seeker. At a slight, threatening movement of the injured man, the druggist hastily snatched up his murderous steel pick.

"Don't you move!" he cried out in warning.

He poised the curving, blood crimsoned fluke of the pick over the miner's scrawny throat.

"I've got about a hundred and fifty

thousand dollars in pay coming to me, Brunn," he remarked facetiously. His chinless face was convulsed in a large grin. He looked like some winged satyr chuckling over a good joke.

A thin stream of blood trickled slowly out of the corner of Charlie Brunn's mouth.

Stepping back and laying down the pick, Horsville carefully put all the explosive charges he had prepared into an empty gunny sack. Taking a candle from the air drill workbox, he ignited it in the yellow flame of the taper that was burning in the drift.

Lingeringly, he peered down at the disabled miner. In the wavering candlelight, with the dynamite laden brown gunny sack on his back and the flaming taper in his skinny hand, he looked like some grotesque phantom, half bird and half human.

"Goodby, Charlie Brunn," he said huskily. "When you get to feeling better, there's your drill holes, and a good lot of dynamite I've left you. Take a last shot. You'll never come out of here."

A silence fell in the drift, broken only by the weeping moans of the little woolly dog.

Horsville's head dropped slowly forward, until his mouth was almost resting on his chest. Teary streams of liquid started from his single red rimmed eye the color of muddied blue seawater. It was a posture of utter despair.

"There's nothing—nothing I can do," he whispered huskily to himself. "After all these years . . ."

He turned and walked slowly down the drift, stooping a little under the sack of explosive on his frail shoulders. The flame of the candle in his hand dwindled to a small point in the black depths of the gallery, like a tiny star, and disappeared.

Charlie Brunn had not spoken a word.

IN THE old part of Drift 77, Horsville lashed his dynamite bombs to six of the heavy wooden timbers that blocked up the cracked roof of the gallery. He tied a charge tightly to each timber with a piece of cord. Then he lighted the fuses with the flaming candle in his hand, and walked swiftly toward the main tunnel.

He had left the outer end of Drift No. 77 far behind when he heard six successive roars, like the hollow growls of distant thunder. The entire mountain seemed to quiver.

Several small pieces of rock fell from the roof of the main tunnel in which he was standing. One small jagged slab struck him, glancingly, on the cheek, gashing it and starting a stream of blood.

Horsville cursed, and wiped his face on his dirty coat sleeve.

"Three hundred feet of 77 is full of stone," he whispered, in his husky voice. "At least three hundred. When he gets better, he's got two miles of tunnels behind there to walk in—till his candles give out—and his bucket of drinking-water."

Horsville stumbled.

"Then he can crawl in the dark. The gold hunting fiend!"

Horsville had not overlooked the menace of the wolf dog lurking in his kennel at the exit of the mine. Instead of heading toward the mouth of the main tunnel, the druggist turned and walked the other way.

At the inner end of the tunnel, he diverged into a steeply rising passage, in which rude steps had been cut. After clambering upward a considerable distance, he came to an almost vertical rise in the constricted bore. He now had to grasp small projecting pegs of iron and cautiously draw himself upward. A powerful blast of air roared up about him, flapping his frayed garments violently.

Having thrown away his blown out candle, Horsville climbed in utter darkness.

He was going up the ventilating shaft and emergency exit of the Apollo Mine. It had an outlet in the side of the mountain, a thousand feet above the mouth of the main tunnel.

Horsville gained the top of the bore and stood in the open air.

THE JULY sun was setting in the Pacific. The ocean lay like a great rim of silver about the island. The snowy crest of Unga Mountain flamed redly, as if it were bathed in coppery fire.

At the foot of the rocky slopes, Delarof Cove shimmered, platinum gray, in the evening light; and down in the shadows that were gathering upon the eastern shore of the island the town of Unga looked like a little cluster of white foam flecks on a deep, dark floor of granite engirded by the sea.

Horsville snuffed the cold salt air that was blowing up the mountain side from the ocean.

"Let him crawl in the dark!" he cried. "He's buried under a billion tons of granite! Let him crawl! It's nothing. The gold hunting fiend!"

A thousand feet below, the great wolf dog, Kill-Man, circled with uneasy strides about the mouth of the Apollo Mine. He had heard the six rumbling peals of the dynamite explosions roll out of the black depths of the galleries; and he had felt the slight tremor of the earth caused by the impact of the falling masses of rock in those subterranean labyrinths.

Occasionally, the animal would stand still and stare with troubled attentiveness into the black mouth of the tunnel, which he had seen swallow up Charlie Brunn and the druggist many hours ago. Then he would turn and gaze, inquiringly, about the rocky slopes above him.

It was while making one of his restless, circling tours around the entrance of the mine that Kill-Man saw a familiar bat-like figure in flapping garments rising mysteriously, like a huge rat, out of the ground, away up on the steep shoulder of the mountain. After it had emerged from the earth, it stood, motionlessly, on the ridge of the slope, blackly silhouetted against a flaming, golden tinged sky.

The great wolf dog instantly flattened himself down behind a rock. Then he began to work his way swiftly up the flank of the mountain, lurking under shadowy ledges and outcropping strata.

Horsville did not see the powerful, savage beast, which had gotten above him and was closing in on him from behind, until a rapid thudding of the animal's pads caused him to spin round. He saw the brute leaping upon him. The dog's hurtling, gray furred body looked like that of a hoary Alaskan timber wolf. His lips were drawn back from over his terrible tusk-like fangs, slightly amber-colored. Death blazed in his yellowish green eyes.

With a thin scream, Horsville turned to run. He felt the stunning impact of Kill-Man's long, sinewy body as the animal landed on his back and violently threw him down. The wolf dog's powerful jaws closed over the druggist's small, wrinkled neck; the incisor teeth of the beast sank out of sight.

There was a crunching, grinding snap; a thin, husky shriek was cut short into a muffled gurgle; and Horsville's head dropped over on to his back, as if it were hung on a flexible hinge. A jet of blood spurted, spasmodically, for a few seconds, from his torn throat.

The great wolf dog flicked his tongue across his gleaming, blood bathed teeth. His jaws were slightly crimsoned. He walked around the body of the druggist, who was lying on his left side, with his head thrown back against his shoulder blades. Briny tears trickled from his single glazing eye the color of muddied seawater. He looked like a rumpled, hideous bird with a broken neck.

The dog moved to the hole from which Horsville had emerged, and stared in. The powerful blast of upcoming air in the shaft rippled through the furry ruff on his neck.

The shadows of the coming night were stealing up the side of Unga Mountain. Snow tipped pinnacles and crags were disappearing into an enveloping mantle of darkness. Far below, a few lights began to twinkle in the town.

The wolf dog squatted beside the hole and raised his muzzle to a solitary star that was already beginning to glitter in a cold sky the hue of blued steel. From his gray furred throat burst a long, blood

curdling howl that echoed and re-echoed in the dusk, among the ledges and crags.

For a long while, he squatted by the hole and the dead body and howled; then he began to descend the mountainside, heading toward the twinkling lights of Unga.

X

A FLAMING candle, encircled by a ring of dully gleaming steel with a sharp pointed spur that was lodged in a fissure, shed a flickering light over the violet black walls of the last and deepest drift in the Apollo Mine. It flickered, too, upon a gaunt, khaki clad man with a maimed right arm which was tightly bandaged in blood soaked strips of soiled blue cloth. Hair that resembled a little patch of dirty snow covered the top of his narrow skull. His razor sharp face, seamy and worn, and smeared on one cheek with dried black blood, was the color of old gray iron. On the palms of his spear-like hands, one of which gleamed yellowly, as if it were dusted with gold, were incredibly hard callouses hollowed to the curve of the hundreds of drill steels they had guided into beds of rock.

Charlie Brunn was sitting on a mass of sloping rock, in the head of the drift, with one of these drill steels resting across his thin legs. It was a heavy black eight foot rod, chisel bitted at one end. On its long stock were gleaming yellow specks. Like the palm of Charlie Brunn's left hand, it looked as if it had been profusely sprinkled with powdered gold.

This drill steel had come out of the tenth hole that Charlie Brunn had drilled that day. In the act of loading some of the other holes with charges of the dynamite that Horsville had left him, the miner had espied a few glinting flecks of gold on that part of the black stock of the abandoned drill which protruded from the sloping head of the drift.

With his uninjured left arm, Charlie Brunn had pulled the heavy steel rod out of its hole, to find its chisel shaped cutting end thickly covered with gleaming yellow dust. The drill had bitten into a fat kidney of virgin gold, deep in the violet black rock of the drift head.

It was the first gold that Charlie Brunn had seen in the Apollo Mine for eight years. The yellow grains brushed from the drill gleamed in the calloused palm of his left hand, and on his grimy garments.

Charlie Brunn had put charges of dynamite in seven of the holes in the drift, including the one from which he had drawn the gold dusted drill steel that lay across his lap. From the steeply sloping surface of the dark stone on which he rested, there sprouted fuses all about him. They looked like thin, starved, lifeless black snakes, in the flickering candlelight.

The gaunt miner grasped a short bladed knife in his left hand. With some difficulty, he split the ends of the fuses. Then, raising his long arm, he plucked down the sputtering candle from the fissured wall of the drift.

His small hard eyes looked very tired as he settled down again on the sloping rock, among the gunpowder cored black braids sticking up from the loaded drill holes. The wavering yellow flame of the candle shot futile rays into the distant blackness of the low gallery.

Charlie Brunn was alone, buried deep in the heart of Unga Mountain. The drift in which he sat ran through a stony black wilderness of cross cuts to the main tunnel of the mine, over a mile away. For hundreds of feet, the single entering gallery was filled with fallen rock. Charlie Brunn had not gone to look at it; he had felt the tremors of its fall and sensed the rise of air pressure in the sealed inner drifts. To clear such a shot down gallery would be a difficult work of months for an experienced crew of miners.

The mountain prisoned gold seeker was not quite alone, though. At his feet, a little, dirty white tatterdemalion dog lay moaning softly. Its eyes, like glittering steel beads, half hidden under a mass of grimy hair, gazed up at its gaunt master watchfully.

CHARLIE BRUNN applied the yellow candle flame to the end of one of the fuses. In an instant, it began spitting a thin stream of hot red sparks.

The tousled little dog leaped to its feet and began to whine with intense fear. It staggered off two or three yards into the darkness of the drift; then reeled back to the feet of Charlie Brunn and tugged feebly at its master's dirty khaki trousers.

Soon all seven of the black fuses were hissing, menacingly. A haze of pale blue smoke filled the tunnel, through which Charlie Brunn looked like an iron gray ghost. He seemed to be meditating, calmly, in a garden of fiery serpents that hissed all around him as their internal fires burned down steadily into the seven deep drill holes loaded with dynamite.

The little woolly dog shivered in every ragged hair. It wept, almost like a child.

"Take it cool, Fuses!" said Charlie Brunn in a low, icy voice.

The tattered dog licked the hard steely fingers of Charlie Brunn's right hand, which rested on the black rock, beside him, like a useless spear. Smuggling up beside its master, it laid its fuzzy head against the man's gaunt thigh and remained very still.

The candlelight shone murkily upon the rocks walls of the drift, which now looked a deep rich blue color, through the fog of gunpowder smoke. Straight out in the gallery, the blackness of the low tunnel seemed to turn into solid jade.

Charlie Brunn sat holding up the yellow flaming candle in his spear-like hand, as if he would light his way into eternity with it. Across his knees lay the drill steel dusted with gold. Beside him snuggled the little ragged white dog. He was gazing into a pair of lustrous black eyes; and he saw the sparkle of imitation diamonds in an amber comb.

"Let her blow—high, wide and handsome!" he exclaimed, softly.

THREE MINUTES AT SEA

by Bill Adams

I WAS second mate of a steamer. It was my second voyage in steam. I was a sailing ship man with the usual contempt for steam. Since leaving sail, nothing had happened to break the monotony. I had made up my mind to go back to sail at the first opportunity. Being in steam was about as exciting as being a street car conductor.

We left Natal with the ship very light. In the between decks hold were a few elephant ivories and some hundreds of bales of horse hides. For the safety of the ship we had a small quantity of sand ballast in the lower hold.

We had just cleared the breakwater when we were ordered back to load surplus war stores. The Boer War was just over. By next morning we had taken aboard seventy thousand cases of high explosives.

Our passenger accommodations were full—men, women and children.

Three days out we ran into a full gale off the Cape. A monstrous head sea arose. Her engines at full ahead, the ship could just hold her own. Seas flooded her forecastle head. Her propeller raced with every pitch. The passengers were locked below. It was the first good blow I had seen since leaving sail.

With nightfall the fury of the gale increased. The decks were continually swamped. Three of the boats were swept to the sea. Ventilators and stanchions were smashed and twisted. The passengers, grown panicky, yelled to be let out.

At midnight I went to the bridge to take charge till four. The wind was a solid wall, the ship continually flung from mountain summits to cañon depths, and back.

Suddenly I saw the lights of a sailing ship heading straight for me. She was running, with the gale at her heels. By the rule of the road it was my duty to give her the right of way. Scarcely had I seen her when she began to burn flares to make sure that I should see her and keep out of her path. For me to alter my course would have meant bringing my ship broadside on into the troughs of those enormous seas. Seventy thousand cases of high explosives would work loose. We would be blown sky high.

For a moment I thought to call my skipper; then decided that he might as well die where he was in that swift instant when the onrushing ship should strike us. For under the rule of the road *it was illegal for a sailing ship to alter her course for a steamer.*

The ship was on us. I could see the loom of her topsails in the dark. I could hear the roar of the sea at her bow.

I heard a yell, a bellowed curse; then the scream of brace blocks and grind of spars as the windjammer shifted her helm. By the light of a last futile flare upon her forecastle head I saw an oil-skinned shape that shook a fist at me. Her masts at a fearful slope, she swept beneath my stern, I could have dropped a biscuit aboard her.

For a while life had been sufficiently exciting.

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A Comic Musician Who Went to War

A BASS DRUM *for* LOOIE

By FRANK J. SCHINDLER

THE ABSENT minded professor, who scratched a match on an Army mule and then wondered who planted horseshoe trade marks in his chest, had nothing on this bird. He would go to mooning about his Lydia—and then lose his bass drum. Shucks, you'll say, no man can lose a bass drum. But wait'll I tell you how I came by him.

You remember the day the Houses of Congress were filled with verbal fireworks, war was declared on Kaiser Bill and Liberty Loan and four minute orators took to the rostrums and did nothing else but orate. I got a telegram from the colonel:

HANK YOU OLD FOOL IM MUSTERING IN THE REGIMENT AND WANT BAND LEADER STOP WON'T TAKE NO FOR ANSWER

I sent back a reply:

ED WHAT THE HELL YOU YELLING ABOUT QUESTION DID I SAY NO QUESTION

The colonel was commanding officer of a National Guard outfit in a Southern town. In peace time he ran a theater. I worked for him a couple of seasons; he called me his three piece orchestra: piano, stool and cover. He was a great lover of music, especially of martial and band music. While I was with him I made something out of the town band of ten mouthpieces—no drums. Then the big town called me and he let me go with regret and we parted the best of friends.

When he was mustering in his regiment he remembered what I had done with the town band and went right about signing me up before I got a chance to join out with some other outfit. So, some days after I sent him my telegraphic reply, I got a whole envelope full of papers; one, making me a sergeant-major in the said regiment just as soon as it was presented at a recruiting office. Others were orders to recruit a full band of twenty-eight men and various other instructions.

I immediately sought out Paddy Crow,

a fine cornet player, offered him a sergeantcy, and he nodded his head and toddled after me to the recruiting office. Toddled is the right word. He had a pair of slow motion dogs and a bay window, like a grass fed cow horse; and no exercise and much sitting around in orchestra rooms and pits put a lot of fat on his carcass.

Arrived there, I got the ear of an adjutant, told him I had to recruit a band in a hurry and showed him all my documents. He was a regular guy and the most obliging man I had ever met. He turned us over to a couple of medical officers and we were punched and stethoscoped, said "ah", had our tonsils sprayed with stuff that tasted like present day bootlegger's sheep dip, exposed our teeth for examination, like horses at a horse market and, from plenty of standing on brass rails, we were found to have high arches. No trouble with flat feet.

"A little fat," remarked the doc, slapping Pat on his bay window, "but you're both physically fit. The Army will take that off of you."

That was a laugh. He scribbled on some forms, gave each of us one, and added:

"Don't slam the door as you go out. The sarge will swear you in."

The sarge did so with *éclat*, and the adjutant gave us a grin and chirped "So long, soldiers", and you should have seen Pat square his shoulders at being called a soldier. He squared his shoulders, and his rotunda stuck out two inches farther.

"Pull in that roundhouse," I wheezed, "and lift those dogs a little faster. You're in the Army now, kid. You'll have to snap into it, because I'm going to have a snappy band, what I mean!"

"Try an' get one, you mean," Pat grinned.

THERE was something in that. I wanted a band that was a band, and I became as busy as a one armed chiropractor in my search for the men I wanted. Some had already signed up; others had promised themselves to other band leaders. Finally I got a pretty fair aggregation; at least, I wouldn't have to show none of them which end to blow into. I was still shy one piccolo, one clarinet, and one bass drummer. Time was getting short. I nailed a piccolo player and sent him to the recruiting office. He came back and reported that they wouldn't take him; he had flat feet. He almost cried and said he didn't play the piccolo with his feet.

"For gosh sake, Pat," I said, "hop over to that recruiting station and buzz that adjutant. I got to get transportation for this mob. Don't come back until you bring a clarinet player, a flute player and a bass drummer. Come on, snap into it Hit a longer stride and crowd those dogs a little. Might as well get used to it right now."

Good old Pat. It took him all day to do it, but he came back with three assorted musicians: a clarinet player of twenty-one; a ruddy faced individual who was a high school professor of music and professed to play bass drum; and a long, lanky individual with soft boiled eyes and a simple look on his face. He had a piccolo in his inside coat pocket.

I got the pedigree of the first two and then turned on the alleged piccolo player.

"What's your name?" I queried.

"Looie Schwartzkopf-Lustigmüller," he answered.

I had been on the jump all day and I was in no mood to be kidded.

"Wha'd'aya doin', kiddin' me?" I snapped at him.

"Who? Me?" he inquired, simply.

"Yes, you!"

"Why should I kid you?"

"Maybe you can tell me? I asked you a civil question!"

"And I gave you a civil answer," he informed me.

"Oh, gosh," I groaned. "That's some monicker to carry into this man's Army. Is that your full name?"

"Full or sober," he wise cracked, looking at me with his soft boiled eyes, like a calf.

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"Full or sober," I snapped, "we'll just abbreviate this thing."

I wrote:

Louis Blackhead, says he plays piccolo

in my book. Then I added:

"And don't try gettin' drunk in this outfit. If you do, you'll get thirty days on the woodpile making stove lengths out of logs."

"I never did like to chop wood," said Looie. "My mother used to scold me—"

"Never mind that," I butt in. "Just see that I don't have to scold you. And, listen, if any of you windjammers want to say goodby to anybody, hop to it! That train leaves tomorrow morning from the Union Depot at 8 A.M. If any of you birds are A. W. O. L, there'll be a firing squad out looking for you."

"Gee," said Looie, "I gotta go ah' kiss Lydia goodby."

"Atta boy!" I grinned. "Give her a kiss for me. You can leave that piccolo with her, if you want to; the Government will furnish you with an instrument. So long."

I went home and spent my last evening at home with the wife and the kids. The next morning I went to the depot and found all my recruits there; most of them had a hangover and were in need of sleep. Sleep they did, just as soon as they got settled in their seats. By the time we pulled out of the yards, Paddy Crow was snoring so loud the rest of the passengers thought the engineer was running with the whistle wide open.

LOOIE'S simple face looked bright and chipper, and he sat down beside me and I asked him how Lydia had deported herself.

"Aw, gee, she cried," he told me. "Gosh, how I'm goin' to miss that girl! We've known each other since we were kids."

"Went to different schools together, huh?" I grunted.

"No, to the same schools," he corrected me.

Then he sprung one of those puzzles of this great democracy on me. He said his father was a French Alsatian, with a German monicker and had fought with the French against the Prussians in 1871.

"Why the hell didn't he change his name?" I queried.

"I guess he never thought of it," said Looie. "Gosh, now that you mention it, I should ought to change it into French."

"What do you know about French?" I was inquisitive to know.

He slapped himself on the chest.

"I speak it like a Frenchman. Lookut—" and he went on and dashed off a long rigmarole in a foreign language. It could have been Siwash, for all I knew about it then.

"I don't know what you're sellin'," I wheezed, "but I'll buy a bottle. Anyway, what I know about German, your name would be Looie Blackhead Happy Miller in English. Is that right?"

"That's right."

"Suppose we translated Blackhead into French; then what would happen?"

"*Noiretête, noiresource, deuiltête, noire-sommet*—"

"Whoa," I objected, "wait a minute! Do all those words mean the same thing?"

"And that ain't all," he replied blandly.

"For gosh's sake," I groaned. "Wadda langwidge—wadda langwidge!"

He grinned and went on and explained about genders and so forth and so on.

"Well," I finally horned in, "shoot the whole works; yeah, the whole monicker in French."

"*Deuilsommet - heureuxmeunier*," he chirped.

"Hurray, mine car," I giggled. "Nope, kid. Your old man is a pretty wise old guy, I guess. Between the two handles, I think you better stick to Schwartzkopf. It's *much* simpler."

Anyway, I was interested and started right in learning the lingo, as long as I had some one to instruct me. I believe in taking advantage of any information that comes my way, and I would need the language, had nothing to do, and I kept Looie's mind off of Lydia all the way into

Cincinnati. There I awakened all those who were still pounding their ears, marched them to a tavern and fed them on spare ribs, sauerkraut, beer and pretzels, and then led them back to the depot and into one of those slow motion trains that travel south of the Ohio River and of which there is no slower. Well, if nothing else, when a pretty scene went by a guy had plenty of time to look at it and could memorize every point in the landscape, down to every individual peanut plant.

We arrived, got off, and then wondered where do we go from here? A long, sun tanned top kick in uniform popped up from somewhere and inquired—

"Are you-all the boys what make the band?"

"That's us, soldier," I replied. "When do we eat and where do we get it?"

"You-all come with me and you-all eat just as soon as you-all get to camp."

"Righto, you-all," I agreed. "Lead on, You-all; we're right on your heels."

"What the hell," grunted Pat. "Gotta walk?"

A COUPLE of canvas topped Army trucks stood at the curb and "You-all" motioned to them.

"I guess not, Paddy," I said. "Tough luck."

Pat gave me a dirty look and climbed into the bus. You-all and the other corn fed chauffeur stepped on the gas and shot us out of there as if they were going to a fire. Side by side, bumping against each other at times, the two trucks rocked, while the two navigators swapped gossip and laid the dust with streams of tobacco juice. Looking at them, you'd figure that they were two of those nonchalant individuals who would do the same thing under shellfire and never raise a hair when a whizbang cracked under their rear trucks.

We cracked down on the camp like Joffre's taxicab army rushing reinforcements to the Marne, and You-all swamped a beetle with syrup of fine cut and drawled—

"Band boys, you-all is heah."

Which was something like General Pershing was alleged to have said to Lafayette.

The colonel came bustling up with a big smile and the glad hand.

"Well, Hank, you old so an' so, I'm glad to see you!"

"Howdy, Colonel!" I greeted him. "If I'm supposed to salute my superior officer, how do you do it?"

"The devil with that!" he came back "What kind of a band did you bring me?"

"Search me," I laughed. "I got 'em in a grab bag. Anyway, this is Pat Crow. I've appointed him sergeant and I know he can play. I'll need a corporal, too, won't I? Yes, sir. Yeah, I think I'll appoint Looie corporal. This bird's name is Schwartzkopf. He's a piccolo player, and speaks French like Napoleon. I know it sounds like a wheeze, but he has already taught me to order drinks in French and how to spring come hither lines on the *femmes*. That's French for women."

"That's great," the colonel exulted. "We'll attach him to headquarters company and he'll come in handy when we get on the other side. Well, when you get tuned up, play something. There's nothing like good band music to uphold morale."

"Mebbe so," I said. "But there's nothing like a lot of hot chow to raise the morale of a lot of hungry windjammers."

"Never thought of that." The colonel snapped at You-all, and he pulled a snappy salute. "Take the boys over and feed them." And to me, "Sergeant-major, when you get through with breakfast, report to me for further orders."

"Yes, sir," I answered, and snapped him a salute as good as You-all's.

He grinned and snapped one back at me and turned on his heel.

You-all introduced us to a mess sergeant and we sat down to partake of Uncle Sam's victuals. We were almost through when a lieutenant came along. My, my, he was a hard boiled looking guy.

"Hey, boys," I said. "This guy looks tough. Better salute 'im."

We all did so; all except Looie. He was too busy stoking his face. The lieutenant gave me the eye and I could see that he was laughing inwardly. Then he fixed Looie with a glare.

"Why don't you salute your superior officer?" he growled.

"Hunh?" inquired Looie.

"Hunh!" the lieutenant snorted. "Can't you say 'sir'?"

"Sure," said Looie dumbly.

"Sure, what?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know what?"

"What I forgot."

"What did you forget?"

"What you wanted to know."

"What did I want to know?" the lieutenant droned.

"I don't know."

He was back to from where he started and it was time to call a halt; so I interrupted:

"Pardon me, Lieutenant, the boy's education has been sadly neglected. He's concentrated more on piccolo playing than on those niceties of the Army. However, if you will overlook it this time, I'll try to drive something into his jug head."

"I wish you would. Let it slide this time. When you bozos get through chow, see me for your uniforms and instruments. Lieutenant Chops. The top kick will wise you up to where to find me."

He passed me a wink and ambled on.

"WHAT'S the matter with that guy?" demanded Looie.

"There's nothing the matter with him!" I snapped. "Didn't we salute? What's the matter—you got a busted arm? Besides which, when you're in the Army, you don't yap sure, yeah, yup, or uh-huh. You say yes, sir, or no, sir. Get that, Jug-head?"

"Yes."

"Yes, what?" Am I or am I not the leader of this band?"

"Yes, sir," Looie choked.

"That's better. Now, don't forget it! Let's go and get those uniforms."

Well, Lieutenant Chops certainly had a sense of humor. He gave us all a pretty nice fit, but he gave Looie a uniform that hung on him like a suit on a scarecrow. It would have fitted Pat nicely, but it flapped on Looie.

"Gee," he crowed, "Lydia ought to see me now! I bet I look swell, don't I?"

"You sure do," I agreed, "only you ought to stand out in the rain and shrink that suit."

"And, ooh, look," he went on, "I got some crêpe on the sleeve."

"Crêpe!" I snorted. "Why, you poor doodle bug, that's a chevron!"

"Chevron? Ha, ain't that funny? I thought it was crêpe. But, gee, maybe Lydia wouldn't be proud of me if she knew I was a corporal."

"Applesauce," I muttered. "Write her a letter. Hey, Paddy, you look after these birds! I'm going over to see the colonel."

When I got back Paddy was memorizing bugle calls; he was elected to blow reveille in the morning. Anyway, a hectic day was done and we hit the hay.

The next morning a guard prodded Paddy into wakefulness.

"Sweetly, Pat," I suggested. "Tenderly and with feeling."

Paddy grinned and blew reveille. Never did I hear reveille blown so slowly; a dirge was a quick step alongside of it. Pretty soon the colonel showed up.

"Who blew that reveille?" he inquired.

"I did, sir," replied Pat.

"Well, Sergeant, you'll have to snap it off faster than that. I had my boots on when you got through." The colonel looked at me; I had my tongue in my cheek. "As for you," he continued, pointedly, "cut out the kiddin'! And, if that band can't snap it off any faster than the sergeant played reveille, that corn fed militia of mine will march right through the band and somebody will get trampled to death. Get your men oriented, give them lots of practise, because you have

to put on a concert in town on Saturday night. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," I answered. "Your diction is perfect, sir."

He snapped at You-all, who snapped to heel, and they moved off, off to razz some one else, no doubt.

WELL, I put the band through the sprouts that day, and it was a good band, except for Dunk, the clarinet recruit Pat had brought me. He was a rank amateur, but he was intelligent and I knew I could teach him something. And Looie—Looie was terrible. I pulled out the book into which I had written, "Louis Blackhead, says he plays piccolo," and added, "Like hell he can!" It looked as if Looie would finish his days in the infantry. Still, I believed in giving him a chance.

The snare drummers were fakers. They could roll and knew all the flims and flams of the percussion trade, but they couldn't read a part. However, teaching them to read was easy compared to making Dunk and Looie get music out of their instruments. They, at least, wouldn't squawk out any blue notes. The high school prof was no bass drummer, but he was a musician and could read a part and count. About a week and he'd be good.

Anyway, we struggled down to Saturday afternoon. I held the last rehearsal for the night's concert that afternoon. I put on a stiff overture and was razzing Dunk and Looie.

"Listen, you guys," I said, "piccolo and clarinet are beautiful instruments, but when you get down to letter C in this overture, don't play and spoil the whole composition. If I hear one of you birds peep in there, I'll have you court martialed!"

"Aw, if I had my own piccolo here," said Looie, "I could play it. I ain't used to playin' on this piccolo."

"Horse radish!" I chirped. "Buddy, your alibi holds about as much water as a sieve. Who the hell ever told you you could play flute and piccolo?"

"Well," he replied, "that's not my instrument."

"And, if not, what is, f'r the love o' Mike?"

"Piano."

"Piano, huh?" I scoffed. "Well, when we get through with this rehearsal, I'll give you a chance to prove that. If you're lying to me, you'll get a perpetual job at kitchen police. Allez up. Let's go with this overture."

We finished the overture and I told them to take a rest. Then what happened? The absent minded high school prof scratched a match on a mule and the mule kicked him into the casualty ward. He was almost a total wreck. They picked horseshoes out of him and wrapped him up in a plaster cast; he had most of his ribs broken.

Well, I shoved one of the snare drummers over on brass drum. He could beat a march, but he was going to be a liability on the classic stuff; and I did want to put that concert over. I dismissed the band and beckoned to Looie. I led him to a piano and shoved some music up before him.

"Play that," I barked.

He did so. I shoved another one up on the rack. He played that.

"Well!" I exclaimed. "Geez, you can read, can'tcha? Listen! No hard feelings, but you're a rotten piccolo player. I'm going to put you on the brass drum. Think you can get away with it?"

"Gee, I would like to play the bass drum," said Looie. "I know I can do it."

"You will," I assured him. "You'll play that concert tonight. If the band starts to swim, I'll stick up two fingers, like this. That means for you to lean on it—get me?"

"I gotcha. Sock it hard, hah?"

"That's the ticket. Turn in that flute and piccolo and take over the bass drum. Remember, that's Government property and you're responsible for it. Better look over those drum parts and get the swing of it."

Well, all in all, the concert was a

success, except that, when we arrived at the hall, Looie had no bass drum.

"Where is your drum?" I demanded.

"I lost it, I guess."

"You guess! Don't you know?"

"Aw, gee, the mail come just before we left an' I got a letter from Lydia. I was so glad, I don't know whether I took the drum or not."

I BUZZED You-all and he shot back to camp with Looie and they came back with the bass drum. We opened the concert with a snappy march and got a big hand from the assembled multitude; and the colonel swelled up in his tunic and beamed like a searchlight. Looie spanked the bass drum like a veteran. Then we put on the big overture. At letter C, where I had told Dunk to lay out, he shoved his nose down into the part. He had been drilling on it and now, by gosh, he was going to make me eat my words and show me that he could play it. It was a noble effort. So noble that he forgot that he was playing in an ensemble and disregarded tempo and everything else in his desperate effort to play it. The whole band was off, except him. I tried to catch his eye, but he wasn't looking. The next clarinet player kicked him in the shins. Couldn't dislodge him.

Pat was laughing and trying to play solo cornet at the same time. By this time we were almost up to letter E—the overture was divided into lettered divisions—where the going was tougher and rougher and the band was getting sort of woozy. We call it swimming. I gave Looie the high sign with two fingers and he commenced pounding the bass drum and cymbals. You'd be surprised what a multitude of sins a bass drum can cover in a brass band. This bass drum barrage jerked Dunk out of it. He saw the expression on my face and almost swallowed his clarinet. After that, he gobbled so *sotto voce* that he was merely a chair warmer.

We finished the concert and the colonel heaped encomiums on my head and took me back to camp in his car. Looie came back in one of the trucks and he was empty handed.

"Where's your drum?" I asked.

"Aw, gee, I must 'a' left it in the hall," he piped.

"Wadda head, wadda head!" I groaned. "Ah, well, somebody can get it in the morning."

ANYWAY, there it started. Looie would stop to look at something and then forgot his brass drum. He would get to mooning about Lydia and do the same thing. He wrote her letters that looked like novelettes, and she answered him with novels.

Then we moved to a training camp in South Carolina and those gorillas in the band, knowing his habit of losing his bass drum, would aid and abet him, if not hide it on him. Pat was the worst offender. They almost drove me into inventing a glue with which I could stick this brass drum to him and make it a part of his anatomy.

It was strenuous work. Many people think that the bands only played—take that either way—but we got the whole course, rifle practise, machine gun work and the rest of it. Then came the time to get away and Looie lost his brass drum on his way to New York. Doggone that drum! We got another drum. We boarded a pot bellied steamer and started for over there. Before we met the convoy we put on band concerts to uphold the morale of the men, as the colonel would have it.

The second day out we played a concert on the deck. This old tub didn't even have a rail around it. Just a lot of gas pipes stuck up along the edge, with a wire cable suspended from them. There was the usual hunt for the bass drum before we got started and I got quite sarcastic with Looie.

We played a march. The sea was what the gobs would call smooth, if you weren't fastidious about the meaning of your words. The waves were running and causing this old tub to swivel up and

down like a wooden horse on a merry-go-round. Looie had no spikes on the drum and, suddenly, the tub changed its up and down motion and heaved sidewise. It rolled over to one side, and the bass drum rolled from between Looie's knees.

"He's goin' to lose that drum again!" Pat sang out.

The drum rolled over—even the cymbal attached to it didn't stop it. It shot for the rail. Looie on all fours, looking like a grasshopper, jumped after it. The drum shot off into the briny, just as I howled—

"Get that drum!"

Looie must have thought I was sore for, nothing daunted, he dived right off deck after the brass drum.

"Man overboard!" went up the chorus.

There were shouts up on the poop deck, bells jangled, gobs came running, their balloon pants whipping in the breeze, and swung out a life boat and plumped it into the water before the tub stopped. They slid down the ropes like a lot of monkeys and laid to the oars. Looie was swimming like a yellow collie dog and near him floated his precious bass drum. The gobs hauled both into their boat.

Looie got another bawling out, for swimming in the Atlantic Ocean against military regulations. I didn't have the heart even to kid him. It was darned lucky he could swim. Anyway, he didn't lose the drum.

We landed in England and he twice lost the drum between Liverpool and London. We arrived in France and it became a continual game of "bass drum, bass drum, who's got the bass drum?" We were in and out of the battle lines, and while we were in the battle lines, there was no music. A lot of hard and dirty work. The band boys did everything from runner duty to grave digging. Looie and I were attached to headquarter's company, for our knowledge of the French language. Looie had tutored me well and I was getting to be quite a linguist.

Those last eight weeks were the worst. Our regiment was in the big push and we plugged away until we didn't care whether we lived or died. We didn't have our shoes off for weeks, and we didn't dare take them off; we'd never get our feet back into them.

IT WAS about the first day of November, under a dreary and weepy sky, with a sea of churned up mud in all directions, and an infernal noise that bit into nerves that were already on the breaking point; and, somehow, they didn't break. Catch as catch can meals, poor water, a stench that filled the nostrils—what a hell! Men, coming and going, ammunition trucks wallowing through the mud, ambulances skidding by, aerial dog fights, bombs dropping from above and crumps throwing up dirty geysers of garbage.

The infantry had pushed on through a battered town and had driven a wedge shaped salient into the Jerries' line. The Jerries retaliated with shellfire and blew out all the telephone lines, and headquarters was cut off from the advance lines. We didn't know what was going on down front. It was getting late in the afternoon. If the men dug in for the night, the Jerries would be nicely oriented over night to crimp off this salient. We were working too fast and the line would have to be straightened, to keep a straight front to the enemy.

"Here's some orders for Major Cleve," said the colonel. "Find a runner and tell him to get through with this stuff."

"I'll take 'em down," I said.

"You're too damned anxious to see what's going on up front," he snapped at me. "You come back. Hell, I'm short handed now. If they get these wires fixed, I'll need you. Find a runner."

"All right," I answered, and sloshed through the mud.

Looie was just coming back from that way, with a piece of dirty paper in his dirty paw. I gave him the orders and told him to be on his way.

"Holy gee!" he groaned. "Do I have to go back there again? The crumps're

bustin' like hell an' the machine gun slugs are whistlin' Yankee Doodle."

"It's tough, kid," I sympathized, and a crump erupted across the field. "They're bustin' down here, too, boy. Li'ble to say, 'Goodby, war', any minute. I got a couple o' cigarets. Here, light up an' get out o' here."

"Thanks, Hank," he said, lighting up.

I watched him slosh through the mud, up through the barrage. A mob of shoveleers went up; up to prepare a nice ditch for the infantry to fall back into when they evacuated the salient. Signal Corps' men were working like muddy beavers to restore communication. Telephones played an enormous part in winning the war. Without telephones, we were deaf, dumb and blind. The "party" took in too much territory.

LOOIE sloshed through the mud and the bursting shells, slipped and dived through holes and finally reached his objective and delivered his orders. He started back and came through the battered village. Funny guy, he had two sides to him: a very bright side and a dumb side. He poked his nose into a building that had once been a tavern, and there, behold, reposed one of the finest bass drums he had ever gazed upon. It was about six feet in diameter. It had been the property of a German army band. The Jerries had been run out of there so fast they left a lot of things behind.

"Hot dog!" Looie crowed. "Here's a bass drum I'll never lose!"

He snapped the head with his fingers and it had a nice mellow boom. Some drum! He did more investigating and found a little food that was fit to eat and a bottle of beer and a bottle of cognac. He was deadly tired and hungry, so he sat down between the wall and the bass drum and ate and drank; drank it all. He became drowsy and fell asleep.

He didn't hear the men coming through and cursing because they had to fall back to a prepared position. The soldiers would have cursed either way; had they been left where they were and then found themselves strafed on both flanks. None of them would have survived the strafing, unless they surrendered. True, officers being only human, made mistakes, but the rank and file didn't stop to reason why things were done so and so.

During the night the Jerries worked right back into the shattered village. They set up barricades, stretched more barbed wire and got set with more machine guns for the next day's slaughter.

At dawn a ragged, rolling barrage crashed down on the village and rolled behind it. This brought Looie back to life. He poked his head out of the door and quickly pulled it in again. As the barrage passed, a lot of bozos with inverted soup kettles on their heads came tumbling into the street.

"Holy gee!" mused Looie. "What the hell! Golly, it looks like the Jerries pushed in here while I was asleep."

Six Germans were clustered around a machine gun in front of the house. From the direction of the American lines came the sounds of conflict, as the machine guns commenced chattering. On they came, getting nearer and nearer, and then the Germans behind the machine gun went into action. Other machine guns went into action and hung up the entire advance.

Looie crawled up a flight of battered steps to the second floor where he had the whole sky for a roof. From the window he got a bird's eye view of the action. The fight had become a stalemate in that particular spot.

Down he came again and pulled the drum mallet from under the ropes of the drum. He slammed the drum; a tremendous boom came out of it, and the Jerries behind the gun stopped shooting and looked at the house. He gave them an encore.

Two of them rose up and stepped to the door, and then Looie remembered he had a gun. He pistoled them both, jumped to the door and shot the other four at the gun. He dived out of the

door and collided with a big officer with a handlebar mustache. They clinched. The officer was a big gorilla, but Looie cracked him between the eyes with his automatic and knocked him cold. Farther up, other Jerries saw their comrades and officer bite the dust, and they swung a machine gun on Looie. However, he was just one jump ahead of them. He hurdled the barricade and turned the machine gun on them.

THE COLONEL was bringing headquarters right down with the advance line, meaning to set up headquarters in the town just as soon as it was retaken. Those battered houses were better than a fox hole. We made progress until we reached machine gun range of the village, and then the advance came to a halt. There were so many machine guns rattling, the air must have been sheets of steel jacketed bullets.

We heard one stop, and then it started to rattle again, but not in our direction. Another one chattered and we advanced in spite of it. It was all cuckoo.

Looie, again, cleaned up the machine gun that opposed him and set out for new fields to conquer. The next thing we knew, he was firing the machine gun out of a second story window.

"Who the hell is that?" the colonel inquired.

"From here it looks like Looie," I informed him.

Looie had a grandstand seat, so to speak, up there on his second floor perch, and he was mopping up. He would stop firing, disappear, and then appear again and start more shooting. He had to come down for ammunition; that was why he was doing the disappearing act. It looked goofy to me, not knowing, at the moment, of his handicap. However, we finally broke in there, thanks to Looie, and then the rest was easier.

I had Looie down on the book as missing, but I scratched him off again. And was he proud when he showed me the bass drum he had captured! He claimed he captured it.

"Well, buddy," I giggled, "if you lose this drum, I hope you miss the boat home!"

The colonel glad handed him, cited him in orders—and hoped to gosh he wouldn't lose this bass drum!

We ground on for three more days and then were relieved. All this time I kept the beautiful bass drum under surveillance. In the mixup of turning the sector over to another outfit, somewhere the confounded drum got lost. We no sooner got planted in rest billets and the colonel was yelling for music to uphold the morale of his *soldats*. Well, there was a lot in that, I'll tell you. A crash of martial music acted like a tonic to men who felt bluer than the bluest and, in spirits, were lower than the lowest.

Anyway the drum was missing.

"Aw, gee," said Looie, "when we come out, we got some mail an' I got a letter from Lydia. I was so glad, I forgot all about the drum."

I quizzed You-all about it. He was the same old You-all, only he looked leaner, tougher, hungrier, and flat nosed, as a machine gun pellet had amputated the tip of his nose. He growled like a bee stung bear and unbosomed himself in invectives that were never meant for polite ears.

"Sure, I saw the doggone drum! That's all I've been doin' since I started this war, playin' nurse to a sulphurous bass drum! Why, the jug-head put it on a truck! He was readin' somethin' at the same time. You-all look in that truck an' you-all'll find it under regimental equipment!"

Well, we found it, made music, and the morale went up like a thermometer in a pot of hot mulligan.

Back we went into the line again and stayed there until station G. I. Cans signed off at eleven o'clock on November eleventh. There was very little hurrahing down in our neck of the woods. Looie and some more of the boys had carried the news of the eleven o'clock armistice down to the most advanced outposts. Men just simply lay down in the mud and promptly went to sleep when the hour arrived.

And the colonel?

"Hank, where the hell is that gosh darned band? Get 'em together and let's have some music! Put a little pep into these soldiers! They're dead on their feet! Come on, wake 'em up!"

"Band?" I inquired. "Have we got a band? God knows, I haven't seen the whole band in three weeks! All right, sir, I'll see if I can get you a band."

I HUNTED for the band. Some were working with the medical units, some were on grave digging detail, and others, like Looie, were coming back from the advance posts and were taking their time about it. I put in a personal search for the bass drum and found it and had it handy when they all finally showed up. I counted noses and, out of twenty-eight men, I had fifteen left.

We played a march and it sounded terrible. Nobody had an embouchure; that is, their lips were soft from lack of playing. Pat, who was now as flat in front as a debuntante, sat down on the ground and groaned.

"What the hell's the matter, Sarge?" I inquired.

"God, Lieutenant," he protested—I had been commissioned meanwhile—"how the hell can a man play on an empty belly? Geez, we've had nothin' but camouflaged corn willie and damned little o' that."

"Hold everything," I said, and went off to buzz the colonel.

"Colonel," I said, "music has charms to sooth the savage breast and inject the morale into the *soldats*, but my windjammers are so doggone hungry, if you can dig up a chunk of beef for them, it will raise their morale about umpty ump per cent."

"Beef!" he snorted. "And where the hell do you think I'm going to get a cow? Suck one out of my thumb?"

"It's a good trick, even if you don't do it."

"And I'm not going to attempt it. However, there was a horse got bopped off this morning and I told cookie to save it. He's skinned it. I'll give you an order to the mess sergeant. That's the best I can do."

"That's good enough. I'll eat horse or mule."

He gave me an order to the mess sergeant and some time later the band sat down to a steak dinner. When we filled up, I said—

"That was good beef steak."

"Yeah," Pat grinned, "that was damned good horse."

You couldn't fool Pat, while Looie looked pop eyed.

"Gee," he exclaimed, "I never knew horse tasted so good!"

"Anything tastes good when you're hungry, kid," said Pat.

And how they did play after that. Pat was stinging high C's; Looie swung a mean mallet and cymbal on the huge bass drum; and the colonel stood by and applauded every number.

I don't want to bore you with the repetition of the same thing, but Looie kept losing his bass drum all the way to the Rhine, back to Brest, across the Atlantic Ocean to Long Island, and back to the home camp.

THE STATE capital was decorated with bunting and a big celebration was to be held in honor of the homecoming of the Division. This was topped off with a parade. The colonel of each regiment led his men down to the reviewing stand and then took his place with the other notables before the stand.

Replacements filled the band to war strength and every man policed his uniform, until they were like so many uniformed Beau Brummels. When you figure that some of the uniforms looked like old door mats, after the hard treatment they had undergone, it was quite a task to bring them up to parade requirements.

Looie had wired Lydia and she and her mother hopped a train and traveled down to see the parade and Looie, mostly Looie. They arrived the morning of the

parade and they didn't get a chance to see him before the parade started.

We rigged up a go-cart affair, with high wheels, for the big bass drum, and a harness that Looie pulled over his shoulders. Lettered on both drumheads was the legend:

CAPTURED FROM THE GERMANS
BY LOUIS SCHWARTZKOPF.

The parade got under way, bands blared, horses' hoofs clattered, the artillery rumbled, and the people cheered and yelled, and a warm, spring sun beamed down on a happy throng. Looie knew that Lydia was somewhere in town and he was as skittish as a cluck with a bunch of ducklings on the edge of a pool. We had one terrible time to keep him with his bass drum. Some big hearted individual had offered a prize for the snappiest outfit, and there was a prize for the snappiest band.

"You pull down that band prize, Hank," said the colonel, "or I'll take you up an alley and demobilize you with a bunch of fives!"

"Well," I responded, "if Looie doesn't lose his bass drum, we ought to bring home the bacon."

Anyway, we swung into line from a side street. I was stepping high, wide and handsome, and doing fancy evolutions with the baton. We were about two blocks away from the reviewing stand. I didn't see what followed, but I can tell about it. The drums were going—*Rub-a-dub-dub—rub-a-dub-dub*—and suddenly a girl at the curb screamed—

"Looie!"

Looie squirmed out of the harness, gave the bass drum a backward push that carried it out of the line of march, and yelled—

"Lydia!"

Then they fell into each other's arms, held a short reunion, and marched along with their arms around each other's waists, and jabbered like a couple of magpies. Pat tried to jerk him out of it, but Looie was listening only to Lydia.

I gave the drummers the high sign for a roll off, and they gave me the *tap-tap—tap-tap—br-r-r-r*, and then should follow the *boom-boom* on the bass drum. However, there was no *boom-boom* and the band didn't start playing.

"What the hell!" I grunted, and turned around.

I took one look at Looie, saw the state of affairs, and stepped to one side and let the band go by. Then I yelled:

"Hey, Jug-head! What do you think you're doing? This is a parade! Where's your drum?"

"My gosh!" he wheezed. "I lost it!"

"Find it!" I howled. "If you don't, I'll have you shot at sunset! Hurry up before we get to that reviewing stand!"

He looked back and saw a couple of kids pushing the bass drum and trying to keep up with the parade.

"Excuse me, Lydia," Looie gulped, and left her flat and rushed after the drum.

"Pull down that tempo!" I ordered the snare drummers, and they pulled down to a slow walk.

Looie got the bass drum, slid into the harness and came down on the fly, pushing the big drum ahead of him. It was the funniest thing you ever saw, and the people thought he was clowning and laughed until they screamed. He slid into his place and I skated up ahead of the band, whipped up the tempo and then high balled for the roll off. Just in time, too, and I got it: *Tap-tap—tap-tap—b-r-r-r-rr—boom, boom!* We breezed by that reviewing stand with flying cadences. How those cornets did sting those high ones!

AFTER the parade we were informed that we were the prize band. As usual, there was a catch in it; we were elected to play a concert that night in a park.

"Now, listen, Jug-head," I said to Looie, and told him where to put the drum. "If you show up without that drum tonight, I'll see that you don't get an honorable discharge and I'll have that Croix de Guerre taken away from you and

give you six months in the hoosegow. Get it? All right! You're dismissed!"

To snap it off, when I arrived at the park, Looie was there and looking as glum as an oyster three weeks out of its native element.

"What's the matter?" I inquired. "Did you lose the drum again?"

"Bass drum?" he moaned. "What the hell I care about the bass drum! I got the drum, but I lost Lydia!"

"Wadda break!" I sympathized, and the rest of the band guffawed. "You'll lose your way home. How did you do this, if you haven't lost your brains and can explain it?"

"Well," he wailed, "I went looking for her and found her and her mother. We—we got married and went up to the hotel they're stoppin' at. I was worryin' that I'd forget the bass drum an' I wanted to show it to 'em an' tell 'em how I got it. So I went over where you left the drum an' got it. Well, I—I, ah, I was so damned happy an' I never looked at the name of the hotel or the street it was on. I got the drum an' I've been tryin' to find the place ever since. Geez, I ain't even had any supper. Now Lydia will say I married her and then threw her down!"

Can you tie that for a jeremiad?

"Aw, cheer up," I said, "you may lose a bass drum, but it's almost impossible to lose a woman, especially if you're married to her. Allez up! Get that drum up here and get that long horsey look off your face. She'll show up."

We started the concert and the drummer was a liability. Looie had no pep. The platform was lighted up like a prize-fight arena, while the audience sat out in the darkness. Looie was half heartedly poking at the drum and looking out over the audience, searching for Lydia and missing beats and gumming up the tempo. I could have shot him without any pangs of remorse.

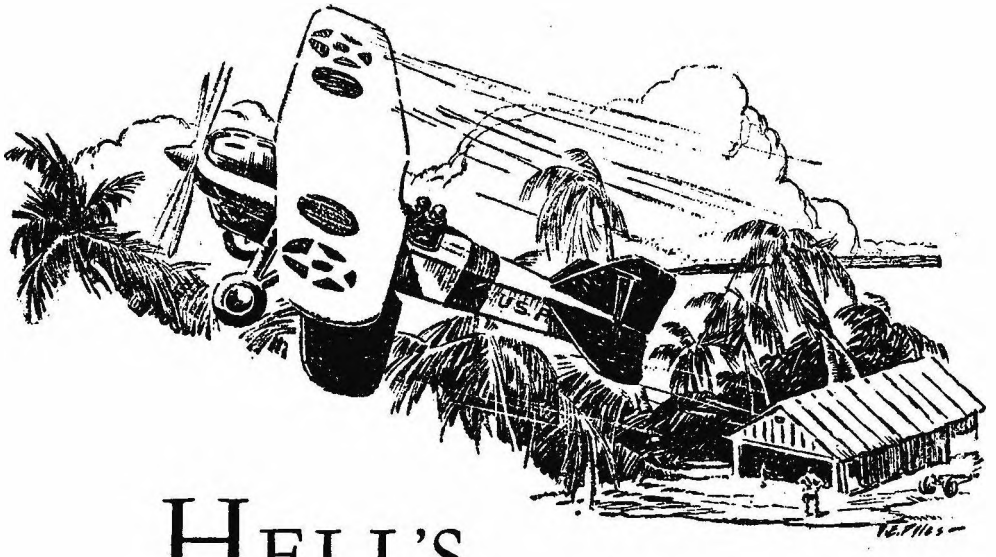
Suddenly he leaned over sidewise and stared out over the audience, and a girl out there screamed:

"Yoo-hoo, Looie, I know you're looking for me! Here I am!"

A big grin spread over his face, and he squared up to the bass drum and laid on like MacDuff, whoever he was.

"Thank God," I sighed. "He's found his Lydia!"

He shipped the drum home by prepaid express and insured it for a thousand dollars. If he hadn't, he would have lost it.



HELL'S ANGEL

A Story of American Airmen in the Philippines

By RAOUL F. WHITFIELD

IN THE first place, there was hot blood in Marcosson's veins. Second son of a Franco-Italian union, he had been born in Morocco and brought up in Africa. He remembered his mother as a lean, wiry creature who flared into rages that were terrible to behold. His older brother quietly slipped away to the diamond fields one night after Marcosson senior had used rawhide fiercely. After that there was swift tragedy. He was young, sensitive—this Dantone Marcosson. For years he remembered the red against the white of his mother's breast. For years his dark eyes stared, in sleepless nights, at the green hilt of the knife.

Three hours after his father had brought swift tragedy into the house, the native police had come. After that he had not seen Marcosson senior again. He remembered him as a powerful, dark eyed man who spoke battering French when aroused to temper, precise English when calm. That is, he came to remember his father in this manner, later, in America. A vice-consul and an uncle had got him to America.

The uncle had raised him, and had kicked him out of the house at the age of fifteen. John Marcosson had never understood his brother; it was not to be expected that he could understand the son. Perhaps he was justified. Rage is a terrible thing—the Marcosson rage was more terrible, perhaps, than any the uncle had witnessed. Hot countries, heritage. Suppression, bitterness.

At fifteen the boy became a wanderer. He got along. The Dantone became Dan.

He traveled over the United States. Somehow, he kept straight—though he saw the inside of many jails. Lack of money got him inside cells. Something kept him from getting that money in a dishonest manner. Heritage, perhaps. His uncle had told him that his father's father had been a priest.

Anyway, Dan Marcosson grew—and toughened. He worked in the steel mills of Pittsburgh, the ore mines up along Lake Michigan. He had a thirst for knowledge, educated himself. He met a doctor in an ore town, told him of his past. Perhaps the doctor was wise, perhaps he was a fool. Surely he tried to be kind. He told the boy many things. He told him to keep away from heat, from hot countries.

Dan Marcosson accepted some of his advice. He harvested wheat, rye—in Canada. He saved some money, crossed the line again, visited Seattle. He was sick of the cold, headed down the Pacific Coast for Mexico. In Ensenada it was hot enough. There was a brawl with a drunken sailor. The boy was strong, and he nearly killed the man whith his bare fists. He got out of town, walked all night through the heat, on the road to Tia Juana.

He slept in the cool of a deserted adobe shack, the next morning, resumed his walk during the afternoon and night. He reached Tia Juana just before the second dawn; when the line opened he went across. His papers were all right. And in San Diego, in a hot sky, he watched two planes twist and circle.

That was the beginning of his desire for wings. He became a hanger-on at Gus Dario's joy hopping field. Later he flew. Gus liked him, taught him. Cooler weather came. Shortly after Christmas he was flying alone. He had nerve, fine eyes. He was almost twenty-one. And Gus admitted he could do more things with the battered Jenny than any pilot he had trained. A perfect feel of stick and rudder.

In April war was declared. When the Air Service came into being on a large scale, applicants were supposed to have two years of college education. Dan Marcosson credited himself with two years at an obscure college in the Middle West, over which Gus had once performed stunts. He passed the mental tests, the physical tests. Already he was a pilot. Among the first half dozen commissioned pilots, he sailed for France. It was a winter sailing, cold. France was cold. But Dantone Marcosson did not mind that. He had come to hate heat, and to fear it. He believed that the doctor he had met up in the ore country had told him the truth. He had wings—and he was very happy.

THESE things I know, because Captain Marcosson told them to me as the *Thomas* slid through a blue-green sea of glass, between Guam and the Islands. There were ribbons on the captain's tunic; his lean face was burned brown by sun and wind. There was a goggle-scar over his left eye; his nose was broken in two places. He had powerful shoulders and arms, and dark, deep set eyes.

I knew the captain's war record. Few in the Air Service were not aware of it. Brilliant? Not exactly that. It was too spotty. Seven enemy planes, officially—perhaps a half dozen more unofficially. That part of it was all right. It was the other thing that counted against him. Twice he had faced court martial boards. Once he had been sent back to Blois and almost returned to the States. It wasn't the discipline—there wasn't much of that in A. E. F. flying. It wasn't that he couldn't fight. It was his uncontrollable temper, his heritage of hot blood.

It was the strength of his arms, the battering power of his fists. Words meant so much to him—the same words that meant so little to those who uttered them. And he hadn't changed, after the war He had stayed in. He had studied. He loved his wings, the swift flight of a plane through the sky. Now, at thirty-three, ten years after, he was a captain. Twice since the war he had lost numbers.

Once twenty of them—the second time ten. He didn't tell me why, but I could guess. You could almost see it, on the transport.

A constabulary officer and the captain were the only two officers on the transport who were not West Point men. There is a difference. You wear the ring—or you do not wear it. The ring is a symbol of the great gulf, in peace times.

We were seated in the smoking room. We might almost have been on the parade ground back at El Paso, or on the Presidio, or on Governor's Island. There was no ship motion other than the vibration of engines. Two electric fans droned and swiveled. It was hot—terribly hot. Marcosson had been very quiet after his talk. I had been thinking. Suddenly he leaned forward, toward me. His eyes were narrowed. There was a huskiness in his voice.

"Lieutenant," he asked, "have you ever been afraid?"

I didn't answer. It was a confession. I thought of how I'd asked Sock Casey, the first day out, who the man who sat before me was. And Sock had replied a bit grimly.

"That's Hell's Angel Marcosson. He's not a West Point man."

That was all—and that was enough. Enough—and yet, not enough. God knows there had been time enough for association, on that trip down. Twenty-seven days we had been out of the Golden Gate. A bit hotter each day. Monotony of sea and sky. Flying fish. Midway Islands, Guam. Cliffs and color stuck out in the middle of a lot of water. And then the vibration of engines again. Hotter. Three days out of Manila—and Marcosson was telling me that he was afraid, by asking me if I'd ever been afraid.

"It isn't so bad, Captain," I replied, after a little silence. "Of course, some spots are worse than others."

Marcosson relaxed again. His face twisted suddenly; the scar over his left eye stood out. The fans droned on. He smiled. He knew I understood.

"I've been in the cold spots for five years," he stated tonelessly. "You say some places down here are worse than others. I'll get the worst."

There was no answer for that statement. I tried to cheer him up.

"They plan to establish fields in the provinces. You might pull Baguio, Captain."

He laughed. Of course he'd heard of that resort. Snow in the mountains—the only cool spot in the hot season.

"She's for generals and colonels, Lieutenant," he returned. "How far are we from—India? Or Africa?"

His voice was low, strange, as he asked the question. I stared at him. I didn't know, anyway. But I could see what he was thinking about. I could follow him back through the years. Thirty-three, he was. He looked forty, older. He looked like a man who was burned out, inside.

I got out a handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from my face and neck. The two fans kicked around an awfully hot air. The deck outside sweltered in the heat. The captain spoke again.

"Ever hear Indian drums, Lieutenant? Native drums?"

I shook my head. Marcosson's eyes were closed; his body slanted in the swivel chair, but it was rigid. His voice held no shade of tone. It was as monotonous as the sea and sky.

"I heard 'em last night," he stated. "First time in fifteen years."

I stared at him. His voice made me shiver. I got from the chair.

"You won't hear them in the Islands, Captain," I stated cheerfully. "Well, I'm going below for a snooze. The heat takes it out of a fellow. See you later."

I started for the smoking room door. The captain spoke.

"Won't I, Lieutenant?" he muttered tonelessly. "That'll be—fine."

I went outside. Heat soaked into the deck. I ran into Sock Casey near the aft companionway. He grinned at me.

"How's your little pal, Hell's Angel?" he greeted. "This heat ought to suit his temperament fine."

I swore. It seemed to me that I could understand a lot of things. It isn't fun to watch a fighter taking a licking.

"Sock," I said slowly, "stick to flying. Don't try to be a comedian."

I went down and tried to sleep. But it wasn't any good. I kept thinking about Marcosson, about the past he'd pictured for me. The captain had a knack of saying things in a way that brought out a lot of things he did not say. He had flown a ship sweetly, during the war. He had wings, all right. He made a plane his wings. And inside of him was a hell. Some one had tagged him right.

There were rumors of a field to be established at Baguio. The C.O. up there would have a nice job. Good air, cool. I hoped Marcosson would get that field. But I knew he would not. A social job, that would be. Staff officers would wing up from Manila. There would be conversation to be made. Not Marcosson's brand of conversation. A West Pointer would get that assignment. An officer with charm. A personality.

I swore into the damp sheets of the bunk in the tiny cabin. There would be the fields out in the distant provinces. Mindoro, Samar, Leyte, Panay, Mindanao. Bohol and Cebu. Hell's Angel Marcosson in close contact with a few pilots, day after day, night after night, on some God-forgotten stretch out in the provinces! The same faces, the same word tones, the same ships. The same enlisted men. And the same heat. Two years of it.

Perspiration soaked my body. The transport vibrated as it had been vibrating for days. The same wood panels creaked. I groaned. If the heat were getting me, what would it do to Marcosson? What wouldn't it do?

The cabin door opened with a slam, against the wash basin. Sock came in. He was red with anger. He glared down at me, his blue eyes narrowed.

"I go into the smoke room," he stated harshly. "No one's in there but Marcosson. I sit down at the next table, start to deal myself a solitaire layout. The first thing I know Marcosson's on his feet. He tells me to get the hell out of the place. God, but he's sore! White, he was."

I stared up at Sock.

"What were you doing, besides dealing out the hand?" I asked grimly.

The pilot swore.

"Whistling," he replied. "And why in hell shouldn't I?"

I rolled over on my face again, tried to shut out the sound of Sock's raving. I was thinking about Marcosson. I felt sorry for him, sorry as hell. It was just the beginning.

THREE days after the transport steamed in past Cavite and docked within a half mile of the Manila Hotel and the Luneta I ran into Jimmy Blake at the Army and Navy Club.

"Some of 'em are swell, Mac," Jimmy stated. "I flew Colonel Brace around while he picked out locations. The Administration is all excited over this experiment. They've got a couple of fields staked out in jungles. Have to fly gas and oil in. One of 'em is slated for a spot that hasn't been missed by a typhoon in the last ten years. They're all hot. Thank God I've got two months leave due me."

I grinned.

"How long will it last, Jimmy?" I asked. "They tried something like it on the Mex border. But it didn't stick."

Jimmy grunted.

"It'll last until the *dengue* kills off twice as many pilots as the fields kill off, which will be plenty. Then the Administration will pull in the ships, and leave gas and fuel cached. They'll write it into the records as a nice bit of tactics. It will be —for a couple of colonels and one general."

I nodded.

"Which is the worst field of the bunch, Jimmy?" I asked.

The lieutenant groaned.

"There's one out near Salcedo, Samar province—she's pretty awful. They're rating her for six P. T. 9's. They lost ten men with fever when they cleared that

jungle out. It gets so hot the sharks crawl out of the ocean and cool off on the sand of—"

I yawned. Jimmy closed his eyes. It was hot in the club. It would be hotter; the season was just starting. I could imagine what the Salcedo field would be like. While I was thinking about the captain, Sock Casey came in. He had just come from headquarters and he had an official list of assignments. I grabbed for it.

I'd drawn a field on Luzon. Sock was slated for assignment to Colonel Brace's staff. And Captain Dantone Marcosson had pulled a C. O.'s job—at Salcedo!

Jimmy was looking over my shoulder, having come to life. His eyes went down the list.

"Soft for you, Sock," he stated. "The colonel smokes none but the best of cigars. And you pulled a nice field, Mac—easy hop in to Manila. Pretty fair country around that stretch. You can— Say, is that Hell's Angel Marcosson? The C. O. for Salcedo?"

Sock beat me to it.

"It sure is!" he stated. "Good spot, Jimmy?"

I swore slowly and with much feeling. Jimmy Blake smiled grimly.

"For him," he said slowly, "it's perfect!"

IN THE third month after I'd gone out to Iriga rumors commenced to drift in. We were in the middle of the hot season. Bailey flew down from Manila. Marcosson was having a tough time at Salcedo. Half of his ground crew men were sick. Two lieutenants had been killed in spins. They were cracking up too many ships. Hell's Angel was keeping out of the air himself and sending others up to map out the country. He was drinking. Staff was considering pulling him out.

"And by the time they decide half the Squadron will be dead," Bailey stated. "It seems that Colonel Brace has sent Sock Casey down to investigate, under cover, of course."

I groaned. Sock Casey, a hot tempered kid flyer, going down to investigate Marcosson! I could imagine the way he'd go about it. And I could figure the way Marcosson would receive him. After Bailey had taken off for his wing back to Manila, I looked up Cap Tully.

"Sock Casey's down at Salcedo," I stated. "I'd like to see him. Never set a ship down on that field. I can make it in three hours. Stay overnight—fly up tomorrow. If the captain will permit me—"

"Go to it, Mac," Tully interrupted. "Why any one should want to go down there to see a guy—that's beyond me. But go ahead—give Captain Marcosson Captain Tully's respects. Tell him I'd fly down myself, only I hate his guts! Tell him—"

Tully stopped. He shrugged his shoulders. It was the first time I'd heard him let loose on Marcosson. Another one who hated the man.

"I told him to go to hell, once." Tully's voice was grim. "I've got a hunch he's there right now. So never mind giving him my regards."

I saluted, and headed for my coop in the fairly new barracks. Packing a kit, I went out and had my pet two seater rolled out. Heat waves sizzled off the cleared field. I was soaked in perspiration by the time I got in the front cockpit. The leather was hot; my Irving 'chute pack made things a lot worse. I wore the lightest helmet possible and rolled down the collar of my washed-white khaki shirt.

There would be a water crossing into Samar, but it wasn't much of one. It was about two o'clock when I took off. The air was bumpy; I got four thousand feet and flew my roller map course to the south east. There was a drift wind from the west, and a pretty strong one. The country below was rugged. In spots it was cultivated. In most places it was not.

I sat back in the cockpit, listened to the roar of the engine—and thought about Captain Marcosson. I wondered why he'd talked to me that afternoon, in the

smoking room of the *Thomas*. Talked to me of the past. It was my guess that he saw the end coming. Of course, there were ways out. But with his record in the Army he would have had to take his transfer to the Islands or resign. And Hell's Angel wasn't the resigning breed. He was sticking to the finish, which, as I saw it, wasn't far off.

"He'll smash into Sock sure as hell!" I muttered beneath the roar of the exhausts. "If the heat's got him . . ."

I swore grimly and kept my eyes on the instrument board. Air speed ninety-two. Altitude forty-five hundred. Engine cool enough, with the gas feed right and oil pressure steady. I'd be down there soon enough—see things for myself. Cap Tully thought Marcosson was sitting in hell. So did I. But Sock Casey was young and hot headed. Maybe I could have a talk with him.

The air the prop flung back was warm, even at our altitude. The rubber on my goggles was hot where it pressed against my skin. I thought of Marcosson's left eye goggle scar, of his broken nose. I thought of his war record. And the damned heat was licking him. He'd known it would. I'd guessed it would. Hot blood in his veins. French, Italian. Killer blood.

And Sock Casey down there investigating. Things would break fast, I could guess that. Maybe I'd be too late. Sock didn't understand. He didn't know what I knew. I should have talked to the kid, back on the transport. Or in Manila. But I hadn't. I'd do it in a few hours. There were two many humans hating Marcosson. It was bad enough for him to have the heat to lick.

I MISSED the field by about ten miles, but twenty minutes later I learned I'd missed it. Circling in a mild bank, I headed northward again. She was no cinch to pick up. I almost missed her the second time. The coast line saved me. I picked up the native town, spotted the field, a few miles to the northeast.

She was small. Her sock was hanging limp from a tall bamboo pole. Jungle rimmed the oblong cleared stretch. The hangars were on the north side, and from the air it looked as though the first typhoon would lift them higher than the world's ship record. They were canvas, staked down.

I circled the field three times and made a fair landing by skimming growth so that I'd have all the room there was to roll along. Even at that I had only about ten feet left when the P. T. stopped. Cutting the switch, I climbed over the side. No use trying to taxi around until I got ground crew men holding a wing tip. And I was tired.

The first person I saw was Sock. He came up at a trot, his browned face as fat as ever, his blue eyes wide. I stared at him. His lips were puffed; there was red trailing down his chin.

"Hello, Mac!" he greeted. "What in hell are you—" He stopped, and I saw that he knew what I was looking at. "It's all right, Mac.," he stated grimly. "Just the C. O's way of enforcing fool orders. That is—the way he thinks he'll enforce 'em."

I swore harshly. Marcosson striking his inferior officer. Striking the man sent down by Colonel Brace. A sweet mess.

"How is he?" I muttered foolishly.

Sock wiped his lips savagely with the back of a sunburned hand.

"Great!" he returned, with fine sarcasm. "He's got a yellow streak two feet wide."

The ground crew men were coming up. Sock changed the subject. He gave orders for the care of the P. T.

"How come you wing down on us?" he asked.

"Pleasure trip," I stated.

Sock laughed. It was a bitter laugh. We moved back toward what looked like some temporary barracks.

"A fine place for pleasure this is!" Sock muttered. "Marcosson's finished, Mac. He's crazy as hell."

I didn't say anything. Sock wiped his lips again.

"Hears drums all the time, Mac. Lost his flying sense. Puts ships in the sky for no reason. Gone wild on staking the country out. He'd got her mapped into fractional zones that—"

We pulled up. I saluted. Before us stood Marcosson. He'd come out along a narrow trail through the growth; one that converged with another we had just turned into, off the field. I stared at him.

It was his eyes that had changed. They shone brightly—too brightly. His face was thinner; he was unshaved. I spoke cheerfully.

"Hello, Captain! Good to see you."

His expression stopped me. The narrowing of his dark eyes, the pressing together of his rather thin lips. His body was tense. He spoke suddenly, in a hoarse tone.

"You, too, eh? All of you coming down. Vultures winging in for the finish, eh? Staff vultures dropping down for the final show. What will it be, gentlemen? A parade in formation? Or shall I break out the personnel on the field?"

He laughed suddenly, harshly. My eyes went to Sock's. He spoke in a low tone.

"The captain is sick, Lieutenant," he stated. "I have suggested that he allow me to fly him to Manila. It didn't meet with his approval."

Sock's fingers went to his bruised lips. There was a grim edge in his tone. Marcosson's eyes were on mine. He bowed. With his right hand he gestured through the dense growth to our right.

"Welcome to hell, Lieutenant!" He was smiling with his lips. "It is a pleasure to—"

He stopped. His body stiffened. Fear flashed in his eyes. His right hand went toward the holster he wore over his left thigh. Sock spoke.

"Ground crew swinging Lieutenant MacNamara's P. T. around, Captain. Sounds a bit like drums, at that."

Marcosson's fingers came away from the holster of his Service Colt. His eyes blazed into the blue ones of Sock Casey. Perspiration streamed down his drawn face. Without a word he faced about—moved down the trail. His body was slightly stooped.

I looked at Sock.

"Why in hell don't you leave him alone?" I muttered in a low tone. "The man's on the edge. If you knew as much as I—"

"I know more!" Sock smiled grimly. "I know plenty more!"

I waited. Sock swore softly; his face was twisted.

"He spent six months in Colon, Mac. It was hot. He almost went under. Drank a lot—and had a Flight to handle. My brother was down there—just out of Brooks' Field. He was only a kid. Marcosson hated him. He took things too easy. The heat didn't bother Al any. Cross country flight—and Marcosson sent Al up with a missing engine. Made him take off. Al went up and the ship—" Sock paused, then went on again, in a low tone—"stalled two hundred feet off the ground. Came down in a spin—the beginning of one. Finished Al. They transferred Marcosson a week or so later. Fever. Damn his rotten—"

Sock broke off, turned away from me. I remembered that the lieutenant had had a brother in the Air Service. I remembered that he had been killed in a crash.

"It might not have been done—" I started to talk, then stopped. What was the use? So many men hated Marcosson.

But Sock heard me. He faced around. There was a grim smile on his face.

"Colonel Brace sent me down to bring Marcosson back to Camp Nichols, Mac. I've got orders in my pocket. I've been having a little hell of my own. Last night I lay on my cot and listened to him rave, in the next coop. He hears drums all the time. He's almost licked. Took a P. T. up yesterday just before sunset. Damn' near turned over on the come-in. A couple more air trips . . ."

Sock swore softly. I stared at him. Suddenly he straightened a bit. His voice was hard, but controlled.

"I could stick down here a few days, Mac, and ride him out of things. I've got him for a court martial already. Can't you see how I could smash him all the way? Well, I won't. I'm going back now, and show him the orders. I'll ride him back to Camp Nichols. We'll start right away. Lieutenant Fenwick can take charge of the field. We'll be half the way back to Manilla by dark, and the riding will be cool. They can take him out of the air, ship him back to the States. A hop a month for his extra pay and he'll still wear wings. It's too damned good for him, but—I'm no killer."

I spoke slowly.

"Better wait until tomorrow morning, Sock. He'll take the orders hard."

Sock laughed harshly.

"I'm afraid to wait, Mac," he stated grimly. "Should have started yesterday. But he's smashing right up before me. I didn't know the full story, all about how Al went out, until I ran into Lieutenant Fellman, ten days ago. He was with Marcosson and Al on the Panama cross country flight. He tried to get Al to tell Marcosson to go to hell and not to take off. But the kid wouldn't do it. Marcosson was his superior—that sort of thing. So he went up . . ."

The lieutenant reached into a pocket of his khaki shirt. Paper crackled.

"Come on in for a wash, Mac." Sock's voice was steady enough. "That is, if there's any water. I'll give Marcosson a look at his orders. See you in a week or so, for a decent chin. We're pulling in the ships, quitting the fields. Not worth it—and the country is pretty well mapped. That's one thing Marcosson did decently."

We moved toward the temporary barracks. The air was heavy with jungle growth, reeked sweetly. Insects hummed. A parrot screamed shrilly. I was thinking of Marcosson.

"He never had much of a chance, Sock," I stated. "It was in his blood."

Sock muttered something I didn't get. We walked on.

"He just naturally likes to hurt," Sock muttered. "I should watch him rot right here—it wouldn't take long now. But I won't."

We reached the barracks. Sock got me some water in a tin basin. It was odorous, warm. But it helped get some of the kicked-back oil off my face. Sock disappeared. He came back again in about ten minutes. There was a puzzled expression on his face.

"We're getting off in a half hour," he stated. "Damned if he didn't take it easily. Just sort of got white, then smiled. Asked me when I wanted to start. I told him right away. He nodded, called Lieutenant Fenwick in, turned things over. Fenwick's been his adjutant. The boys are filling up the tanks now."

I frowned.

"Think I'll wing back with you, Sock," I said slowly. "No use sticking here. Go back as far as my field, anyway."

Sock nodded.

"All right, Mac," he returned. "Go out and have the boys get at your ship. Grab a look at the field. You can see all of it in five minutes. In a month it'll be historical."

I grinned, went out. My ship was on the deadline. Sock's was there, too. I got the sergeant in charge, told him I was flying out with Sock. He was in such good humor that I guessed Sock had hinted about the general abandonment of the provincial fields. They started fueling my bus.

It was too hot to walk. I didn't know any of the pilots at the field. So I sat down on a gas can, in the shade of one of the hangars. And while I was thinking about Marcosson I heard the drums. They were distant. They rolled something like thunder. Far away thunder. It was the first time I'd heard them.

I went out on the deadline. The ground crews were sweating over the two ships. Sock came out from the barracks with his kit. He listened, smiled grimly.

"Hear 'em, Mac?" he muttered. "Some damned family branch of the Moros. Most of 'em stick down on Sulu. Not many drums like that in the Islands—

not now. They were talking all last night."

I swore softly. I could imagine what that dull booming had done to Marcosson's nerves. They must have taken him back a lot of years. Well, he'd seen it all coming. He'd felt it coming, back in the smoke room of the transport, months ago.

The ground crews were finishing up fueling. I stared across the small field. The C. O. was coming out. He wore his uniform—no flying overalls. He walked with his head down. The heat, even with the sun getting down, was sizzling.

I got up as he approached, smiled. If he heard the distant drums, he gave no sign of it.

"It'll be all right to get into a bit of civilization, eh, Captain?" I suggested. "Even a few months down here are pretty tough."

He smiled. It was a peculiar smile. His eyes were narrowed, seemed to be staring beyond me. Sock came up. Marcosson spoke.

"I've seen the post officers." The C. O's voice was steady. "Lieutenant Fenwick will take charge as soon as we get into the air. I'm ready, Lieutenant."

Sock started to say something, changed his mind. A corporal came over with the 'chute packs. All three of us got into them.

"Running lights and flares checked, sir." The corporal addressed Marcosson. "Your Irving has just been rerolled."

The C. O. nodded. In hot countries the Irving 'chute packs have to be unfolded and rolled again more often than in cold climates. The corporal was evidently unaware that Marcosson was being relieved.

I shook hands with Sock.

"I'll drop away south of Iriga, Sock. See you later."

Sock nodded. I turned toward Marcosson. We shook hands.

"See you in Manila, Captain," I stated cheerfully.

There was a peculiar expression in his eyes. He spoke in a hard tone.

"Coming to the court martial trial, are you?" he asked.

I saw Sock stiffen. He spoke quietly.

"There won't be any, Captain," he said. "You're already broken!"

Rage gripped Marcosson. His whole body stiffened. His hands were at his side, fingers spread stiffly. They were shaking. He sucked in his breath sharply. Sock turned his back on him, moved toward the front cockpit of the P. T. he was to fly.

There was silence over the field. The drums broke it, rumbling. Marcosson relaxed. His lips moved a little. I caught the words.

"—already broken—"

He straightened. I moved toward my ship. The engine of Sock's P. T. roared; there were test blocks under both planes' wheels. A hand gripped my arm. I halted, turned. Marcosson spoke above the roar of the P. T's exhausts.

"I thought his brother was—yellow, Lieutenant! Thought he could get the kinks out of that engine, in the air. He took her off in a tough climb. He was green—and I thought he lacked nerve. Tell him that, Lieutenant. Tell him I know he's Al Casey's brother. I've known it since I ran into him on the transport, coming down to this hell. That kid was so damned cool, so sure of himself. And I was—"

He stopped, his face twisting. Then, suddenly, he smiled. His voice was calmer.

"Tell him that, Lieutenant—when you see him in Manila. And—happy landings—"

He turned away, went swiftly toward the two-place P. T. I stared after him. The ground crew men were pulling the blocks away from the wheels. Marcosson swung up into the rear cockpit; I saw Sock twist his head, saw the captain nod.

I got it, then. Marcosson was going out. Sock would never land him in Manila. Somewhere along the air route—

A gust of wind swept back from the rolling P. T. as I started to run toward

her. She picked up speed; her engine roared. I shouted hoarsely. No chance of Sock's hearing me. Turning back, I climbed into my plane. She was throttled down; I revved her up, signalled the ground crew men to pull the chucks away from the wheels. We rolled out from the dead line. Sock's ship was taking off, climbing.

He took her up in a mild bank. I gave him plenty of air, circled widely over the field for altitude. My eyes went to the rear cockpit of the other P. T. I could see Marcosson's head; it was motionless.

AT EIGHT thousand Sock leveled off —set a course for northeast Samar. I winged in toward the plane. There was nothing I could do, yet I wanted to do something, to stop Marcosson. I could see him sitting before me in the smoke room of the *Thomas*, telling me that story. I could see what a battle he'd had. And now Hell's Angel was going out. How? Over the side? With no jerking of the Irving's rip cord ring?

I swore softly. My eyes went down to the instrument board. When I raised them again the two ships were flying within twenty five feet of each other, Sock's P. T. on the right. And Marcosson was swinging a leg over the side of the fuselage!

Sock's helmeted head was turned slightly to the right. He was staring up at the white clouds high in the sky. I shouted hoarsely, knowing that he couldn't hear. And even so, there was nothing he could do. Marcosson was stepping overboard.

Sock's head twisted suddenly. Perhaps he was just taking a look at the sky behind; perhaps he felt that something was wrong. The captain was on the upper surface of the P. T.'s lower wing, out of the prop wash when her pilot saw him.

And Sock acted. A wing of the P. T. flashed upward—the right wing. The nose of the ship came around. The roar of her engine blended into the roar of my plane's engine.

I zoomed. But there wasn't time. Wing crackled into wing. Struts snapped. A wire hissed across the cockpit of my ship. I ducked my head, felt a stabbing pain in my left leg as I cut the switch. Splinters of the props cut through the twisted and torn wing fabric. Even as I raised my head I could feel the first motion of the spin into which the tangled planes were falling.

I shoved the goggles up over the leather of my helmet, snapped the buckle of my safety belt. The two ships were in a slow spin now; my eyes went toward the cockpits of the other P. T. And the first thing I saw was the head and shoulders of Sock Casey. His head hung limply across the left side of the cockpit fuselage; red streaked across his face. He was unconscious!

I crawled up from the leather seat. The two ships were tightly tangled, wings were interlocked, The spin was becoming greater—but it was a flat spin. A pancake spin. And it would not stay that way long.

My eyes went out toward the right wing surfaces of the other ship and I saw Marcosson. He was crawling slowly over the wing, toward the front cockpit. His face was white, set. His eyes were on the head and shoulders of Sock Casey.

I shook my head violently to fight off the first waves of dizziness caused by the spin. The wing on which Marcosson had been working his way outward was undamaged. I knew what had happened. Sock hadn't seen me wing my plane in so close. He *had* seen the captain on the right wing. He had guessed what the man was about to do. His bank to the left had been made to prevent Marcosson from getting clear. With that wing-tilt the captain could not have jumped without striking the fuselage of the plane. And Sock had banked into my ship in one booming air crash.

Wind was shrilling through the broken wires of the two ships now; shrilling through torn struts, ripped fabric. I stared at Marcosson as the fingers of my left hand went instinctively to the harness

over my left thigh, gripped the release ring of the 'chute pack. The two ships were down around five thousand feet already.

Five feet of twisted struts, torn fabric separated me from Sock's cockpit seat. But Marcosson was within a few feet of the pilot now. I saw one hand reach down into the cockpit. With the other he gripped a strut still intact. And then he was dragging Sock up from the cockpit seat, pulling him inch by inch out on the wing—the good wing.

The spin was becoming wider. The noses of the two planes were dropping. Marcosson raised his eyes to mine. He was smiling grimly. He jerked his head toward the undamaged left wing surface of my plane. Then he started to drag Sock out along the wing.

There was nothing I could do. Couldn't reach them through that wreckage. I got a leg over the side of the fuselage—the left side. The stick had jammed against my left knee in the crash. I dragged out along the wing, pulled myself up to my knees. The planes were spinning to the right. I turned my eyes toward the wing beyond the wreckage.

Two figures shot out into space. Arms were gripped around Sock's body. I thought I caught a glimpse of Marcosson's right hand on Sock's 'chute harness.

I released my grip on a wing strut. The spin hurled me clear. I counted five—jerked the rip cord ring. The pilot 'chute crackled. The bigger spread of silk snapped as the small spread, sprung from the pack, pulled it out. The harness tightened about my body. My head came around with a snap. And then I was drifting downward, gently.

I shook the tears from my eyes, stared off to the right. A figure was dangling inertly beneath a spread of white silk. Sock's figure. My eyes went downward. Something was streaking toward the tropical growth below. My eyes followed it for a second—then I turned them away.

Perhaps ten seconds later there came the *boom-crash* of the tangled planes. I slipped my 'chute toward Sock's. We were within five hundred feet of the earth. He raised a hand weakly, tried to wave to me. I stared downward.

Both 'chutes were drifting clear of the jungle strip. The wind was carrying us down toward primitively irrigated fields. I got a glimpse of several natives staring up at us. The two 'chutes were drifting within fifty feet of each other. I drew up my legs, prepared to break the shock of the seventeen-foot-a-second drop. There would be little wind drag.

I struck, fell forward, pulled down on the shroud lines of the collapsing 'chute silk. Getting loose from the harness, I limped toward Sock.

He was trying to sit up. I got a handkerchief around the dent in his head made by a strut splinter. He spoke thickly.

"Marcosson—pulled my rip-cord in the dive. I was conscious—couldn't move. He let go—did he—"

I shook my head slowly. "Didn't pull his own rip cord, Sock," I said hoarsely. "He took the plunge into the jungle strip."

Sock Casey closed his eyes. We weren't far from the field. They'd heard the crash—it wouldn't be long before they'd reach us. As for Marcosson—the jungle growth was thick; in places impenetrable. A five-thousand-foot plunge!

"He—didn't want to go back—that way, Sock," I muttered. "He wasn't—that breed."

Sock nodded weakly. I stared at the natives, stripped to the waist, coming cautiously toward us. I told Sock what Marcosson had wanted me to tell him, about his brother.

"He pulled me out," Sock said slowly, after a little silence. "Maybe—there was something in that name—Hell's Angel."

I nodded.

"He went out that way," I said.

Another Great Instalment of

D'ARTAGNAN

IN THE summer of 1630 all France was bubbling with war, treason and civil strife. Cardinal Richelieu was directing the army, yet his position was insecure. The queen mother, Marie de Médici, loathed him; King Louis XIII's supporter, du Plessis, intended that France and he himself should rule all Europe; but the queen, Anne of Austria, had perhaps the most important following of all Richelieu's enemies.

As lady, Anne of Austria lacked not of cavaliers; as queen, she enjoyed the loyalty of the famous company of Musketeers; as diplomat, she cultivated the most extraordinary of all the Musketeers—the swiftest rapier, the most graceful gallant and the readiest wit—d'Artagnan.

The queen's association with d'Artagnan, curiously, drew not only d'Artagnan into Richelieu's most venomous and unscrupulous plot of that hard year; but it reunited in jeopardy the famous

A Brilliant Sequel To "The Three Musketeers"

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

By *and*

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Three — Porthos, Athos and Aramis.

It seems that two years before in the village of Aubain there died one Curé François Thounenin, who had added to his will a codicil providing for a certain child, christened Raoul d'Aram, born while the curé was at the abbey at Dompt—in 1626. Singularly enough, the child had been born in the abbey while Anne of Austria and her now banished friend, the Duchesse de Chevreuse, were retreated there for religious peace and tranquillity. It was little wonder that Richelieu, hearing of the child and the Thounenin will, grew suspicious of the queen's virtue; it was not strange that he attempted to gather his proofs—the will and the child.

A network of mystery surrounded the affair. The will was in England; the child was concealed; the Duchesse de Chevreuse, in her remote province, refused to speak of it; the queen was desperate. It was at this critical time that Anne of

12/67

Austria employed d'Artagnan to ride from Lyon to Dampierre with a message for the Duchesse de Chevreuse.

It was a short journey, Lyon to Dampierre, but in 1630 a perilous one, even for a Musketeer—or especially for a Musketeer. D'Artagnan had gone less than a league when he came upon a dying man, robbed, whose last words were a confession that the child was at St. Saforin. The man's papers were the papers of Porthos; his ring was the ring of Aramis, Musketeer and suitor of the Duchesse de Chevreuse. A strange coincidence, indeed! But it was not stranger than a chance meeting with Porthos that night at a wayside inn; for Porthos had married and was presumably quietly settled in the provinces.

It was fortunate for d'Artagnan that Porthos was there; he acted as second when Montforge, Cardinalist and plotter, challenged d'Artagnan to a duel. Cardinal Richelieu himself appeared and interrupted the duel; d'Artagnan, trembling for his life, was summoned to the cardinal's chamber. Instead of being executed outright, d'Artagnan was given a horse and a purse and ordered to go to Dampierre. Thus he bore from two factions—the queen and the cardinal—a message for the selfsame provincial duchess. He got permission to take Porthos along with him.

D'Artagnan and Porthos sought out Athos, begged him to accompany them; he too was involved in the Thounenin will affair by a message from an Englishman, Lord de Winter, summoning the four well-known Musketeers to appear in Paris July 30. They discussed Montforge, something of a coward for he wore mail, and Athos chided d'Artagnan for stealing a letter from Dompt from the table of Sophie de Bruler while he kissed that traitorous lady.

"I make this prediction," said Athos. "Montforge undoubtedly knows our errand; he will be ahead of us."

"So much the worse for Montforge," said d'Artagnan in a low voice.

Twenty minutes later, having paused for a bite and a sup, the three friends were mounting and riding forth for Dampierre, with Grimaud, the servant, behind them.

CHAPTER VII

MIRACLES ARE SOMETIMES UNWELCOME

SINCE the night when a group of men witnessed the execution of a woman beside the River Lys, one of those men had vanished from human ken.

Aramis resigned from the service, and with him the Chevalier d'Herblay disappeared. A few letters came from him; he was bound, he said, on a journey to Lorraine. Then silence. It was rumored that he had taken orders, had become a sulpician; Athos, at least, believed this profoundly.

While Athos, Porthos and d'Artagnan were spurring for Orleans to reach Dampierre more swiftly by avoiding Paris, and while Maréchal de Bassompierre was killing horses in the endeavor to reach Paris, peculiar conversations were going on in an upper room of the Croix de Bernay—that famous tavern so pleasantly situated a short day's ride south of Paris on the Orleans road, where the western highway crossed.

This upper room was large, commodious and comfortable. Upon a couch by the window half reclined Aramis; under his hand was a species of bedside table, bearing paper, ink, quills and sand. He was clad only in a loose black gown, which revealed bandages about his chest. His features were pale and sunken; from time to time he paused, as though the effort of writing overtaxed his strength. A crucifix hung on the wall just above his couch.

A knock, and Bazin entered. As once before, Bazin perceived his master wounded both in mind and in body and turned from things of this world to things of the next; the joy of Bazin was, however, tempered by the fact that his master's wound was this time no slight matter.

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Bazin in dismay, on seeing his master's occupation. "Monsieur—you are not writing, surely! Any exertion has been forbidden—and here is the *chirugien* below, and the Curé of Bernay with him—"

"Excellent, my good Bazin, excellent," said Aramis in a faint voice. "Bring them up at once."

He laid aside his quill and sank back on his pillows.

A MOMENT later Bazin ushered the two men into the room. The *chirugien* came to the couch and shook his head as he regarded his patient.

"This is bad, very bad!" he declared, without responding to the greetings of Aramis. "You see, M. le Curé, he has been writing!"

"Exactly," said Aramis, and smiled at the reverend gentleman. "Monsieur, I had an excellent idea last night for the thesis of which we were speaking yesterday."

The *chirugien* intervened bruskly:

"Your pardon, gentlemen, I must demand silence. M. le Curé, look at this poor man! Regard his pallor, regard his eye, regard his weakness; you can see for yourself. He is sinking."

"God preserve us!" exclaimed the curé, and crossed himself. "Surely, monsieur, you can not mean that—that—"

"That this excellent young man is doomed," said the *chirugien* firmly. "That, monsieur, is precisely my meaning. In ten minutes the reaction from his efforts will take place and will produce fever. With sunset this fever will die out. By midnight he will be in a coma of exhaustion. If he lives until sunrise he will die tomorrow afternoon. I have no hesitation in making this prediction to his face, for he has disobeyed my most particular commands. He has undone all my work."

"In the service of God," added Aramis. "Besides, my friends, there is really nothing to cause you such distraction. If it be the divine will, I am content to die."

"You are too devilishly content," said the blunt man of medicine. "You make no effort to recover. Your will is not at work. I've bled you and bled you—and what good does it do?"

"It makes me weaker, I can assure you," said Aramis. "As for the wound—"

"The wound can not heal when fever comes upon you," said the other. He produced certain vials and called for water, which the anxious Bazin fetched. When he had mixed a potion, he entrusted it to the lackey.

"Give your master a spoonful of this every hour," he said, and took up his hat. "Gentlemen, I bid you good day. I shall return toward sunset and change the dressings."

With this he departed, very angry because of the unheeded instructions. On the stairs Bazin followed and waylaid him.

"Monsieur," begged the poor fellow, with tears in his eyes, "tell me the truth, in the name of God! Do not make me suffer. My master is not—ah, surely there is some hope for him?"

"My good man, I can not deceive you," said the physician, not unkindly. "He has been at work there for an hour or more; the results are evident. He can not live more than a day."

"Jesus!" exclaimed Bazin in horror. "Can nothing help him, nothing save him?"

"Nothing but a miracle," said the other.

"Then I shall pray for the miracle," said Bazin.

With a shrug, the physician went his way.

THE CURÉ, meantime, sat beside Aramis and felt his brow.

"True, there is fever," he said compassionately. "My dear Abbé d'Herblay, I am distressed beyond words."

"Nonsense!" said Aramis with a wan smile. "That man was right, my friend. I have no will to live. I have been hurt, wounded, more grievously in spirit than in body. My thoughts are no longer fastened upon things of this earth. Come,

let me read you this thesis! I have the idea of confounding the followers of Jansenius, of placing his infamous book, the 'Angustinus' in the light of schismatic heresy. To this effect—but hand me those sheets, I beg of you—let me read to you—"

The curé assisted him to sit up a trifle, handed him the written sheets and watched him anxiously. With his charming smile, Aramis thanked him and selected his first sheet.

"Here we have it, my father. You will note that I say nothing of Jansenius at the opening; in fact I have given the thesis a distinct general title."

In his low, clear voice he began to read:

"NEW SCHISMS OF THE WEST

"Three great schisms have occurred from the establishment of the Christian religion to our day. The schisms which separated the Greek Church from the communion of the Roman Church, and which, begun by Photius in 802, was finished by the Patriarch Cerularius in 1053, is called the Eastern Schism. That which took place after the double election of Urbain VI and Clement VII in 1378, is called the Great Western Schism. Last, the Schism of England, which separated the English from the Roman communion under Henry VIII in 1534; from this the Anglican Church took its rise.

"Photius was born at Constantinople. He had been ambassador to Persia and First secretary of the Emperor Michael, when he was exalted to even greater height—to the Patriarchate of Constantinople in place of Ignace, recently deposed. Pope Nicholas I was opposed to his intrusion and anathematized him in his councils; on his side, Photius gathered his bishops and anathematized the Pope. The Greek Emperor, Basil the Macedonian, re-established Ignace and Photius did not resume the functions of the Patriarchate until after—"

M. le Curé intervened.

"Enough, enough, my dear abbé," he said gently, though firmly. "I perceive the scholarly trend of this thesis, and can well imagine how you will turn it to present day value—but, I beg of you, read no more! Let me peruse the work at my leisure. *Linguam compescere, virtus non minima est*—it is not the least of virtues to restrain the tongue—"

"Ah!" exclaimed Aramis. "That reminds me, the text I have chosen for this thesis, my dear curé! I really must have your opinion in the matter . . ."

THERE was a knock at the door. To the impatient word of Aramis, in came Bazin, looking extremely agitated and holding a letter in his hand.

"Well?"

"Monsieur!" implored Bazin, desperate. "I swore that you were not here, that you were ill, that you were dying — but they had already learned you were here. Two confounded cavaliers—I mean, two gentlemen—they asked me to bring you this letter."

"Very well, give it to me," said Aramis. He sighed and fell back upon the pillows. "But what are letters?" he said, after looking at the superscription. "I have nothing to do with the things of this world."

None the less, he tore open the missive, and a little color came into his face as he read it. The letter was one of the four sent by Lord de Winter; in all respects it was a duplicate of that which Athos had received.

"Singular!" murmured Aramis, and looked up. "Bazin, you say this was brought by hand?"

"One of the gentlemen said he had fetched it from your former lodgings in Paris, monsieur," said Bazin, in terror at this new contact with the old life. "He is most anxious to have speech with you."

"Who is he?" said Aramis.

"A stranger, monsieur, masked."

Aramis handed him the letter with a gesture of resignation.

"Take this, burn it, destroy it, eat it—what you will. It is nothing to me."

The curé rose.

"My dear friend," he said, "let me have these sheets you have written. Let me read this admirable thesis at my leisure! I shall make place— If you have a visitor, then see him by all means. You should not be here, alone and friendless, desperately ill—"

"I have more than I deserved," said Aramis in a gloomy voice. "What is the

world, after all? A place where anger breeds anger, where wrong begets wrong—*litem paret lis, noxa item noxam parit!* And have I not brought all my misfortune upon myself by forgetting the first maxim of a devout man—*nemo militans Deo*—no servant of God should mix in secular affairs? Take the thesis if you like, my friend. Return soon to me. Bazin! Show M. le Curé out and fetch in this cavalier who seeks me."

Bazin had been holding the letter over a candle. His sharp eyes did not fail to sight the hidden writing, and a subdued groan broke from him as he comprehended its import and read the signature of Lord de Winter. He said nothing of this to Aramis, however; the last scrap of the letter curling up, he pinched out the candle and showed the good curé to the door.

"Winter!" murmured Aramis, left alone, and stared out of the window at the trees. "That Englishman! Well, it has nothing to do with me. I am finished; everything is finished. Let the dead bury their dead. When she—"

Two tears gathered in his eyes and slowly rolled upon his cheeks.

THE DOOR opened. A cavalier entered, turned, calmly pushed Bazin outside, then closed the door and turned the key. He approached the couch. Aramis was astonished to see that he was masked. He had fair hair, a mustache and goatee of the same; his hands were as beautiful and as elegantly tended as those of Aramis himself. Blue eyes glittered through the mask. His garments were of blue velvet, and a magnificent diamond sparkled on his right hand.

"Be seated, monsieur," said Aramis. "I am, as you see, too weak to rise."

"You are the Abbé d'Herblay?" asked the stranger.

"I am. And you?"

"I am the Chevalier Nemo," and white, beautiful teeth showed as the stranger smiled and sat down.

"No One!" repeated Aramis, frowning slightly. "I do not like this, monsieur."

"Your pardon; a few questions, monsieur, and I give you my true name," said the other. His voice seemed touched with emotion. "Your lackey has told me of your condition. Have I your permission to speak frankly?"

The head of Aramis sank back.

"What you like, what you like," he said. "I have no secrets. I have no will to live. I have—nothing."

"My poor—" began the other, then checked himself. "Two days ago, monsieur, I was in Paris. I was speaking with Mlle. de Sirle."

Aramis started slightly, then essayed a feeble shrug.

"What of it?" he murmured. "She is a beautiful woman, monsieur, and wicked as she is beautiful. Every one who knows her loves her instantly; she lives by love, in fact."

"And you, monsieur?"

"I? I am impervious to love," said Aramis with a trace of hauteur. "I have eschewed the vanities of this world. All is vanity, folly, crackling of thorns under a pot!"

"Precisely," said the other. "Monsieur, you are ill—"

"No," said Aramis, "I am dying."

The visitor was silent for a moment, as if in restraint of some deep emotion.

"Then allow me to mention private matters, for which I promise you entire justification," he rejoined. "You are, I believe, a friend of Mlle. de Sirle."

"Of that woman?" The lip of Aramis curled slightly. "You do not know me, my friend. She is the most dangerous person in Paris."

"As you warned M. de Bassompierre."

Aramis turned, if it were possible, even paler than before.

"How do you know these things?"

"I am coming to that. First tell me—you sent a friend to render Mlle. de Sirle a certain service?"

Aramis hesitated.

"Yes. I could not go myself; I had just received a letter which wrecked my entire life. So I sent a friend, for reasons of

my own. Three hours afterward I was wounded and robbed, and was brought here. Are you content?"

His voice had become very weak. His eyes closed.

"And where is your friend?"

"I know not," murmured Aramis. "What matter? Porthos can take care of himself. I sent him. She would make use of him; he would tell me everything. Such was my intent. Then—the letter. Then—the wound. I came this far from Paris—and I am dying. What matter?"

"Ah! I understand now," said the visitor. "I should have known that La Sirle could never entangle you. This letter you received, it was, perhaps, from a lady named Marie?"

Aramis looked up, started slightly and regarded the stranger fixedly.

"You—you come from her?"

"No."

Aramis turned his face away.

"No matter," he said. "Nothing matters. I am a dead man, and have no hope in this world; say your say and get you gone, for I feel weakness upon me, and all these things have passed out of my life forever."

AGAIN his eyes closed. It was, indeed, symptomatic of his utter weakness and dejection that he should consent to thus mention names with a stranger. Nothing could have been farther from the usual discreet, even secretive, nature of Aramis, who never let his right hand know what his left hand was about.

Now occurred one of those strange things which never happen for the world to see, those queerly silent things which pass unknown and unvisualized.

Two tears escaped from beneath the vizard of the stranger, as he looked down upon the changed form of the man upon the couch.

"My poor Aramis!" he said in a new voice, a low, rich, ringing voice that broke upon the silence like a chord of music. With a swift gesture the stranger removed his mask, plucked hard at false goatee and mustache, pulled them away, revealed himself smiling, blue eyed, soft and dimpled of face as any woman.

Aramis had turned at that voice. One low cry burst from his lips. His eyes widened, and he came to one elbow, staring terribly, the pallor of death in his face.

"You!" he cried in a strangled tone. "You—Marie—"

"I, Marie—Marie of Tours—Marie de Rohan—Marie de Chevreuse—Marie who loves you—ah, my poor, poor Aramis! Could you not guess that my frightful letter was only a blind for the eyes of others?"

And with a magnificent, impulsive gesture, the speaker was upon her knees and holding the head of Aramis in her arms, against her breast, as she might have held that of a child.

This woman, in whose person were united the most princely names of France, was the sole enemy of Richelieu who could meet him on equal ground, word for word, act for act, genius for genius—and defy him. Against this woman all the power of the great minister was as naught. He might humble her, he might exile her, he might treat with her as with an equal, but he could never outwit or destroy her.

At this moment, in this room, her effulgent beauty was at its zenith. Those dazzling charms which, five years later, were to lure an emperor, and after another five years a viceroy, were in this moment at the height of their perfection. Only supreme beauty can indulge in passionate tears and yet remain undimmed. As Marie de Chevreuse knelt beside the couch, her tears of pity warm upon the face of him she believed dying, this most beautiful woman of France had never appeared so resplendent, of such sublime loveliness. Marie de Chevreuse, who could swear like a trooper, could weep like an angel.

Outside in the corridor, listening at the locked door, was Bazin. When he heard this cry and this name burst from the lips of Aramis, he straightened up, he staggered, he put out one hand to the wall for

support and with the other he crossed himself rapidly.

Then, with a wild and stricken air, he hastened down the corridor with trembling steps, and presently was in the courtyard. A dust covered coach stood there, a coach bearing no arms or insignia. Beside it was the horse of the physician, who had stayed his departure in order to cleanse and bind up the hurt of an hostler kicked by a horse. The *chirugien* was washing his hands when Bazin approached him, and he turned in sharp alarm.

"What?" he exclaimed, startled by the lackey's air. "Your master is not dead already?"

Bazin groaned.

"Ah, monsieur, you are a terrible man!" he responded. "You bade me pray for a miracle, and I prayed and—and—"

The physician surveyed him in puzzled wonder.

"And what, my good man?"

"And the miracle happened, monsieur!" exclaimed Bazin in a hollow voice.

"The devil! You do not appear to be very happy about it."

The casement of the upper room was flung open. The voice of Aramis floated down.

"Bazin! Name of the devil, where are you? Come and pack! We are leaving at once!"

FROM the inn room came the companion of Mme. de Chevreuse, an elderly, shrewd man in the attire of a valet. The host, whose account had evidently just been paid, brought him to the physician.

"Monsieur," said the valet, "will you have the goodness to inform me of the amount of your fee in the case of the sick man above?"

The physician did so, and then followed Bazin up the stairs, jingling the money in his pouch. The door of the upper room was standing open. The stranger, again masked, mustache and goatee again in place, was supporting Aramis and helping him dress. The physician paused at sight of his patient's changed aspect.

"I see you are right," he said to Bazin. "The age of miracles has returned."

Aramis looked at him and laughed.

"Monsieur, I grieve to disappoint you! But devil take me if I intend to die today or tomorrow either!"

"Obviously."

The physician looked at the sparkling eye, the heightened color, the sudden animation and laughing eagerness of his late patient.

"Well, monsieur, at least take the potion I left for you, and if your wound reopens, bid your lackey pray once more, but don't waste the time of a *chirugien*, for your case will be hopeless. *Bon voyage, monsieur!*"

And, with a bow, he departed.

Bazin, now aiding Aramis into his shirt, murmured a low and despairing word.

"But the thesis, monsieur—the thesis on the Great Schisms! M. le Curé has those precious sheets and he is departed."

"To the devil with him and the thesis!" said Aramis. "Get my things packed and stowed, saddle the horses, ride mine yourself. I go in the coach."

"To Paris, monsieur?" queried the unhappy lackey.

"Name of the devil, no!" The masked stranger broke into a ringing, merry laugh. "In the other direction, my good Bazin. You don't remember me, eh? Very well, then. At least you'll remember the place whither we go! To Dampierre."

Bazin uttered a strangled sound—a combined response and groan. And, furtively, he crossed himself and rolled his eyes to heaven. Monsieur Bazin was a devout man, yet he did not congratulate himself on having brought a miracle to pass.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH A GENTLEMAN PROVES TO BE A GOOD WORKMAN

RIDING north and west, d'Artagnan and his companions were followed by only one lackey. Porthos had left his plump Mousqueton to act as squire for Madame du Vallon. Planchet,

the former lackey of d'Artagnan, was now a sergeant in the guards, and within the past week his successor had been trounced and discharged for theft; thus d'Artagnan was without a lackey. Grimaud, the silent servant of Athos, alone followed the three.

They rode from Lyon to Nevers without a halt, and came into the charming capital of the Nivernais with staggering horses and parched throats. They went to the post tavern, turned over their horses to the hostlers, and stumbled into the inn room for dinner before seeking rest for the night. Grimaud, after his custom, remained with the horses to be certain they received proper attention.

"Ah!" Porthos sighed as he lowered himself into a chair which groaned beneath him. "We are at Nevers. From Nevers we ride on to Mélun. From—"

"Not so fast!" said D'Artagnan, with a cry of joy as bottles and food began to rain upon the table. "From here we ride to Orleans."

"Eh?"

Porthos opened his eyes wide. Athos, who cared nothing about their road, was pouring wine.

"But Orleans is not the road for Paris!"

"We do not go to Paris," said d'Artagnan. "We go to Orleans, thence to Lonjumeau. There we head west for Dampierre."

"An excellent program!" Athos lifted his flagon. "To a safe journey!"

Presently Grimaud entered, came opposite his master and paused until Athos looked up. Then Grimaud put out a hand as though taking a horse's reins, looked the imaginary animal up and down, and turned his head, speaking to an imaginary person.

"This is the horse, as described."

His gaze came to rest upon d'Artagnan.

Athos dismissed him with a gesture, and looked at his two friends. D'Artagnan was frowning, Porthos was gaping in astonishment.

"You see—the cardinal gave you a horse, my dead d'Artagnan!" said Athos quizzically. "A beautiful horse, a horse in a thousand! An hostler takes his bridle, turns and says that this is the horse as described. *Voilà!* The description is known. Montforge has passed this way ahead of us—and has left men behind! Beware!"

And having said this he refilled his flagon.

"WELL," said d'Artagnan after a moment, "and what do you expect?"

"Naturally, the unexpected," retorted Athos with a shrug. "Why worry?"

"Good. I'm too weary to care what happens."

None the less, d'Artagnan questioned the grooms and hostlers carefully, inquired after a cavalier of Montforge's description, and learned exactly nothing. The three comrades slept soundly that night, and were off with sunrise.

Despite this disturbing incident, nothing happened to justify the expectations of Athos. The towers of Orleans smiled sunnily upon them of a midday, and they bore straight on to make another five leagues of the northern highway ere night. They considered that if anything happened, it should come at Orleans; thus, once past that city, they took small thought to any peril.

Porthos had discarded his sling, for his wound no longer troubled him. He had secured a huge horse of Norman strain, which might have served some mail clad Roland as destrier; this animal had no speed, but bore the weight of Porthos like a feather. With his great figure, his gallant air, his enormous horse, Porthos was the admired of all beholders, and was taken to be a duke at the very least.

LATE on a warm summer's afternoon they came into Lonjumeau, with the silver thread of the Yvette glistening along the valley below. They avoided the post tavern here, lest it prove dangerous. Instead, they sought the Pomme d'Or, rode into the courtyard of this hostelry so famous for its wine and

fowl, and Porthos at once vanished inside to look over the situation and command a fitting dinner. Athos, who was somewhat particular about his rooms, departed with the host to inspect the proffered chambers.

D'Artagnan approached the horse trough, which an hostler was filling from the pump, and held his wrists beneath the flow of water to cool his blood, for the day was hot and the highway was thick with dust despite its paving of stone flags. At this instant a coach passed in the street, outside the wide open courtyard gates. The coach was white with dust, the four horses were flecked with lather, and its pace was rapid. D'Artagnan glanced at it as it rumbled past.

Framed in the window of this coach he glimpsed the face of a man—a man who was looking straight at him, a face suddenly agape with recognition, a face he knew and that knew him. Then it was gone, rolling away down the street toward the bridge.

In that coach window had been framed the face of Aramis.

For a moment d'Artagnan remained absolutely petrified with astounded incredulity. Pale and haggard the face had been, yet he recognized it instantly, and knew he himself had been recognized. And no word, no halt!

He gained the gateway with one leap and stood staring down the street. The coach went on without pause; indeed, the postilion was whipping up the horses as though Aramis had ordered more speed. It whirled on toward the bridge and the city gates. Evidently Aramis had no intention of stopping.

With an oath, d'Artagnan turned and ran like a madman toward the horses, which the staring Grimaud and a groom were unsaddling. His own animal was being led to the stables. He disdained the horse of Porthos, and instead caught at that of Athos, as yet saddled and bridled. He tore the reins from the hand of Grimaud, flung himself into the saddle at a bound, and one glance told him that neither Porthos nor Athos were in sight.

"Aramis!" he cried to Grimaud. "I have seen Aramis!"

His startled horse plunged, leaped, turned at the pull of the bridle and went out of the courtyard like an arrow. D'Artagnan had his sword, and the pistols of Athos were at the saddle; he was bareheaded, and his cloak reposed with his hat.

As he came thus plunging out into the street, the people there scattered with cries of fright and anger. The horse slipped, recovered; d'Artagnan thrust in his spurs and sent the frightened animal hurtling in the wake of the coach, unheeding the shouts of those he barely averted. Luckily, the street was not blocked ahead, and he had a clear way.

IN HIS haste, in his furious concentration upon the coach ahead, our Musketeer did not perceive two cavaliers who had dismounted in the street outside the Pomme d'Or and were conversing. They, however, did not fail to observe his sudden emergence and his mad gallop toward the bridge.

"It is he!" exclaimed one, and they hurriedly mounted and rode after.

D'Artagnan had no trouble in sighting his quarry, once he gained the bridge and was across the Yvette. The coach had not taken the northern highway for Paris, but that to the west, a road leading to Palaisau and beyond. It had gained on him. He sighted it half a mile away, climbing the higher ground there, dust rolling out behind it in a great cloud.

"The devil!" said d'Artagnan, putting in his spurs. "They're whipping up; can it be that Aramis does not want me to catch up with him? Bah! There's too much at stake to pause upon his sly whims."

Tired though his animal was, it responded nobly to his urgings. The coach had passed beyond his range of vision long ere he had in turn reached the uplands, but the heavy dust it raised showed that he was gaining. Here on level ground, however, four horses had the advantage over one, already wearied by climbing the

rise, and with dismay d'Artagnan found his animal to be flagging.

At a bend in the road he caught sight of two figures behind. So thick was his own dust that he could see only that they were riding furiously, gaining on him fast.

"Ha! Grimaud and Athos, no doubt!" he reflected, and then gave his attention to the road ahead.

He determined to expend his horse in one last, supreme effort, and if he could not come up with the coach, a bullet would at least drop one of its horses. It was vital that Aramis be halted, that an explanation be obtained, at any and all costs.

To this end d'Artagnan drew from their holsters the two pistols at his saddle, which were already loaded, and made shift to prime them, as he rode. He had just primed the second pistol when he became aware of a rider close behind him, and turned.

At this instant the man behind him fired a pistol. The bullet tore the hat from the head of d'Artagnan, but did not injure him.

Only then did he see his mistake. This rider, and the other slightly in the rear, were strangers! The second man held a pistol drawn, ready for use. Without hesitation, d'Artagnan raised the weapon in his own hand. As he pressed the trigger, his horse stumbled. His bullet missed the first man, but struck the horse of the second.

"Assassins!" exclaimed d'Artagnan. His horse stumbled again, then pitched forward and fell. Unprepared, he was flung clear of the saddle and sent rolling in the dust of the road.

Catlike, d'Artagnan was upon his feet almost instantly, only to pause there in sharp dismay. In the fall, his right shoulder had been struck; for the moment, his arm was next to useless, numbed, paralyzed. The first rider had just dismounted and, sword out, was running at him. The second, flung by his wounded horse, was on his feet and plucking at his sword.

"Assassins!" cried d'Artagnan, furious. "Do you know you are dealing with a royal officer?"

He had no reply, except a snarling grin. Both men, he perceived, were *bretteurs*, or bravos of a certain type very common at this period—veterans of the wars in Italy or Germany, men used to every trick of arms, who would cut a throat for a pistole and do it with all the address of long practise.

WITH an effort of the will d'Artagnan's numbed fingers closed on his sword hilt and bared the blade. It was high time; the first *bretteur* was already lunging at him. There was now no doubt whatever; this was no mistake, but deliberate assassination. D'Artagnan knew he was dealing with men who were unscrupulous, pitiless, who would either kill or be killed.

Avoiding that first lunge by a miracle of agility, d'Artagnan engaged the sword of the *bretteur* with his own rapier, and at the very first pass, perceived his adversary to be a master of the weapon after the somewhat rough style of the army. For a moment he could do no more than hold the defensive. The shock of a rude fall unsettles the nerves and affects those delicate sensitory ganglia whose messages control the brain of a swordsman.

"Flank oblique, Carabin!" cried out the bravo suddenly.

"Understood," replied the second, who had now come up, and he fell upon d'Artagnan from the left side.

"Cowards!" cried d'Artagnan, finding himself thus engaged by two men at once.

"No, monsieur, good workmen," replied Carabin, with a grin.

D'Artagnan fell back a step, the better to hold both swords in play. He was himself again; the dazzling rapidity of his thrusts and parries astonished and angered the two *bretteurs*, who redoubled their efforts. The sun was setting; in this reddish light their blades took on a copper tinge, and their eyes seemed glowing with infernal fires. Carabin began to work around to the rear of the Musketeer, but the agility of d'Artagnan defeated

his purpose. And now the anger of d'Artagnan passed into that furious ecstasy which seized upon him in battle, uplifting him above all thought of peril. The dust raised by their trampling feet, the hoarse breathing of men, the blood-shot eyes and snarling lips, the sweat that streamed from brow and neck, the clink and click of blades, the sharp death glinting there at their throats—all this swept through the veins of d'Artagnan like wine.

He broke into sudden laughter. Still engaged with the first man, he avoided a lunge from Carabin and then, with the flashing swoop of a falcon, was away and entirely clear of Carabin. In this momentary respite he hurled himself upon the first *bretteur* with fiery abandon. It was his only chance, as he now saw that to cope with both at once was impossible. He must kill one of them swiftly, then finish with the other one.

Ten seconds passed before Carabin could work around the Musketeer, returning to the attack.

In this ten seconds the rapier of d'Artagnan flashed before the eyes of the first *bretteur* like the white fire of a thunderbolt. The blades crossed, met, clung as though magnetized together. Suddenly, with the rapidity of light, d'Artagnan disengaged—and dashed the hilt of his sword into the *bretteur's* face; almost in the same motion, it seemed, he leaped sidewise and ran the dazed man through the throat.

The second was upon him with a howl of rage and fury.

"Coward!" roared Carabin, seeing his comrade clutch at his throat and fall. "That was not the act of a gentleman!"

"Certainly not," returned d'Artagnan coolly, as he engaged, parried, riposted. "I am not dealing with gentlemen, but with good workmen. My faith, but I'm a good workman myself, my friend!"

"Work, then," growled Carabin, "for you'll feed the devil's fires tonight!"

And he attacked with a ferocity, a grim determination, that alarmed d'Artagnan. Here was a better swordsman than the first; one, also, who knew every trick of camp and field and put them into play; his business was not to fence, but to kill.

D'Artagnan, however, had been on more than one campaign; also, the hotel of the Musketeers was not a place where one played with blunted rapiers. Thus, he was not caught asleep when the *bretteur* produced a poniard in his left hand and, forcing up the rapiers, drove in at him with the shorter weapon, vainly.

THE MINUTES passed; the sun dropped from sight. Still the two men fought there above the dead *bretteur*, two horses watching them amazedly, the third horse dying with slow and shuddering coughs. Twice the point of Carabin touched d'Artagnan, once in the arm, once in the throat—mere touches, scarce sufficient to draw blood. Trick foiled trick, riposte answered lunge; about them the dust rose in a continual cloud, suffocating them, as their feet stamped the earth, and their breath came in hoarse pantings. D'Artagnan was astonished and grew more furious every moment—that a mere *bretteur*, a bravo, a hireling assassin, should thus withstand a Musketeer was intolerable!

Abruptly, so swiftly as to be past the eyesight, a thrust went home. Carabin staggered, recovered; the sword fell from his hand; he stood there staring terribly upon d'Artagnan, as blood gushed out across his sweat stained shirt.

"Ah!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "You have—you have—killed me—"

His knees gave way and he pitched forward and lay still for a moment. Then his eyes opened. He came to one elbow, panting, the pallor of death growing in his face.

D'Artagnan stood holding his sword, gulping fresh air into his lungs as the dust cloud thinned and dissipated on the evening breeze. There was no sound save the cough of the dying horse and the rattling breath of the dying man. Presently d'Artagnan sighed, looked at his rapier, found no blood upon it and sheathed it.

"Water!" gasped out Carabin. "On—my saddle—"

"With all my heart," said d'Artagnan.

He strode to the *bretteur's* horse and removed a leathern bottle hung at the saddle, which was still half full of liquid. He unstopped it, came back to the dying Carabin and knelt, holding the bottle to the man's lips. Then Carabin drew back his head.

"You are a swordsman, my friend," he said faintly. "It is a pleasure to be killed by such a man. Your name?"

"D'Artagnan, lieutenant in—"

"Ah! You are d'Artagnan, the man who killed Jussac—then it is no disgrace! My only regret is that I have failed in my errand. More water—"

D'Artagnan leaned forward, held the leathern bottle again to the man's lips. But this time the hand of Carabin moved, the hand that still held the poniard. Almost at the same instant the other hand clutched d'Artagnan by the sleeve.

Overbalanced by this clutch, pulled forward, d'Artagnan fell across the legs of Carabin. The poniard missed its stroke, tore the skin of d'Artagnan's neck, no more.

"Scoundrel!" he exclaimed, trying to wrench from that dying grip. "If—"

Like a flash the *bretteur* uplifted himself. A cry of despair broke from his lips; he was dying in the very act! With one desperate, superhuman effort, he dashed his clenched hand into the face of d'Artagnan and fell back, dead.

The hilt of the poniard struck d'Artagnan between the eyes. He fell face down and lay like a man mortally stricken.

TWO HOURS passed.

When d'Artagnan came to himself it was with a vague and wandering bewilderment. Grotesque dreams had seized upon him, and for a space he thought himself still in dream. He was numb with cold, for he found himself stripped to his shirt; the stars blinked overhead, and in his ears was the sound of rude, harsh voices in dispute.

"Keep the gold, then, and give me the silver," said one voice. "You know very well I dare not have any gold. I'll take the silver and this coat."

"It's a good coat," objected another. "It isn't bloody like the others. And these boots are of fine leather—"

"Leave them, fool!" broke in a third. "Do you want questions asked of us? These boots are dangerous. Leave them. Give Louis the silver and the coat!"

"There's a letter or a paper in the pocket," said the first. "Here, throw it away and leave it. What about this man's shirt?"

A hand pawed the throat of d'Artagnan, and he saw a shape above him, blotting out the stars.

"Something hard under the shirt!" exclaimed the man. "By the saints, this one is still warm!"

D'Artagnan stirred suddenly, sat up. He comprehended that some peasants had come upon the scene and had looted the bodies. He saw three figures, but when he opened his lips to speak, cries of fright broke from them, and all three fled into the night.

"Fools! Dolts! Come back!" cried d'Artagnan. "I'll not harm you!"

Useless, they were gone. He rose, cursed them, tried to pursue them. His feet were bare and he stumbled into a patch of briars. With fresh curses he returned to where the other two bodies gleamed white and naked under the stars. In some dismay he forced himself to grapple with the situation.

His boots lay nearby; except for these and his shirt, he was naked as the two *bretteurs*. He drew on the boots, then retrieved Richelieu's letter and his own papers, which had been flung to the ground. At one side he found his baldric and sword. The peasants had not dared carry off anything which might cause questions to be asked of them later on. Thus, they had not touched the two horses, which were cropping the grass nearby. They had borne away every scrap of clothing, however.

Except for a bruise, d'Artagnan found himself unhurt. His money was gone; his

saddlebags were emptied. He had, however, his own horse, now rested and recovered, also an extra horse with equipment. The sale of this animal would provide him with clothes and money.

"Alas, where is Athos?" he murmured. "Surely he and Porthos would have followed—ah! They must have taken the other road, the Paris highway! Well, no matter. We have a rendezvous in Paris with Milord de Winter—that's understood. Meanwhile I must press on to Dampierre and find Madame de Chevreuse. And now—back to Lonjumeau, or ahead?"

His hesitation was brief. If he returned to Lonjumeau, he would doubtless find his companions gone; and his appearance in such costume would provoke mirth, to say the least. Much better to follow the road westward and get clothes in the first village he reached. So, taking the reins of the dead *bretteur's* horse, he mounted, grimaced, and started out along the road.

He looked back at the two white things in the starlight. Not they were to blame, he knew well, but Montforge. Curiously he found himself angered; not by what had happened, but by the fact that he had so nearly lost the ring beneath his shirt. He might, he reflected, yet have need of the queen's jewel. Money did not come to one out of the air!

Thus thinking, he came to a crest and, some distance ahead, saw the yellow gleaming lights of a village.

CHAPTER IX

A NAKED MAN HAS NO CHOICE

THE VILLAGE of Champlan was small. Aside from the church, the only building of any consequence was the inn, to which d'Artagnan directed his horse. A lantern burned above the gates, which were open.

In the courtyard, near a blazing cresset, stood a coach which a groom was washing. At sight of this coach d'Artagnan drew rein in astonishment; it was the same vehicle which he had been pursuing that afternoon! So, then, Aramis had halted here!

No sooner did this thought strike into his mind, than a man, the only person in sight except for the groom, turned from the coach and peered at him. This man, who was somewhat elderly, had the appearance of a lackey.

"So, you have come!" he exclaimed, then started in surprise at the aspect of d'Artagnan as the latter came into the circle of light. "Name of the devil! I told the fool to fetch a surgeon, not to drag him out of his bed!"

D'Artagnan was alert to the situation. A surgeon had been hastily summoned, probably from the next village or town; he recalled the haggard face of Aramis at the coach window, knew Aramis was wounded.

"Ergo," he reflected as he dismounted, "I cease to be a Musketeer—and become a surgeon!"

"Good!" he said to the man. "A wound, I understand? Clothes do not matter. It is true that I was brought out of bed. So much the better! Where is the patient?"

"*Diantre!* Clothes matter more than you think, perhaps, but it's your business, not mine," and the lackey grinned wryly. "You look like a soldier rather than a physician, my friend."

"Undoubtedly Mother Eve made some similar remark to Adam, the first time she saw him clad," returned d'Artagnan crisply. "Well, does the patient die while you talk? Lead on!"

The impatience in his voice checked the lackey, who perceived that he was dealing with a gentleman. D'Artagnan was in a hurry, indeed. Any of the inn folk would know he was not the expected surgeon. The one groom in sight was a half witted lout, fortunately, who paid no heed to what was said.

"Come," said the lackey, turning to the stone stairs that ascended the inner wall of the courtyard. "My master is at dinner. His friend has a bad wound, which has been slow in healing and the jolting of the coach today has hurt him

terribly. If the wound has opened he is a dead man; we have not dared to look as yet."

"Fear not," said d'Artagnan. "I have a balsam of oil and rosemary which has the miraculous virtue of curing all wounds that do not touch the heart. I promise you I will cure him."

Then he remembered that he had lost everything, including his vial of that balsam, whose recipe his mother had had from a Bohemian, which he ever carried with him. However, this could not be helped, and since he knew the recipe by heart, he could have more of the balsam prepared for the patient.

THE LACKEY guided d'Artagnan to the upper corridor, upon which an open doorway emitted a blaze of light. In the hallway were grouped scullions and chambermaids, while into the open doorway the host of the inn was himself bearing a platter holding an enormous roast duck, almost a goose in size. Obviously the friend of Aramis was about to sup well.

The door of the room adjoining this was opened by the lackey, and d'Artagnan entered. One glance around showed that he had reached his goal. Upon the bed lay Aramis, senseless, loosely wrapped in a black gown. No one else was in the room, and one poor candle burned dimly beside the bed.

In the wall was a door which opened into the adjoining room. The lackey went to this door, knocked, and opened it at a curt command.

"Monsieur," he said to the unseen friend of Aramis, "the physician is here, but he came literally in his shirt. If you wish to order that he be clothed—"

"Name of the fiend!" cried out d'Artagnan angrily. "Clothe yourself, lackey, and let your betters alone! Shut the hall door and keep those women outside. I'm here to work, not to parade myself. *Vivadiou!* Time enough for clothes when there's nothing else to do. Be off! Have my horse looked after. Bring clean cloths and water. Fetch more candles. Lively!"

The lackey scuttled out hastily. A burst of laughter sounded from the adjoining room. Into the communicating doorway strode a laughing cavalier, masked and hatted, who held a candelabrum in one hand.

"Here are lights, M. Aesculapius!" he exclaimed gaily. "And if my friend recovers I promise you six pistoles; if he dies, six inches of steel!"

"To the devil with your pistoles, your steel and yourself!" snapped d'Artagnan, who was now bending over Aramis and laying bare the bandaged chest. "So! He's in bad shape, but I've seen him in worse. We must have warm water to remove these wrappings; they're blood hardened. Well, my friend, at whom are you staring?"

The cavalier in the doorway was inspecting d'Artagnan in some amusement.

"Sword and shirt — your costume, monsieur, might be bettered!" he said merrily. "Shall I lend you a pair of breeches to go with that sword?"

D'Artagnan was removing his baldric. With it came a portion of his tattered shirt. He surveyed himself ruefully.

"Well, well, monsieur, I shall attend first to my patient, then to myself," he replied, not knowing whether to be angered or amused.

"And so, my Gascon," returned the cavalier, "you have seen this gentleman in worse shape, have you? May I ask where?"

D'Artagnan could have bitten off his tongue.

"I said I had seen others in worse shape," he replied. "I see a pair of breeches there on a chair. If you'll have the goodness to retire to your dinner and leave me to my work, I'll be obliged."

"With all my heart, most testy physician!" said the other mockingly, swept a low bow, and stepped back into the other room. "And, when your work is finished, perhaps you will do me the honor of joining me."

"Ah!" exclaimed d'Artagnan. "Since I

haven't eaten this afternoon, I'll be glad to do so, monsieur.'"

THE OTHER closed the door. D'Artagnan reached for the breeches on the chair, which fitted him passably. As he put them on there was a tinkle; the chain of the scapulary around his neck had parted. Doubtless a link had given way during his exertions that afternoon. The sapphire ring of the queen fell upon the floor.

D'Artagnan picked it up, placed it on the little finger of his right hand, pocketed the scapulary and buttoned up the breeches, just as the lackey entered with a tray. He motioned to the bedside table.

"Put it there. Now, help me with these bandages. Removing them will hurt him, and that will bring him to his senses. Have the fresh cloths ready."

The bandages were undone. The wound was bathed in warm water, the cloths came away. A low word broke from d'Artagnan at sight of the wound. Then he saw the eyes of Aramis flicker open and stare up at him.

"*Vivadiou!* It's angry, but has not broken open," he exclaimed. Then, at the ear of Aramis, "Quiet, comrade! Let your mind be at rest. That sealed packet and that letter from Marie Michon have been destroyed. All is safe. If you hadn't run away from me, you'd have learned it sooner. Quiet, now!"

The stare of Aramis, at these words, passed into a look of wide eyed incredulity, of stark amazement. However, Aramis had no chance to appease his curiosity or wonder, for he was being deftly bandaged afresh.

"No talking," said d'Artagnan to him, mindful of the lackey. "Set your mind at rest and go to sleep. I'll be here in the morning, and if you'll have the goodness to tell this lackey that I'm a doctor to your taste all will be well."

Aramis quite understood; and a faint smile touched his lips. He looked at the lackey.

"Tell your master that we stay here for the night, or that I do at all events," he said. "I must speak with this gentleman in the morning."

"Very good, monsieur," said the lackey, and held the water while d'Artagnan rinsed his hands. "But I do not know where this gentleman can sleep; we have taken every bed in this tiny country inn!"

"Bah! Your master and I will share a bed," said d'Artagnan carelessly. "Aramis, no more talk! I'm dining with your friend. By the way, since he is masked, do you care to tell me his name? I can allow you two words, at least."

Aramis regarded him with a rather amused uneasiness.

"Alas, my dear d'Artagnan, I regret that the secret is not mine to impart."

"Keep it to yourself, then," said d'Artagnan bruskly. The lackey had already taken his departure, apparently in some agitation. "Listen, my friend! Porthos is close by. All goes well. I'm on my way to Dampierre, and we'll talk in the morning. So turn over and sleep!"

"Wait!" exclaimed Aramis.

At this moment, however, the door between the two rooms opened, and the cavalier appeared, still masked.

"I hear your voice, M. d'Herblay—excellent! This is indeed a worthy physician, even if he came in his shirt, and a torn and bloody shirt to boot! Come, my Aesculapius, come and join me, and let our friend here sleep."

D'Artagnan, nothing loath, followed into the adjoining room. The lackey, already there, held a chair for him at a table bountifully spread.

ONCE seated, d'Artagnan, who was extremely curious, turned all his attention to his host, but found himself completely baffled. Certainly here was no one he knew. The cavalier retained his mask and his hat, upon which was a magnificent plume; his garments were of the most beautiful quality, and the lace at his throat and cuffs was superb Mechlin. The voice of the cavalier was a thin contralto of peculiar timber; and this gentleman,

observing the frank curiosity of d'Artagnan, lightly touched his throat.

"Monsieur, you will pardon my singular speech! Some years ago I was wounded in the throat, and my speech has been affected since. To judge from your attire, you came hither from the bed of another patient, or perhaps from your own bed?"

D'Artagnan, noting the flash of jewels, concluded that he was speaking with some noble.

"You have hit it, monsieur," he replied, with his frank and winning smile. "To be more exact, two patients—who tried to rob me. *Vivadiou!* They came close to doing it, too."

"So that explains it!"

The cavalier appeared to be vastly amused. D'Artagnan was eating and drinking while he talked.

"As to sharing a bed with you, monsieur, I regret to say that I am not in the habit of accepting such proposals. We might indeed share this room, which has two couches."

"Better still," rejoined d'Artagnan, his mouth full. "Having recently slept with two dead men, I prefer not to sleep with any man at all for some time to come."

The masked cavalier laughed heartily, showing white and perfect teeth.

"I have never tried that novelty," he observed, "although I understand that the late Queen Margot put the prescription into effect at one time. Now, if we—"

He paused suddenly. D'Artagnan, in lifting his winecup, had passed his hand near the candles; the sapphire on his finger blazed suddenly. He saw that the cavalier had observed it and quickly turned the bezel inward, but too late.

"Monsieur, that ring!" exclaimed the other, leaning forward, the color ebbing from his face. "It is most astonishing, but if I mistake not, it is well known to me."

"Impossible," said d'Artagnan, in swift alarm. "It was a gift to me from a lady, long ago, and I wear it in memory of her."

At this instant came a knock at the door. The lackey opened; there was a moment of agitated conversation, then the lackey came to the table and bowed respectfully to his master.

"Monsieur, it seems that another physician has arrived. There has been some mistake."

"Pay him and send him away," said the cavalier, who seemed in some agitation. "Go out, shut the door, leave us alone! Devil take you!" He hurled a volley of oaths at the lackey, who hurriedly went out of the room and shut the door.

D'Artagnan, however, observed that these oaths seemed to come from emotion rather than anger. The masked cavalier turned to him quickly.

"Monsieur," he said, "will you permit me to ask you one question? You are no surgeon, yet you have done your work well. Who you are, I care not. But I should like to ask you whether, on the inner side of that ring, there are not engraved the words '*Dolor hic tibi proderit olin*'?"

"Hm!" said d'Artagnan. "I have not forgotten my Ovid, at all events—'this grief will some day avail you', is it not? Well, monsieur, a very pretty motto there."

"Damnation take you—will you answer my question?" snapped the cavalier.

D'Artagnan leaned back in his chair, twirled his mustache, and met the angry blue eyes behind the mask.

"Come, come, monsieur!" he said, coolly. "This ring is no concern of yours, I assure you."

"According to your own statement," said the other, with an effort at self-control, "you are the King of France, monsieur! Having the honor of knowing our good Louis, I find it hard to credit your words."

"Eh? My statement?" exclaimed d'Artagnan in dismay.

"Exactly. The only lady who could have given you that ring is her Majesty, the Queen."

D'ARTAGNAN took the ring from his finger and looked inside it. The words were indeed graven there. He had already pocketed the gold signet ring, and now he pocketed the sapphire and pushed back his chair.

"Monsieur," he said with a curious deadly severity, "do you insist that I tell you whence comes this ring, and my connection with it?"

"Insist? I demand!" exclaimed the other imperiously.

D'Artagnan now knew beyond a doubt that he was dealing with some noble of the court, perhaps with the Duc d'Orleans himself, who had seen that ring on the queen's hand, and who knew it intimately.

"Very well, monsieur, I comply with your request," said d'Artagnan, "and, having told you what is not my secret, I shall then kill you."

Upon these words he stood up and drew his sword. The masked cavalier did not move.

"Speak!" he commanded, evidently disdaining the threat as mere bravado.

"With the greatest of pleasure, monsieur," said d'Artagnan politely, and selected the exact point of the other's throat for his thrust. "That ring was given me by her Majesty, to show Madame de Chevreuse as surety that I was her Majesty's messenger. I regret, monsieur, that I must now keep my word, which is never broken."

And with the rapidity of light, before his purpose could be guessed, he thrust his rapier to the point he had selected.

This thunderbolt of a lunge could not be escaped; but it could be evaded.

The masked cavalier had been playing with a long carving knife; he whipped it up, half parried the blow. The rapier of d'Artagnan, instead of piercing his throat, merely touched his ribs, scarce letting blood, and tore itself clear. From the cavalier broke a singular cry, and he fell sidewise in his chair as though dead.

D'Artagnan, poised for a second thrust, stood gaping down at his senseless figure.

"The devil! I can not very well kill an unconscious man," he murmured. "Still, it must be done. First, let me see with whom I'm dealing. After all, if this is some prince of the blood who is protecting Aramis I might—"

He laid his sword on the table, lifted the fainting cavalier and removed the mask. The face thus exposed was unknown to him. He loosened the cavalier's garments, felt the wound—and abruptly recoiled. The wound itself was nothing—it was scarce bleeding, in fact—but d'Artagnan had placed his hand upon the least expected object in the world.

"So, my Aramis!" he murmured, then checked his amazement, collected himself.

He swiftly replaced the kerchief he had disarranged, buttoned the tunic again, put the mask again in position, and over the cavalier's brow sprinkled a little water. One glance at the sparkling jewels, the beautiful hands, the dull gold masses of knotted hair, told him all that was necessary to confirm his discovery. Until this moment the cavalier's hat had remained in place; d'Artagnan straightened it, found that it was pinned fast, and chuckled.

The blue eyes opened beneath the mask, and d'Artagnan stepped back a pace. He seized his rapier and placed its point at the throat of his host.

"Not a word!" he commanded. "Monsieur, you see that I am not to be trifled with. Luckily for you, I remembered just in time that you were protecting my friend Aramis. Instead of killing you, I turned the point, gave you a bare scratch, and now I shall be very glad to have a little further speech with you. I am M. d'Artagnan, lieutenant of Musketeers. Your name?"

THE CAVALIER straightened, touched his side, grimaced. His gaze searched the impassive countenance of d'Artagnan, then his lips parted in a smile.

"Thank heaven for your memory, monsieur, tardy as it was!" he exclaimed. "So you are the friend of Aramis, who followed us this afternoon? I guessed as

much. I am the Chevalier de Moreau, a relative and intimate of Madame de Chevreuse; in fact, all her business passes through my hands. She is at this moment very ill and can see no one. Thus, monsieur, your message would have to be delivered to me in any case. A few words with Aramis will convince you that I am speaking the truth."

D'Artagnan lowered his sword.

"And the ring, Chevalier—"

"Was one given the queen by Chevreuse," said the other quietly. "I myself had the stone mounted for madame."

D'Artagnan sheathed his weapon and bowed. He now knew with whom he was dealing.

"Monsieur, will you accept my apologies?" he said. "If you will permit me to look at the wound I was so unfortunate as to give you, I—"

"No, no, it is nothing," said the chevalier, and laughed a trifle maliciously. "But you yourself are wounded, M. d'Artagnan. At least let me—"

D'Artagnan blinked at recollection of earlier passages with the chevalier.

"Bah! Mere scratches, my dear chevalier, not worth attention," he said. "Well, shall we resume our dinner? I believe, in view of what you say, that I may confide my messages to you."

"Absolutely, I assure you," said the chevalier, and drained a glass of wine. "I am forced, in the illness of Mme. de Chevreuse, to handle all her affairs."

"Then," said d'Artagnan, "you may be able to tell me what name was signed to a letter, not long ago received by M. d'Herblay, a letter which told him never to see the writer again, never to speak with the writer, never to think of the writer?"

The chevalier turned pale.

"Monsieur, how do you know of such a letter?"

"It was taken from Aramis when he was attacked and wounded. The man who took it and other papers died in my arms. I destroyed these papers, recognizing the seal of Aramis."

"Ah!" A breath, as of intense relief, escaped the chevalier. He rose and held out a hand to d'Artagnan. "Monsieur, you are an honorable man. I salute you."

For a moment d'Artagnan pressed those soft yet strong fingers, and felt a magnetic current pass through his veins. Then, resuming his seat, the chevalier continued.

"The letter was signed by the name of Marie Michon."

"Exactly," said d'Artagnan. "Now—" and he poured more wine—"we may come to business. I have two errands to Madame de Chevreuse—one from a man, one from a woman. Choose!"

"Ladies first always!" said the chevalier gaily.

"Good." D'Artagnan touched the sapphire on his finger. "Her Majesty gave me this ring to show madame, asked me to bring whatever message might be given me. That was all."

"Hm!" The chevalier reflected. "I can speak for madame here, I believe. Tell her Majesty that the will of Thounenin is being sent to Paris by way of London, but a sure friend is on guard. The moment this will is seized and destroyed, danger ceases. I dare not communicate with her; Marshal de Bassompierre will let her know the outcome."

"For the ears of all the court to hear?" asked d'Artagnan dryly.

"In four words which she alone will understand, 'God loves the brave'. Understood?"

D'Artagnan inclined his head.

"The message will be delivered, monsieur. May I ask whither you are taking my friend Aramis?"

"To the Château of Dampierre. He is in need of care; his recovery will be slow."

"Lucky Aramis!" thought d'Artagnan to himself. "Beloved by one of the greatest ladies of France, the most beautiful woman in Europe, who would wish swift recovery in such a case?"

THE CHEVALIER drew from his finger a large ring ornamented with a small but magnificent diamond of the most exquisite quality.

"If you please, M. D'Artagnan, give

me the token of her Majesty and accept this, instead, as evidence to her that your mission was fulfilled. She will recognize the jewel, since it was a gift from her. And now, your second errand?"

"Is less agreeable, I fear." D'Artagnan slipped the ring on his finger, but not without a sigh. The queen's jewel had been to him more than a jewel merely. "His Eminence Cardinal de Richelieu sent me to Dampierre with a verbal message."

The other stiffened perceptibly, fastened a sharp and alert gaze upon d'Artagnan.

"A verbal message? From his own lips?"

D'Artagnan assented.

"It is not impossible," he said, "that his Eminence had learned of the mission confided to me in secret by her Majesty. In fact, I have every reason to believe that I was not expected to reach Dampierre alive. However—*me voici!*"

"And the message?" The chevalier leaned forward in breathless suspense.

D'Artagnan repeated the message of the Cardinal.

"It is this, from the lips of His Eminence! 'His Majesty has learned all and is taking the child under his own protection. Be very quiet during the next six months. If you indulge your liking for letters and visitors you are lost.' That is all."

The effect upon his listener was extraordinary. Across the face of the chevalier spread a deadly pallor; his lips parted in a gasp, and then he uttered a cry of mortal anguish, a low but piercing cry, as though these words had stricken him to the very heart. His head fell forward; he had fainted, for the second time.

"The devil!"

D'Artagnan rose, hearing a knock at the door. He opened, found the lackey there, and beckoned. "Look to your master—he has fainted. No harm done. I'll see to my patient."

He knew that the lackey was, of course, in the secret of his master.

Passing into the next room, where the candle still burned dimly, d'Artagnan closed the door, then looked down at Aramis. To his gratification the latter was sleeping soundly and peacefully, with a half smile which lent his features an almost angelic expression.

"Ah, my dear Aramis, one can forgive a duchess for loving you!" murmured d'Artagnan to himself. "You have your faults, yes, but to accompany them you have a heart of gold. And where, I wonder, is honest Bazin? Strange that he did not come with you."

"I am here, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said a voice.

D'Artagnan started. From the floor at the foot of the bed uprose the melancholy figure of Bazin.

"I was seeking a physician, and when I came back with him you were here."

D'Artagnan burst into laughter, which he checked instantly for fear of waking Aramis. He knew very well with what feelings Bazin regarded him, and he made haste to set the lackey's mind at rest.

"Well, my good Bazin, I have not come to drag your master back to a secular life, I can assure you. As a matter of fact, he will be very lucky if he hangs on to any sort of life, for his wound is a bad one; but I imagine he will have the best of care at Dampierre."

"He will, monsieur," said Bazin, with a sort of groan.

"I have, it appears, appropriated his breeches. I came with only my shirt," said d'Artagnan. "Can you find me some clothes, any clothes at all? I have no money, but I have an extra horse which seems to be a good one. If you can arrange to sell this horse for me in the morning—"

"I can arrange everything, monsieur," said Bazin. "Do you go to Dampierre with us?"

"Unluckily, no. I leave you here, and I leave as quickly as I can get clothed."

"Then, monsieur," said Bazin, brightening visibly, "I will arrange it. As for clothes, my master has a whole portmanteau in the coach, and I recall that his clothes fit you perfectly. Since he

will have no use for riding boots, you might as well take his."

"Good," said d'Artagnan. "Then I will bid you good night."

He returned to the adjoining room; but, upon entering, found it empty. He glanced around in astonishment. At this instant he caught sharp voices from the courtyard. Leaving the room, he came out upon the stone staircase just in time to see two horses dash from the gateway and go into the night at a gallop. The host was ascending the stairs, and held up both hands at sight of d'Artagnan.

"Ah, monsieur, they have gone!" he exclaimed. "The gentleman left his coach and postilion to bring the wounded gentleman in the morning, and said that you were to have his room in his place."

"The devil!" muttered d'Artagnan. "So she fled on getting that message, did she? My dear M. de Richelieu, I congratulate you on effecting more with a dozen words than I could with my sword point!"

And, with a sigh, he turned back.

CHAPTER X

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE OF THE COMTE DE LA FÈRE

LEFT AT the Pomme d'Or, Athos and Porthos learned from Grimaud what d'Artagnan had cried out, and how he had departed. They lost no time in following; unluckily, the horses had to be saddled. Upon reaching the bridge they made inquiries, and a soldier there declared he had seen a horseman answering the description of d'Artagnan take the highway north to Paris.

At the best pace possible, they followed this false scent, but saw nothing of their comrade, naturally enough. When darkness fell, they rode into the Croix de Berny, their horses staggering, and realized that they had come amiss. Inquiries revealed that d'Artagnan had certainly not been seen at the Croix.

"Supper, wine, a bed!" declaimed Porthos, stamping into the main room. "Capons, beef—ah, what a hearth spit I see there, and loaded too! Not so bad, Athos! Our lieutenant no doubt took that road bearing to the left from Lonjumeau, eh?"

Athos nodded, gestured Grimaud to see to the horses, and followed Porthos inside. Once seated, he emptied two goblets of wine before speaking, then regarded Porthos fixedly.

"Do you know what day this is?" he demanded severely.

"That I do; Tuesday, thanks to the saints, and no fish until Friday!" rejoined Porthos carelessly. "Only, I wish d'Artagnan were sitting here. We must go back to Lonjumeau and take that cursed western road, comrade."

"We can not," said Athos gloomily. "Tomorrow is the thirtieth of July."

"Eh?" Porthos wiped his lips and stared at him inquiringly. "What of it?"

"You forget. Lord de Winter will be expecting us in Paris tomorrow. His errand is of the most supreme importance; we know this already."

"*Pardieu!* You are right, Athos. But are we then to abandon poor d'Artagnan? We can find him at Dampierre, certainly—"

"Our business lies ahead," said Athos with an air of finality. "D'Artagnan knows the place and date of appointment; he will be there, if he is alive. We, on the contrary, are not yet at Paris."

"Bah!" exclaimed Porthos. "Half a day's ride away, my friend!"

"In six days, the entire world was created," rejoined Athos. "In half a day, I assure you, Richelieu can undo a large part of the work of creation."

And he applied himself to the wine and food before him, without further remark, until the meal was finished. Then, regarding Porthos with the noble yet indefinably sad air which told of strange thoughts in his soul:

"My friend, I have a presentiment, and you know that I am never deceived. I feel that this meeting with Lord de Winter holds for me either a terrible grief, or a great happiness, I can not tell which."

The eyes of Porthos widened; and before he could reply Athos had left the table.

NEXT morning they left the Croix de Berny at an early hour, passed through Chambord without incident, passed Arcueil, and were almost within sight of Chatillon when the huge Norman horse of Porthos suddenly went lame. Inexplicable as it seemed, there was the fact. The animal had apparently strained a ligament or tendon.

"Ah!" exclaimed Porthos, purpling with abrupt anger. "You recall, we baited the horse back there at Arcueil? And those grooms crowding around? *Pardieu!* I'll wager a pistole—"

Athos made a sign to Grimaud. The latter sighed, dismounted, held his stirrup for Porthos, and himself took the Norman.

"Forward!" said Athos. The two friends rode on, and ere reaching Chatillon had lost poor Grimaud to sight. They were only a short distance from the gates of Chatillon when two men, who had been standing with their horses at the roadside, mounted and rode into the town ahead of them.

"Did you see that?" said Athos. "They were awaiting us. They bear word ahead. Porthos, we must separate here."

"And why, if you please?" demanded Porthos in some wonder.

"One of us must keep that appointment with Lord de Winter," said Athos, and drew rein. "If we go on together, we shall both be stopped, depend upon it! Therefore, separate here. You ride to the east, enter Paris by the Porte St. Antoine. I will ride west, make Issy, cross the Seine and enter from Passy. You comprehend?"

"I comprehend this," said Porthos, puffing out his cheeks. "If they watched us enter Chatillon, they will certainly watch us leave!"

"Yes, but by separating, we divide their forces, throw their plans awry, and gain greater chance of winning through," said Athos calmly. "Bourg-la-Reine lies ahead; from there it is just two leagues to Paris, It is not yet noon; we need not reach the Place Royale until tonight. You know the rendezvous? The Hotel de St. Luc."

"Well, then," said Porthos reluctantly, "I shall wait here for Grimaud."

"Do so," said Athos. "Farewell! Until tonight."

And, without looking back, he turned into a side street and was lost to sight.

ATHOS knew very well that no one wished to prevent any of them meeting Lord de Winter, for this rendezvous was probably known to no one, and would give no suspicion. It was far more likely that d'Artagnan had been seen to leave Grenoble with one friend, and Lyon with two friends and a lackey. Their road had been roundabout; thus Montforge, easily ahead of them, could have made dispositions to kill them all.

"And that is undoubtedly his purpose," reflected Athos. "Why, we do not yet know. He has his orders; that is enough. Ah, Richelieu! You are powerful; but when you turn your power against the honor of a woman, forces of which you know nothing will blunt your weapons! Once before you pitted yourself against four men who had only heaven to assist them, and you lost. Be careful lest this time you destroy yourself!"

Crossing the Seine at Issy, Athos mounted the heights of Passy and took the Paris road. It was now noon; he had seen no indication of any further danger, and he was hungry. At the Auberge de la Pompe, just outside Passy, he turned in and ordered his horse fed, and commanded a meal for himself. He was in funds, since d'Artagnan had shared Richelieu's purse with his friends.

Athos was in the act of mounting, at the gate of the inn, to resume his journey, when a voice arose from a throng of country folk who were returning from market at Passy.

"M. le Comte! M. le Comte!"

Athos paused. A man broke from the throng and ran to him, an elderly man with an air of respectability, who came

up to him with an expression of astonished joy.

"Ah, M. le Comte!" he cried out. "To find you here—"

"I believe you mistake," said Athos coldly.

The other halted abruptly.

"Mistake? Monsieur, do you not recognize me—do you not know Gervais, your father's old steward, now the steward of your uncle? No, no, monsieur, you are the Count de la Fère!"

Athos glanced quickly around, then he held out his hand to the older man, and his warm smile lighted his face.

"Ah, Gervais!" he said affectionately. "It is indeed you? But you have changed terribly—"

The steward seized his hand and kissed it, with tears upon his cheeks. Before he could speak, Athos checked him, gave his horse to a groom, and led Gervais into the inn. He demanded a private room, and in two minutes they were alone.

"Ah, monsieur, I have searched all Paris to find you!" cried the old steward in agitation. "What luck, to see you here on the road! No one knew what had become of you. Some say you are with the army, some say you are dead."

"Gervais, I am dead," said Athos, with his air of inflexible calm. "Whence come you?"

"From Roussillon, monsieur! I have a message from your uncle. He is very ill; he will not live long; he begs you to come to him. He sent me to find you. He has no one of his own blood in the world. You alone are left."

"I, I only remain!" said Athos, and lowered his head. "Yes, that is true."

"I have been in Paris for a week, searching everywhere," went on Gervais. "Yesterday I came to see a cousin of mine, who lives here near Passy, who has a farm here. Monsieur, you will come home with me? Say you will come—"

Athos raised his head. His features were composed; one would have said they were of marble, so cold and bloodless had they become.

"My good Gervais, the Comte de la Fère is dead," he said calmly. "Athos the Musketeer alone remains!"

"Monsieur," pleaded the old man, "you have a duty. Ah, pardon me—it is true! Your uncle is dying. He begs only to see you. Whether you are dead or alive, I implore you to come and speak with him!"

"Ah!" said Athos. "Yes, one has a certain duty—" He sighed, and suddenly clasped the withered hand of the steward. "Gervais, look you; I am engaged in a matter not my own. I can not answer you here and now. You have money?"

The other made a gesture in the affirmative.

"Also, monsieur, I have a thousand livres which your uncle sent, thinking you might have need."

"I do not wish his money; keep it," said Athos coldly. "Come to the Hotel of the Musketeers, or rather the Hotel de Treville, in the Rue du Vieux-Colombier, precisely at noon tomorrow. Ask for M. Athos, you comprehend? If I am not there, come the next day at noon, and the next. For the present I am not my own master. The first day I am free, you will find me."

The faithful steward utter a cry of joy.

TEN MINUTES later Athos was once more riding toward Paris. He rode carelessly, blindly, not looking whither he was going; he was steeped in reflection, and his features wore an expression of gloomy bitterness. He was quite lost to everything around. The country folk on the road avoided him carefully. His distinguished air, his garb, and above all the magnificent horse he bestrode, the horse which Richelieu had presented to d'Artagnan, showed them that he was some noble best left alone.

At the point where the road dipped down under the hill of La Chaise, to seek the banks of the Seine, his horse suddenly halted of its own accord.

Athos lifted his head. This little glade, enclosed by trees, was empty save for a coach which stood directly ahead of him.

A rear wheel was broken. In the coach, thus tilted to one side, sat a young woman, magnificently dressed, and of the most dazzling beauty. She was staring at Athos; by the terror in her eyes, by the pallor of her features, he perceived that she was in great fear. A glance around showed him that she was absolutely alone.

Approaching the coach, Athos doffed his hat and bowed in the saddle, with that absolute grace of which he alone knew the secret.

"Madame," he said, "I see that you are in some distress. If I may have the honor of assisting you, I beg that you will consider me entirely at your service."

At these words the terror passed from her eyes and she clasped her hands together.

"Ah, monsieur, you are a gentleman. Will you have the goodness to remain until my servants return with another coach? Two soldiers just passed by; if they had not discerned your approach, they would have robbed me."

"Be at rest, madame." Athos dismounted and bowed again. "My name is Athos, of the Musketeers; you are safe. If you will tell me of what regiment those soldiers were, I shall see that they are punished as they deserve."

"I do not know, monsieur. I was too terrified to observe! I am the niece of M. d'Estrees, who is with the army. Our tiny château is close by. If you will have the goodness to escort me home I shall be eternally grateful!"

Athos assented with his air of grave courtesy. To himself he thought that never had he seen so beautiful a woman as this girl, for she was little more than a girl. Athos was a person who looked upon women with a jaundiced and critical eye; but this creature delighted him. Her fresh complection, her air of frank innocence, told that she was not of the court; her hair, of a rich golden yellow, was unpowdered; her eyes were of a limpid and serene blue. Above all, she radiated that indescribable charm which is the attribute of one woman in ten thousand, and which not one man in ten thousand ever encounters.

Before he could more than assent, however, a coach appeared, coming from the direction of Paris. The coachman drew up, the postilion opened the door, with bows to Mlle. d'Estrees and glances of curiosity at Athos.

"If mademoiselle will enter—"

"Good," she said. "This gentleman will escort me. You will bring his horse, François."

Athos handed her into the other coach, followed, and sat by her side. He felt somewhat ill at ease; the closeness of this charming girl, the air of frank abandon with which she turned to him, provoked singular feelings within him.

"You are a gentleman of the Musketeers?" she asked. "Ah, monsieur, how fortunate you came when you did! My father was in your corps. Well, shall I make a confession? When I saw you, I said to myself: 'That is no ordinary man! He is some great prince in disguise.' Confess, monsieur, I was right? Athos is the name of a mountain, not of a man."

"You are well versed in geography, mademoiselle," said Athos, and turned to her with that noble and singularly charming smile which he rarely showed, and then only when he was with some one who pleased him greatly. "We are all princes in disguise, my child, but too often the disguise—"

"*Tiens!* What sort of talk is this?" She broke in with a gay laugh. "My child, indeed! My reverend gray haired father—nonsense, monsieur! I am no babe, and you are no philosopher. But there is our château ahead; come, confess, is it not a pretty place?"

"It is adorable!" exclaimed Athos.

"Then you will enter with me, drink a glass of wine, allow your horse to be rubbed down, allow my cousin to thank you for your kindness, and if you are polite you may kiss my hand."

"With all my heart, mademoiselle," said Athos, and for once his grave manner was somewhat lightened. Her arch words, her laughing eyes, her youth and innocence, affected him in an extraordinary fashion.

DURING this brief conversation the horses had been pushed hard, and the coach approached a little château set in a small and evidently ancient park, closely crowded by surrounding buildings, yet all having the air of being far in the country. Two enormous oak trees quite shrouded the entrance gates of stone; the château itself proved to be a small structure but of very beautiful proportions, in the style of those erected during the reign of François I—that is to say, a century earlier.

Athos alighted, handed Mlle. d'Estrees from the coach, and she spoke to the servant who appeared at the doorway.

"My cousin—he has not departed yet?"

"I think he has gone to the stables, mademoiselle, to select a horse."

"Good! Tell him I wish to see him, and that we have a guest."

The servant departed. Athos was by this time very curious, and willingly accompanied the young lady into the house. He knew the name of d'Estrees, but he did not know that any one of the name could be living here; the former lady of Henri IV had bequeathed her children a title, and not a name.

Athos asked no questions, however. In a day when Chavigny was twitted to his face upon being sired by Richelieu, Athos possessed a singular delicacy and refinement, which was not the least of his virtues.

Having ordered wine, his hostess led him to a small library having only one window, high in the wall, and completely lined with books from floor to ceiling.

"This is our coolest chamber on such a day," she stated. "Also, it is my favorite room. Further, I desire to look up the name of Athos in an atlas."

"Then I may save you the trouble," declared Athos. "It is the name of a mountain in Greece, inhabited solely by anchorites, who admit no woman to their enclosure."

"While you, monsieur, by force of contrast—"

Athos smiled.

"I, mademoiselle, present neither contrast nor conformity. But what an admirable library! When you shall have read all these tomes, I dread to think of how scholarly you will become!"

"Oh, I have read them all," she rejoined. "That is to say, all except the Plato, which I find dull. And apparently I do not look the scholar, to judge by your observation!"

A servant entered with a magnificent salver of massive silver, on which were exquisite Venetian glasses and wine in a beaker of chased gold. Athos glanced at the shelves of books closest to hand; he was astonished to see the most handsome bindings, and among others the works of Rabelais in the superb binding designed by Fevart for Henri II. The Greek, Latin and French authors were mingled indiscriminately; Montaigne nestled cheek by jowl with a royal Book of Hours of the XIV Century encased in a jewel studded box from the hand of Pierre Lovat.

MADEMOISELLE D'ESTREES poured wine, and extended a glass to Athos, then raised her own.

"To the broken coach," she exclaimed gaily, "which led to so fortunate a meeting! Ah, I hear my cousin. I pray you to excuse me for one instant, monsieur."

And setting down her untouched glass, she left the room hastily.

Athos held his glass to the light, sniffed the bouquet of the wine, which was his favorite Malaga, then checked himself as he was on the point of sipping. His eye had caught a few grains of white powder on the tray at the foot of the beaker; the more singular, as the salver was highly polished.

Setting down his glass, Athos glanced around. A frightful suspicion seized upon him. He turned, went to the door, opened it, looked out into the hall. No one was there. He caught an echo of low voices from a half closed doorway beyond and stepped softly toward it. The voice

of a man came to him with astonishing words.

"You fool! It's the wrong man—*pardieu;* they picked the right horse, though! The pair of them must have exchanged horses."

"Is it my fault, then?" came the tones of Mlle. d'Estrees, but now singularly low and sullen. "We got the message, did our part well—"

"Finish it, then. I've no time to waste, Hélène!" returned the man. "I must be off at once. You say no admission can be gained without the ring? Well, I must get a ring made, since the one you sent is lost."

"Be sure it bears the arms of Bassompierre!" cautioned the woman. "And remember, they have guards at St. Saforin!"

The other laughed curtly.

"Bah! I'll take the child to Grenoble. No news today?"

"None from London as yet. Marconnet came this morning from Lyon. It is rumored that the king is ill," said the woman's voice. "If you have trouble, bring the boy here. But have a care! Bassompierre is in Paris. He will be here today or tomorrow."

"Tonight or tomorrow night, you mean," and the other laughed again. "Here, I've no more time to waste. I will take a look at our man; if he has not drunk your potion, then we must put a sword into him."

ATHOS, who had listened to this conversation with incredulous horror, made his way back to the library. He caught up his glass and emptied it behind a bookshelf, then replaced it and sank into a chair, closed his eyes, relaxed as though drugged.

The terrible paleness of his features assisted the illusion.

He was as though frozen in a sort of nightmare. What he had just overheard made it clear to him where he was, who this woman was and how he had been entrapped. This girl, whose innocence had so appealed to him, was the Hélène de Sirle of whom d'Artagnan had spoken; the ring mentioned was the ring on d'Artagnan's hand. The horrible realization left him benumbed, incapable of thinking or acting; for the moment he could only play his part supinely.

"He has it, *pardieu!*" said the man's voice at the door. "Good; I am off. Marconnet will take care of this one for you. The address of the goldsmith who made the other ring?"

The girl's voice responded inaudibly. Footsteps receded.

Athos opened his eyes, sat up, sweat starting on his brow. Only now did it occur to him that the man must have been Montforge. He went to the window and caught sight of a cavalier mounting and knew the man must be departing.

"Just God!" murmured Athos, sweeping a terrible look around the room. "Into what sort of hands have I fallen? Well, there is only one way out."

He drew his sword. The trembling which had seized upon him passed, and was resolved into a cold and deadly anger. Since meeting the broken down coach upon the highway, much time had elapsed; the afternoon was beginning to wane.

To gain the entrance, Athos was forced to pass the length of the hall. As he came to the door of the room where he had heard the conversation, a lackey came out, saw him, stopped in astonishment. Athos lifted his rapier.

"Not a sound!" he commanded sternly. "Turn around, lead the way!"

Instead of complying with this order, the lackey caught a poniard from his belt and at the same instant sent a cry ringing through the house. The rapier of Athos drove into his throat, too late to check that cry of alarm.

"The devil himself," said Athos, freeing his weapon, "has evidently supplied servants for this house!"

He strode hastily to the entrance, then checked himself. Hélène de Sirle, as he now knew her to be, stood at the foot of the steps. She had doubtless been saying farewell to Montforge, and had heard the

lackey's cry; swift, shrill orders were coming from her lips, and Athos caught sight of three men running across the garden, their weapons bared.

"It is he; kill him!" cried out the young woman in a tone of indescribable ferocity, and moved as though to lead her three men up the steps to the portal.

ATHOS perceived that he was trapped. Outside, near where the coach still stood waiting, he saw the horse he had ridden, but he was unable to reach the animal. With a swift motion, he caught hold of the open doors, swung them shut, and dropped a bar into place just as the three men hurled themselves upon the barrier with angry cries. The doors trembled, but did not give way.

Turning, Athos made for the wide staircase winding to the upper floor. He had recognized at a glance that his one hope of leaving this place alive lay in reaching his horse; but the cries of domestics ringing through the lower part of the house showed that he could not seek another entrance or even make use of a window. He dashed up the stairs, and was halfway to the upper floor when a pistolet exploded below.

Athos staggered, lost his balance, fell upon hands and knees. At the same instant a man with bared sword appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Marconnet!" came the cry from below. "Monsieur Marconnet, kill that man!"

"Gladly," responded the man above and, descending a step or two, darted a thrust at Athos.

The latter, however, had realized his peril, had heard the cry, knew that the man above was the courier arrived from Lyon that morning. He still held his own sword; parrying the lunge as he rose, he engaged Marconnet with a ferocity augmented by the sounds of men ascending the stairs behind and below him. Another moment, and he would be taken in rear.

That moment did not arrive.

A terrible cry burst from Marconnet. The rapier of Athos entered his stomach from below and emerged beneath his shoulder blade; before the steel could be plucked out, the unfortunate man plunged headlong, as though shot from a catapult, and his body was hurled upon two servants in the act of attacking Athos from behind. They were swept from their feet, carried downward, and came to the floor below with a crash, punctuated by cries of anguish.

Athos, catching up the rapier dropped by Marconnet, darted on to the top of the stairs. He had lost his hat; the pistol ball had carried it away, ploughing a slight gash across his scalp from which the blood was running freely.

Having already made up his mind exactly what he was to do, Athos started down the upper corridor to gain one of the rooms giving upon the front of the château. A door opened, a *femme-de-chambre* appeared and uttered a scream at sight of this stranger, sword in hand. Athos pushed her back into the room, slammed the door upon her, darted to a door farther on and, hurling himself into the room, closed and locked the door again.

"The devil!" exclaimed a voice. "What means this, monsieur?"

ATHOS whirled. He had gained the room which he desired, whose windows opened upon the front balcony of the château, but this room was not empty. It was a magnificent chamber. A massive oak bed, sculptured with passages from the lives of famous women and draped with the most exquisite of brocades and satins, occupied one entire end of the room. At one side was a long dressing table of mahogany, holding perfumes and pomades, glinting with jeweled trifles, that of a lady, beyond question.

Standing before the windows was a pale and half clothed young man who had apparently just left the bed to draw the curtains when the alarm was sounded. He had caught up a sword and bared the blade as he addressed Athos. The latter recognized him as a wealthy young noble of the court, one M. Sourens, who was

rapidly acquiring a reputation for extreme profligacy.

"Your pardon, monsieur," said Athos, having turned the key in the lock. "I did not know this room was occupied. If you will have the goodness to let me pass—"

"Pass as you came," said Sourens heatedly. "*Ventrebleu!* To have canaille like you rushing into one's room. Out of here before I chastise you, scullion!"

Athos became very pale.

"Monsieur, if your chastisements are as out of date as your oaths," he said with contempt, "they are scarcely to be feared. Stand aside, if you please."

He advanced toward the window, but Sourens flung himself before the glass angrily.

"Devil take you, I'll teach you how to speak to a gentleman—" and he attacked the intruder swiftly, viciously.

Athos met the attack with a slight smile of disdain, and for a moment held the infuriated young man in play. Cries and the stamp of feet were resounding through the building.

"Monsieur," said Athos politely, as the blades rasped, "I have no desire to harm you, but it is imperative that I leave this house at once by way of your window. I ask you to give me passage, in default of which I must kill you."

Maddened by the calm contempt in the air of Athos, the other heaped oaths upon him.

"Gallows bird!" he concluded. "Sneak-thief, I suppose you are some *bretteur* of the *faubourgs*, are you? Pass, indeed! You break into the room of Mlle. de Sirle and then—"

"Ah!" said Athos with an expression of satisfaction. "Since you appear to be occupying her room, monsieur, it is evident that you have no right here. Therefore I must keep my word."

And he ran the young man through the heart, composedly stepped across his body, and wrenched open a window.

The sun was just setting. Before him was a balcony, the gardens some twelve feet below. No one was in sight outside; the coach and horse still stood there, unguarded. Obviously, every one was searching through the house.

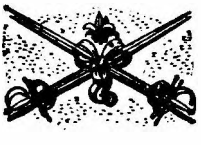
Athos thrust the borrowed sword into his own sheath, lifted the baldric over his head, and cast it into a flower bed below. Then, bestriding the rail of the balcony, he leaped after it.

Inside, the château was filled with confusion, but no one thought to look out in the gardens for the intruder. Athos picked up baldric and sword and mounted. In less than a moment he was riding toward the entrance gates, which stood wide open.

"Decidedly," he observed, "I do not envy d'Artagnan his errand to that young lady!"

He swayed suddenly, caught himself from falling, and passed a hand across his eyes. Then, settling his feet in the stirrups, he was between the gates and out in the road, where people began to stare at him, bareheaded and hurt as he was.

He forgot that he himself had not yet entered Paris.



TO BE CONTINUED

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Contest

AS PREVIOUSLY announced, *Adventure* is offering prizes for short essays. Here are the details. They concern the serial novel now running—"D'Artagnan", by Alexandre Dumas and H. Bedford-Jones.

Adventure offers these five *double* prizes for reader criticisms—each preferably about 200 words in length. A *book* and a *check* go to *each* of the five winners!

THE BOOK

A hand-bound first edition volume of "D'Artagnan" in full leather. In each copy is bound one page of original manuscript—*in the penwriting of Alexandre Dumas!* To real booklovers, one of these volumes should be of tremendous and lasting value. But in addition——

THE CHECK

With each book goes a check prize of $100. For a critique of 200 words length, this means fifty cents a word.

Conditions of the Contest

1. Anyone, except employees of the Butterick Publishing Company and the Covici, Friede Book Publishing Company, may submit an essay criticism.
2. No essays over 1000 words in length will be considered.
3. No manuscripts will be returned.
4. Winning manuscripts will become the property of the Butterick Publishing Company.
5. The general subject of the essays will be: "Is 'D'Artagnan' worthy to rank with the best Dumas—and why, or why not?" Pointed titles aimed at a sector of this question will not be barred. If contributors wish to discuss briefly how much of this novel was actually written by Dumas, that is allowable.
6. Judges of the contest will be the editors of *Adventure*.
7. The contest will close December 1.
8. Announcement of the prizewinners will be made in the February 1 issue of *Adventure*.

Why Does Aunt Ceily Wear a Red Bandanna?

LEONARD H. NASON clinches the argument that the black neckerchiefs the gobs wear had a practical rather than a symbolical origin—and he adds a few interesting comments on the first uniform white pants.

I note in the July 1st Camp-Fire Major Wheeler-Nicholson and Brother Reechia discussing the stripes on a gob's jumper collar, as well as the black neckerchief. I wrote a filler for *Adventure* on this very subject, that appeared within the past two or three years. The stripes were supposed to commemorate the victories of Trafalgar, Copenhagen and the Nile, but these three stripes are worn by all the navies involved in these three battles, both victor and vanquished. I doubt if France would want to commemorate Trafalgar. The neckerchief

was worn to bind up a man's head when he wasn't wearing his hat, to keep his hair out of his eyes. Remember that sailors wore long hair in those days, and the reason the jumper collar is as it is was to keep the greasy queue from soiling the jacket.

The black ding-dangle the Welsh Fusiliers wear to this day was for the same reason, but who'd connect this "flash," as it is called, with a sailor's jumper? I imagine the neckerchief was black so that it wouldn't show the dirt. There is, in either the Tate Gallery or the Whitehall Museum in London, an old engraving of a press gang, about 1740, and the sailors have black handkerchiefs around their necks. They look like a bunch of bootleggers. The British Navy didn't have any uniform then. I've forgotten when they got one, but it wasn't for a long time after. It appears that the origin of naval uniforms was due to a very economical captain, who cut up an old set of sails and made trousers for the crew out of them. The effect was so pleasing, everybody with the same color pants, all white and gleaming, that the idea was adopted by the Admiralty, and they went about uniforming the Fleet.—STEAMER.

Digger Fool Brunn

IF DEX VOLNEY'S tragic ending to the singularly fascinating career of poor Charlie Brunn left you too agitated and disturbed for comfort, get what little consolation you can from the following letter.

"Digger Fool Brunn" is a story of the ruthless and bitter struggle of a man to retrieve a mistake of his emotional youth. They are real people, these men of Unga. They are taken from life without much improvisation; only their characteristics are focused under the strong light of the most careful description I could command. Their names, even, have scarcely been changed. Louis Greenwood is dead now; died in his chair in his San Francisco office at the age of eighty-five, with his white hair upstanding like a riffle of snow, his finger to his lips, his diamond ring gleaming in the rays of the afternoon sun that shot through his spacious windows. Louis Greenwood got his start buying skins along the Alaska Peninsula fifty years ago. He lost some of his fingers while adrift in a skin *bidarke* in a blizzard off Unimak Island. After that his handwriting was a weird conglomeration of triangular shaped letters.

As for the Apollo Mine, it is remarkable that just the other day I ran upon this comment in *Cosmopolitan* for April, 1896:

> "An Alaskan Gold Mine:—The Apollo Consolidated Gold Mine is in a remote position, lying about one thousand miles a little south of west from Sitka, on the island of Unga. It is a property of considerable importance, inasmuch as its yield is at the rate of about $300,000 a year. It is also of much geological interest. It is sunk on a zone of fracture in lava (andesite) of Tertiary age, resembling in this and other respects the deposits of Bodie in California . . . The dislocating forces have not opened a clean fissure in the developed position of this property, partly on account of the rock's own irregular structure, and partly because the present workings are near the original surface. It is manifest that any fissure as it reaches the surface will tend to divide into branches and to splinter the rock, because the walls at the outcrop are free to yield in various directions . . ."

One evening, I came up to the mine with a spark gap wheel belonging to my wireless transmitter which I wanted trued up in the mine shop lathe. I entered the main tunnel and went up into the drifts where Charlie Brunn and his helper were at work; arrived in time to see Brunn setting his evening bunch of fuses to sputtering and snarling with his candle flame, while his little ragged white dog whined with fear and snapped at his master's ankles. Horsville looked on with his watery eyes that looked, in that flickery, smoky gloom, like black holes in his head.

Unga, today, is the place pictured in my first *Adventure* story—"Lead—No Grit"—a place of desolation and abandonment, inhabited for the most part by a few wretched squawmen crazed with moonshine, houses tumbling down, roofs falling in, doors unhinged, wharf decaying. One of my characters is still there, I believe. You see, he really escaped the fangs of the wolf dog.—DEX VOLNEY

Spinning Rawhide Ropes

IT CAN be done, but the author of "Juggling a Rope"—an authority on trick roping and spinning, as well as on ordinary lariat work—doesn't advise rawhide unless nothing else is handy.

The writer was interested in Mr. Greene's reply *in re* spinning rawhide ropes, in *Adventure* for August 15th inst.

Mr. Greene is right, to a certain extent. Rawhide ropes *can* be used for one or more of the commonest spinning stunts—in about the same degree, however, that a 17th Century, hit-or-miss blunderbuss *could* be used for shooting squirrels!

But a No. 12, braided cotton "Spot Cord" is a whole lot better, in fact the best for the purpose, being used by most professionals. So, too, is a .22 rifle somewhat better in the other case!

No rope spinner ever would attempt to spin a rawhide rope if anything else was at hand or procurable. Nevertheless, I can spin a 55 foot rawhide I possess; but it is not an easy trick to do.

The reason why rawhide ropes can not successfully be used, for general spinning, is because they are too stiff, too heavy and too rough. They are not limber

like a Spot Cord, and therefore will not conform to all the various contortions and gyrations that take place in a suitable rope in the hands of a professional rope spinner. A well worn hemp or manilla rope is better than a rawhide for spinning—but that isn't saying much!

The Camp-Fire brings out the truth about many erroneous beliefs; long may it shed its light!—CHARLES H. COE, 2947 Mills Ave, N. E., Washington, D. C.

Another Canal Digger

THE HARDY heroes who survived the hazards of the Isthmus found life ever afterward pretty tame. Mr. Galbraith's reminiscences are an interesting footnote to Mr. Young's story "Canal Diggers" which appeared August 15th.

For many years *Adventure* has been a never failing source of pleasure to this writer, just how many years you may judge from the fact that I was No. 1134 in the old Legion.

Never until date, however, have I placed on the glowing embers of the Camp-Fire, either the heartwood chunk of praise, or the smoke breeding fagot of criticism; though many times have I discussed Westerns with my very close friend Andy Adams. As I chased the festive broomtails and nursed the bossies for some eight years prior to the war, I naturally knew a little about the life, and always the *Adventure* Westerns were, and are, in character.

So then, you have to blame for this outburst, Edgar Young's "Canal Diggers", for I too was there. His tale brought back to vivid reality, the memories of that period of my life.

Was only fifteen at the time, though my C. C. papers will show eighteen, and I had drawn the name Cucaracha Kid—Cocorachy the boys called it. Great was my pride in a nickname from that gang of hard boiled hellions until I discovered that the word meant "cockroach." Thus it was in the year of grace 1905.

The old French excavators with buckets on a side elevating gear were still in use, and if I remember correctly we had only ten Bucyrus shovels on the job. Back from the right of way, buried in the jungle were miles (literally) of machinery and equipment, with the brass and copper parts missing. A pretty reliable story had it that a couple of live boys from the States loaded a chartered ship with this loot and merrily sailed away, without paying a cent for their plunder.

I thought I was a rodman, but somehow in the shuffle I became a trainman, under a yardmaster named Terrill or Ferrill, and the old boy kept me out with my string of dumps when the driving rain cut like knives and the storm so heavy I couldn't see the head of the old Belgian side tank from the cab.

My crew consisted of a Jamaica driver, fireman and brake boy, all huge men. The brake boy was a scant six feet, and the smallest; and I, being nearly five-seven, led him a dog's life. His duty was to stop the train by the simple expedient of running alongside and jamming a 2 or 3 foot section of rail between the spokes of a car. This "sprague" would chock up against the frame of the car and after a season the outfit would stop.

The cars were coupled by two foot long links, each side the "bumper", which were dropped over a hook on the next car. This arrangement made about three feet of play between cars and it took about half an hour for the layout to calm down, after the steam was off. The cars would jiggle up and down the track until tired. The alleged engine, I might add, had hand brakes—no air or even steam.

Upon a day, "Squash" the brake boy, stepped in between two cars to uncouple, and the bumpers decapitated him—just exactly that; slick as the guillotine could have done. I didn't enjoy that very much. This had happened several times, but notwithstanding everyday warnings the survivors continued to couple and uncouple in the same old way, without waiting for the works to stop. It was 118° down the Cut more than once, and we drank the water from the tanks of the engine; no ice water, no filtered water, and for a time, only native chow.

Black beef heads in the dirt of the market place, alive with flies; *iguanas* on a rope. Barricades still in the streets from the revolution; men with arms and hands chopped off in machete action, walking around. A bull fight in the plaza at Panama, with the Alcalde riding through the saloon doors for a drink. The little horses and the big snakes. Armadillos, parakeets and monkeys.

The deadly stench of the fog that *came up out of the ground* in the morning; the night the Wisconsin man licked sixteen soldiers single handed, refusing all help. I remember these things.

Seventy-one men and this boy left New York on the *Seguranca* in March. Eighteen died before July. The native burials—take 'em out and dump 'em in a hole and bring the box back. The spine chilling wails through all the hot night, after thees burials.

Every hut a place to buy a drink; Corrigan's American bar at Culebra, where Corrigan bluffed out the Cuban constabulary sergeant Betancourt, with Betancourt's gun stuck in his face.

My friend Duque, of the paper. We called on a lady; the hall was dark, the machete missed Duque and the seven-inch scar is still visible on my left leg. On about the same night Brandon, whose people had the tobacco concession for the Republic, grew five silver clamps in his head from a similar accident.

Guerini, the little Frenchman, weazened and yellow, a hangover from the days of De Lesseps, who would tell me as he pointed to the condors (?) overhead: "Meat for them—you—if you don't drink the good wine." Yes, I remember well these matters.

The magazine just under the hill at Culebra. I stayed there one night with the watchman, also a Frenchman, and stone deaf. The blasting dropped chunks of rock and hard earth right through the tin

roof, with some thousands of pounds of powder and other explosive parked beneath. The watchman slept through it all until I shook him awake, and then we stayed right there, because he could not find the key to the padlock on the door. Sure—I remember that.

All this and more comes to mind after reading Mr. Young's story.—HARRY R. GALBRAITH, Box 486, Colorado Springs.

A Lunar Note

COMRADE JOHNSTON joshes Joshua—and we have to admit that Major Gilson and the editors took liberties with the moon.

How come with Brother Gilson and his astronomy? The story—The Thraldom of Singan—is a good one, but a "full" moon rising at "midnight" anywhere on this terrestial ball is a new one to me. Straits of Macassar, the *locus in quo*, (ahem! excuse me) is pat on the Equator, which practically cuts Borneo in half. The moon is full when 180° from the sun; it must then rise practically at sunset. The greatest variation this year from six o'clock rising is 41 minutes late in latitude 0°. If the earth's orbit were a circle, the planet a sphere standing square on its axis (no tilt), full moon would rise at plumb six o'clock every month. I was not there when the earth was made, so it is not that way.—T. J. JOHNSTON, New York City.

Major Gilson replied—

My friend, Mr. Rud sent me on your letter; and when you've got to haul down your flag and give up your sword, the only thing to do is to do it with as good a grace as is possible. I surrender to a superior authority. I know you are right. The main stock in trade of a writer is, as you know, his powers of observation; and sometimes they let down over quite ordinary details.

The fact is that in fiction writing one seldom describes a scene exactly as one saw it. Though I have traveled more than most men, I should very soon run dry of experience if that were so. It is better, too, to get an artistic effect, I think, to paint composite scenes. I was born in a place called Dedham, in Essex, England, where the landscape painter, John Constable lived and did all his early work. He was very fond of the tall, square tower of Dedham Church, and in a great many of his pictures he put in that tower whether it happened to be there or not. That may be permissible "poetic licence," which is admissible in fiction on occasions when real places or real people are concerned. That doesn't justify me in taking liberties with the moon; and I am not going to pretend it does.

By the way, has it ever occurred to you how difficult it is for any author, however conscientious he may be, to avoid coming up against the expert? Apart from our ordinary literary qualifications, we have to be doctors, lawyers, botanists, geologists, and follow every other conceivable profession or trade you can think of. If we trot round the world collecting *facts*, with a guide book in one hand and a note-book in the other, we are apt to miss the real human element in the life around us that is the thing that counts in a story. That you think my tale a good one is more to me than the fact that I have libeled the moon, though I grant you, it would be a better one if I had not made this mistake. I have a nautical as well as a medical expert, both of whom are good enough to look through my work when there are parts of it where I may have got out of my depth. Most authors' errors pass unnoticed by the average reader; but I do know of slips in both Kipling and Robert Louis Stevenson—so "even Homer sometimes nods". And now I can only end with a promise to keep a more careful eye on the moon in future, so far as my work is concerned.—CHARLES GILSON, Sussex, England.

British Baseball

THIS CORRESPONDENT did not believe British gobs ever played baseball—as in a story by F. R. Pierce. Also the tale was accused of being anti-Chinese propaganda. Mr. Pierce's reply:

DEAR MR. BERNHEIM:

The story, "Wicker Baskets", came, as so many fiction stories do, from various sources. While I know it is rare indeed for Englishmen to interest themselves in baseball, nevertheless they occasionally do—just as Americans occasionally play cricket and lacrosse. Such situations frequently develop in the Orient and other remote places in the world where soldiers and sailors of different nations are in peaceful contact. Before the war, a friend of mine who is a well known fiction writer and who was at that time a member of the United States Navy with the Asiatic Fleet found himself aboard a German vessel. The German and American sailors were together quite a lot in those days. This man, mellowed by good German beer which was always served visitors aboard the German vessels, was called on to make a speech. He could not speak German, yet he made an attempt at it, and informs me it went over big.

The story of the ball game was related to me by an engineer friend who spends considerable time in the Orient. He saw the game until the sniper got busy; then he cleared out. It was from this story "Wicker Baskets" was built or written.

It is possible for an enlisted man to work up from the ranks to captain in the Navy. There have been several such men in the past and there will no doubt be others in the future. However, the term "captain" is also applied to any man, regardless of rank, who is in command of a vessel. He may be an ensign or even a boatswain in command of a tug boat, but in my gob days he was variously referred to as the captain, skipper, old man and occasionally

in stronger terms if he happened to be unpopular.

The conclusion of your letter suggests the story is anti-Chinese propaganda which the editor published because he had to. While an editor and writer might get away with conservation propaganda (such as conserving waterpower, game, timber and so forth), no editor or writer for *Adventure* would have a chance to use the pages of the magazine, which is published for entertainment, as a means of spreading racial, religious or political propaganda of any nature. Neither the readers nor the publishers would stand for it. Nor, so far as I know, is there any desire on the part of editors or writers in general to slip in propaganda stories. They are chiefly interested in turning out magazines that will interest a large number of people who wish to be entertained.

Personally I am anti-nothing. I find so much of interest and good in the various races and religions that there's not much time left to look for faults. When I become a paragon of perfection myself, which Heaven forbid, I'll probably become anti-a-lot-of-things.

When we wordsmiths rub a reader the wrong way, we are glad to hear from him; and I am very glad Mr. Rud forwarded your letter to me. Pardon the somewhat longwinded reply. This is a fine Summer day (Puget Sound propaganda) and one is apt to ramble on. Respectfully,

FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

The Merchant Marine

A READER believes that discrimination exists against American seamen on American vessels.

There has been much said in regard to having an American Merchant Marine manned by American seamen and very little done to try and get Americans on the ships of our Merchant Marine.

I was recently a member of the crew of a large passenger ship, operating out of New York to the East Coast of South America, that has a crew of over 150 men and in this crew there were not a dozen American members. Among this number of Americans there was only one American among the seamen, and he was an ex-service man, badly wounded in the leg from his services in the Army overseas, and had been going to sea for some time and was a good seaman.

Because this fellow resented being insulted by a foreign born freight clerk and for no cause other than this, the fellow was discharged from this ship after reaching New York; not only was he discharged but he was given one of the worst discharges that I have ever seen given for service on board ship. He was given this discharge by an American chief mate. Not only was this fellow given a discharge of this kind but the chief mate of the ship refused to let him explain the trouble that he had with the freight clerk. This happened to an American seaman on a ship under the American flag. I think this will explain why American ships are manned by foreigners.

I am ready to back up the above at any time and give the name of the ship that this happened on and also the names of the ones mentioned. I have no interest in this other than being able to see this printed so as the American public can see the treatment that this former soldier who almost gave his life 10 years ago, now receives under the flag that stands for right and justice.—A. W. MCGILL.

Romance

ON THE TENTH of this month, of October, 1928, old and new friends of *Adventure* and *Everybody's* are invited to a party. A magazine of genuine worth—planned to equal or excel all we have accomplished heretofore, is joining our ranks. It is *Romance.*

It is a magazine of love and venturing that is clean and real; a publication in which the relations of men and women are dignified and glorified. Let no one buy this magazine if he or she seeks the worst side of human life; it is not depicted.

Probably that warning is rather unnecessary, since the readers of *Adventure* never have been sought among the lower strata of patrons. But, in frankly asking for a "fair field and no favor" for *Romance,* I want no one to imagine it other than a genuine complement and worthy companion to *Adventure.*

Try a copy—and read it through. The magazine will start with one of the finest novels of this year—or any year. It is "The Sun Virgin", by Thomas Dixon, the man who wrote "The Birth of A Nation", "The Leopard's Spots", and a dozen other popular novels.

Beside Mr. Dixon, the first four issues will feature the following authors:

Mazo de la Roche	Robert Carse
Captain Dingle	Walt Coburn
Elizabeth Dejeans	William Corcoran
Hugh Fullerton	T. S. Stribling
Octavus Roy Cohen	R. W. Kauffman
Dorothy Graham	T. T. Flynn
Raymond S. Spears	J. Allan Dunn

Mr. Henry La Cossitt, late of the Doubleday, Doran Company, is editor. He and I join in promising you a real magazine and a real treat—in *Romance.*

—ANTHONY M. RUD

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Rigs and Rodeos

A READER from Old England seeks information as to the singleness or doubleness of the saddle riding gentry.

Request:—"I am particularly interested in the subject of stock saddles. It seems to be a controversal point, with Walt Coburn and Will James locking horns over the single- or double-ness of Montana. I know an old cowpuncher who used to pursue the classic arts of roping and frescoing the exteriors of Hereford babies in the days before and during the Klondike gold rush, when British Columbia was range country. Three days by stage from the railroad in those days! According to him, B. C. was single-cinch range. Now he is a village carrier, storekeeper and small farmer, with a pair of bowed legs and a scar all across his face to remind him of the old days. The scar is a memento of a certain black outlaw horse who used him as a plough wherewith to cut up an acre or two of British Columbian real estate.

I wonder if you can tell me if the single-cinch rig goes for all the Canadian ranges?

In addition I should be glad if you could let me have any information on Wyoming and Colorado rodeos (Cheyenne Frontier days excluded). Are there any local restrictions on certain events, such as that which prevents the throwing of the steer in Californian bulldogging? Is there any system of local championships, as in Canada. What towns hold regular rodeos?

I saw the Stricklands, Bob Crosby and family, Mike Hastings, Howard Tegland—presumably the one and only International bronc-riding champion of the whole wild world, since there has never been a similar contest, in name at least—and Pete Vandermeer, at Wembley in '24, but it is to my lasting sorrow that I didn't see enough. Incidentally, it looks as if the Hotel Roosevelt will have to dig up another trophy to replace the present one, which would appear to be destined to grace the Crosby mantelshelf. Oh you, Bob!—as Mrs Crosby is reported to have encouraged her spouse at Wembley (British Empire Exhibition)."

—G. E. S. TURNER, Oxford, England.

Reply, by Mr. Frank Earnest:—No doubt a great deal could be written on the relative merits of single and double rig saddles, but in nine cases out of ten from my own expereince, the fellows who contend the single rig to be the saddle either never used a double rig, or, at least, never has done any heavy roping. My experience, having ridden both kinds, has been that a double rig stays put without having to cinch the guts out of a horse, but a single rig won't. It may be that there is more give to a single rig when a horse is bucking, but for mine, I'll take the double rig.

I know a good many punchers who went to Canada, and those from the Southern States and some from Oregon and Idaho preferred the single rig, but the Colorado, Wyoming, Montana and Dakota boys mostly used the double. As I never rode the Canadian range, I can not say whether or not the single rig was more extensively used there or not. In these days not much heavy roping is done on the open ranges. All corral and chute work.

Nearly every town of any size and smaller ones too, in Colorado and Wyoming have rodeos at which mostly local talent competes. So far as I am aware, there are no restrictions as to bulldogging. Yes, there is a system awarding local championships in Wyoming and Colorado, and also in most other Western States. Rawlins, Wyoming, Sheridan, Rock Springs, Green River, and Wheatland, Wyoming, Colorado Springs, Steamboat Springs, Meeker and Fort Collins, Colorado, are some of the towns that usually hold regular rodoes. It might interest you to know that quite a number of championship contenders at rodoes are professionals, and never punched a cow in their lives. Yakima Cañutt was one of them. The range ain't what she used to was any more.

1/68

Whale Oil

A RECORD haul and a true fish story.

Request:—"Can you tell me about how much a whaling ship gets as returns from one of its trips? Have you any actual records of any of their trips?"—GUS SWARTZ, Los Angeles, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—The last account that I have of a big haul was that of the Norwegian whaler, *N. T. Nielson Alonso.* She was covered from stem to stern with layers of congealed grease, and gave off that peculiar odor of whale oil that you can smell a mile or more; she arrived in Sydney, Australia, on February 29th, from the Ross Sea, as she had to have bunker coal before proceeding to Larvik, Norway.

Unusually favorable conditions prevailed all the time during the four months' cruise, and the vessel's tanks were full of whale oil to their full capacity.

And it is recorded that fifty-seven thousand (57,000) barrels of oil were secured on that voyage. This is valued at about $1,330,000.

There is a record of a sulphur-bottom whale 95 feet in length and having a weight of 147 tons—294,000 pounds. This specimen, captured off the west coast of North America, is the largest whale of which there is authentic record; this would mean that this one was the largest animal ever known to man, up to that date.

The one that went ashore was big enough so that a 75-ton locomotive crane was unable to lift it out of the entrance to the Panama Canal, so it was towed 12 miles out to sea, and Navy aeroplanes dropped two 160-pound bombs and blew it to pieces.

Iron Cross

THE VARIOUS classes of this famous Prussian medal.

Request:—"I have two German Iron crosses, one bearing the date of 1914, straight ribbon, 1⅛ inches in width, large 'W' in the center, crown at the top. On the opposite side is the date 1813, in the center a three-leaved oak spray, just above that the initials 'FW' and another crown at the top.

The other cross is dated 1870 but has a triangular ribbon 1 7-16 inches in width. On the opposite side both are identical.

How many different classes of the German Iron cross and what are the distinguishing features?

What is the approximate value of each of the above crosses assuming them to be in nearly perfect condition?—ROBERT SCHENK, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—The Iron Cross is Prussian, not German. It was originated in 1813 by Frederick William. This medal has the 1813 reverse of your medals, the other side being blank. As far as I know, only one class was issued at that date. It lapsed, and was revived in 1870. The side dated 1870 is the obverse, and the reverse is the same as the old 1813 medal. The second class is worn with a black and white ribbon, and the official ones are in the neighborhood of 1⅝ inches across. The first class has no ribbon, and was worn on the tunic just above the belt; consequently, it had no reverse side. One does not get the first class until he has received the second class. He then ceases to wear the second class medal but folds the ribbon into one of the button-holes and binds it around the edge of the coat. There was also a grand cross, about 2¼ inches across, given to high generals and worn about the neck. The decoration then lapsed, and was revived in the World War, obverse 1914, reverse 1813. These were issued in second and third class and as grand cross.

Your specimen, 1⅛ inches across, is probably not official. I have seen these in various sizes and all grades of workmanship. Many were made privately and were quite elaborate and were sold for dress occasions. Those made during the last war vary considerably in minor details as a number of concerns made them, there being several million made. Now and then one finds one with a red enamel cross in the center. These were given for Red Cross service. The ribbon for these is just opposite to that of the combatant cross; that is, white where the black should be. The German way of mounting the ribbons is generally in two straight folds back of the cross, the whole sewed on to a piece of felt. The Austrian and Balkan method of wearing decorations is with a triangular folded ribbon.

It is hard to say what the value of your pieces would be today. During the war the iron crosses sold over here for all sorts of prices, varying from $1.00 to $10.00; I should say they averaged about $4.00. I doubt if it is worth more than $2.00 or $3.00 today, if genuine.

Aviation

AN INTERESTING exposition of various methods of communication in air. Lieutenant Townsend kindly undertook to answer this reader when the Ask Adventure chair of aeronautics was temporarily vacant. It is now filled, and capably, we are certain, by Lieutenant Jeffrey R. Sparks.

Request:—"1. How did observer and pilot talk with each other in the two-seater planes—the D. H., for instance—of the A. E. F.? Could they talk at all, with the engine and propeller roaring? Was there any equipment to enable them to do so? What was their usual method of communicating with the ground, as during artillery spotting?

2. How are these things done today, in Army planes?

3. Just what is a dropped message? I mean, dropped from an airplane. Is it a written message, and is there any container or weight attached to it?

—L. R., Petersburg, Va.

Reply, by Lieut. Glen R. Townsend:—1. There were several methods of communication between occupants of a plane in use in the A. E. F. The most common mechanical means was the telephone. Sets were designed especially for this purpose with the transmitter held in place by a breastplate and the receiver built into the helmet, thus affording opportunity for instant use while leaving the hands free. This method was generally satisfactory, I believe. An earlier method, developed chiefly for use in instructing student pilots, was the Gossport (I think that is correct) equipment. This consisted of a rubber tube with a mouthpiece for the instructor and hearing tubes for the student. A vibrator was built into the tube to facilitate the transmission of the voice waves. Frequently the occupants of a plane communicated only by the use of signs, and sometimes it was possible to cut the motor out for a brief period to enable the pilot and the observer to talk with each other.

For communication between plane and ground there were also various methods. Wireless telegraphy and wireless telephony were both used during the World War for this purpose. The telephone is, of course, the most satisfactory method when it is possible to use it, but in 1918 it had not been developed to its present state of efficiency. In the absence of one of these methods messages could be dropped by the plane and messages from the ground to the plane could be sent by means of a prearranged set of signals.

Panels were most frequently employed by the ground troops in forward areas in communicating with a plane. Panels in the Army are simply pieces of cloth of various sizes and shapes, white on one side and bright orange on the other. By arranging the panels on the ground in various designs according to a prearranged plan messages could be sent to the pilot or observer of a plane. At night or in heavy fog colored lights were sometimes used in the same way. The wigwag and semaphore systems could also be used for sending messages to a plane under certain conditions.

2. The present systems in use in the Army for communication between planes, and planes and the ground, are simply developments and refinements of the methods used during the war. Wireless telephony has been greatly perfected and it is now possible for a plane to hold communication with the ground by this method over a distance as great as 250 miles. Communication between planes in the air can also be carried on most efficiently by the same means. And in the large planes which carry a crew of several men the occupants are all connected by telephone. By means of a simple switch arrangement the leader of a bombing flight, for example, can communicate through his telephone with the other occupants of his plane, with the other planes which accompany him, and with one or more ground stations. However the dropped message is still used and panels are also used, chiefly for marking the position of command posts, front lines, etc. Colored lights and pyrotechnic signals—rockets and Very pistols—are also used under certain conditions.

3. A "dropped message" is simply what its name implies—a message written out in the ordinary form and dropped from the plane. For this purpose the message is enclosed in a small container (a small can, cloth or rubber bag) and a weight attached. A streamer of bright colored cloth is attached to aid those on the ground in following the message as it comes down and finding it should it fall in weeds, brush, etc. Before dropping a message a plane will fly over the approximate position of the troops with which it wishes to communicate. The ground troops, seeing the plane, will display panels to indicate the position of the unit command post. The plane flies low and drops the message as near as possible to the position of the panels.

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October 15th

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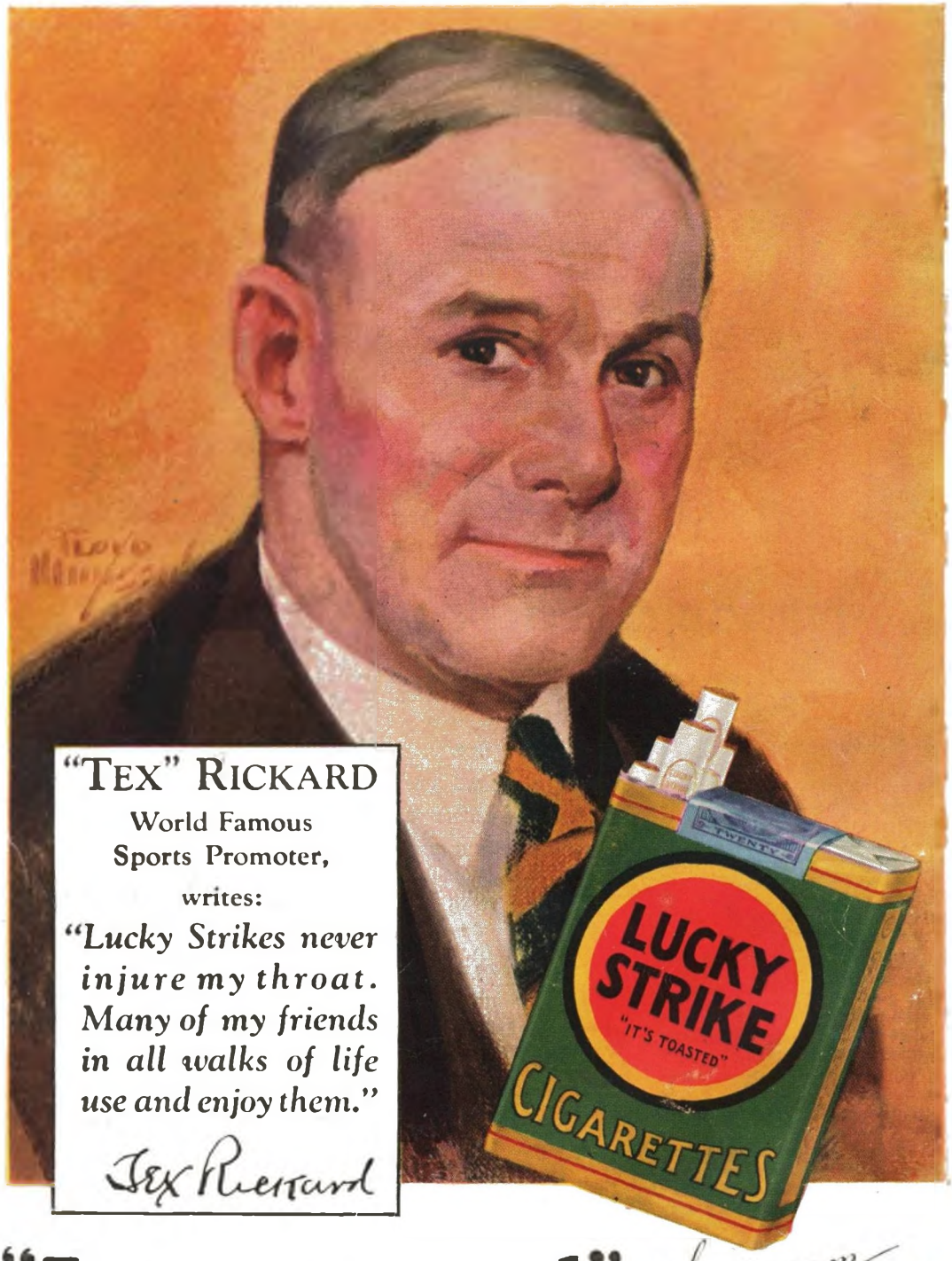

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