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October 1st

Adventure

Published Twice
A Month

THREE COMPLETE NOVELETTES

ARTHUR O. FRIEL · H. BEDFORD-JONES · L. PATRICK GREENE
F. R. BUCKLEY · R. V. GERY · HUGH PENDEXTER *and Others*

They gave a new Thrill

THAT'S WHY THEY GOT THERE . . . SO QUICKLY

IT WAS JUST TWO YEARS AFTER HE SAW HIS FIRST RACE HORSE THAT SANDE WAS CROWNED "EARL" OF AMERICAN JOCKEYS.

FAST SUCCESS STORY NO. 2

EARL SANDE

The first race horse he ever saw was hitched to the tailboard of a prairie schooner. 2 years later, every track in America resounded to the cry, "C'm *on* Sande!" *He always gave the public the best run for its money.* That's the reason, too, for OLD GOLD'S quick success. A real run for the smoker's money. A new taste-thrill. And no throat-hack. Sandes and OLD GOLDS are born . . . not made.

. . . . . **BETTER TOBACCOS**

"NOT A COUGH IN A CARLOAD"

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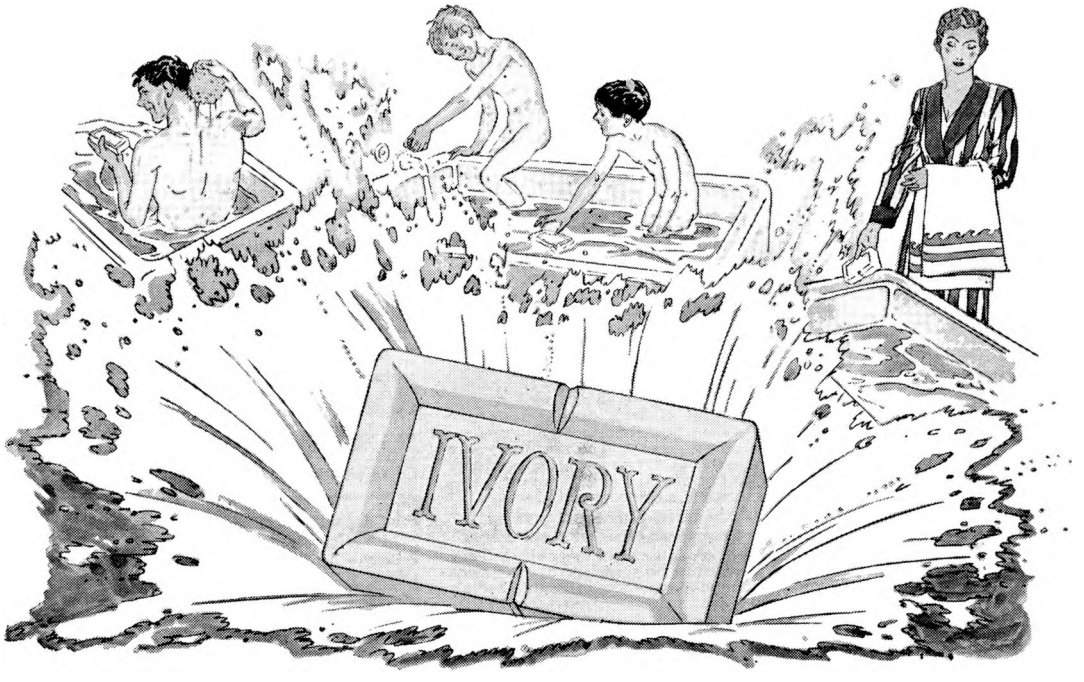

Revelations of a famous puritan

For a whole week I'd been sitting on a grocer's shelf in an Ivory wrapper . . . dissatisfied . . . longing for a little place beside a tub that I could call my own!

When Mrs. Tompkins bought me, I may have seemed white and calm, but I knew that at last I would discover what it means to be a cake of Ivory Soap . . .

Well, this morning I learned *all.* When Mr. Tompkins opened the bath-tub faucets, I wanted to get in the water! But I didn't expect Mr. Tompkins to *throw* me in. As I shot downwards, my short innocent life flashed before me. I thought, "This is the end!" But it wasn't, for I *floated.*

When Mr. Tompkins took his bath sponge to me I excitedly foamed. And the more I foamed the better friends Mr. Tompkins and I grew to be. My coat of bubbles was very becoming to him!

I had a rest until the children took their evening baths. Then I did fourteen high dives without once hitting bottom. And *foam!* I actually reduced my waistline cleaning up two pairs of very grubby knees. But when I got through I was proud of those children.

Mrs. Tompkins looked so tired that I was very glad to do a little overtime work for her just before she went to bed. I bubbled out my sympathy in heaps of soothing bubbles. And afterwards she did look as rosy and comforted as a sleepy baby.

I think I'm going to be so busy that I shan't have time to continue this diary. However, it does my heart good to know that the Tompkinses like me so well. So I'm going to wear myself down to a sliver for them!

. . . kind to everything it touches · $99^{44}/_{100}\%$ Pure · "It floats"

Adventure
(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

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A. A. Proctor
EDITOR

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HELL DIVER

A Novelette of Lost Treasure in Southern Mexico

By ARTHUR O. FRIEL

CHAPTER I

ESCAPE

HELL DIVER Hoke lifted his head above the surface of the Rio Grande, snatched a fresh lungful of air and vanished. Three seconds later the water was ripped by bullets.

The spurts and splashes subsided. The dark stream, dull but visible in the thin light of a half moon, flowed on, sullen, silent, without another break. The horsemen on the Texas shore watched keenly. At length one laconically asserted—

"Sunk."

Turning his horse, he trotted northward. The others followed, rifles loose, minds grimly content. No man could have reached the other side without again emerging for air. Whether shot or drowned, the robber of old Dan Mattison was food for the catfish.

Away downstream, the dead fugitive drew himself up on the Mexican bank, caught new wind, squeezed water from his black hair and laughed in sneering triumph.

"Yah-ha-ha! Saps! Takes faster guys than you to dust a hell diver's tail, I'll tell the world. This for you."

One broad hand rose to the end of his long nose, and the stubby fingers waggled contempt at the outwitted pursuers. The other slid into a pocket and fondled the wet roll of bills so easily obtained by spying on old Dan and, at the opportune time, socking him under the ear while the safe was open. One punch, a fast ride, an expert swim, and now he was several hundred dollars to the good and out of reach.

The exultation of escape was enhanced by pride in his natatorial prowess. Not many men could have swum so far and fast under water. Still fewer could, while swimming, have dived so quickly and swerved so sharply beneath the surface. The natural gift which had been his in boyhood still was good and the name it had earned him then still was true.

That sobriquet, bestowed on him by bigger boys at the old swimming hole far away in Pennsylvania, had been partly derisive, partly envious. The derision applied to his physical resemblance to the water bird, the grebe; the envy to his skill. His sharp nose and quick, small eyes were birdlike; his short arms and legs, ending in hands and feet so wide as to seem almost webbed, gave him fleshy paddles which drove him faster than the longer but slower sweeps of his playmates. When to this surface velocity he added the hell diver's ability to disappear

at will and reappear at some unexpected spot rods away, the creation of his nickname was inevitable.

The left handed tribute had made him decidedly conceited at the time; and since then, though he was considerably older and had changed his name more than once, to himself he still was Hell diver Hoke, able to outdistance or outsmart anybody in water, and almost any one on land. Successive escapes from retribution in various parts of the country had nourished not only self-esteem, but contempt for the brains of Nemesis. The incident just past was a case in point.

Had those avengers been canny enough to keep an eye downstream, they might possibly have spied the whitish blur of his face when, at intervals, he turned on his back and allowed nose and mouth to protrude just far enough to suck in more air. But, being straight shooting, straight thinking fools, they had watched for him to come up in a straight line toward the south. Hicks! A hell diver who had gotten away with robberies all the way from the Susquehanna to the Colorado was not so dumb as that. He laughed again and repeated his ribald gesture.

Then he turned to cool calculation. His narrowed eyes went to the approximate place upstream where he had swung off his lathered mare and plunged into the river. Perhaps the beast still was there, unfound in the brush. She had been too exhausted to follow the riders home of her own accord. It would be easy enough to recross the watery barrier and hunt for her. But, after brief thought, the refugee shook his head. The brute was a poor plug anyhow, and now she was all in.

His gaze moved southward. Down that way, not too many miles off, was a railroad running to Monterey. Somebody or other had said Monterey was a good burg to lie up in; more than a hundred miles from the Border, with no prohibition, good looking women, living expenses cheap enough, an American dollar worth two Mex, and plenty of Americans around to talk to if a gent got lonesome. Also, it was a junction point for trains running in all directions; so when a guy got fed up he could pull out for anywhere.

His hand squeezed the roll again, and a grin grew under the beak-like nose. Forthwith he stripped, wrung out his soggy garments, wiped the short but heavy revolver in his shoulder holster as dry as he could and redressed. Then, without another glance at the States, he plodded away through the riverside growth and out into the mesquite, heading into the vast mystery of Mexico.

CHAPTER II

NEWS

IN THE BARROOM of one of the lesser hotels of Monterey, a metamorphosed hobo sat in complete comfort and content.

Dirty, wrinkled, unshaven, hatless, Hoke had come into the railroad yard by freight. Side door Pullmans saved both money and attention by possible talkers. Now, bathed and barbered, he lounged in a new suit of quiet gray, a Stetson of the same subdued shade, blue shirt and socks and neat black shoes. He had a cool, clean room upstairs, a bottle of mescal on the table before him, and some of that potent liquor in his stomach and brain. Also he had some five hundred dollars of American paper in his shoes, and a fistful of silver pesos in his pocket. Best of all, he had entire freedom from the phantom which for years had hovered behind him in the States—the possibility of eventual recognition and arrest. Although this specter had seldom worried him much, it had never given him complete peace. Here it was impotent, lost in the distances, walled out by the saw toothed mountains encompassing this sweet little semi-tropic city.

He liked the new town, with its half Spanish, half American atmosphere; its flowery parks, palm plumed homes, calling parrots and unhurried Southern people on the one hand; smoky Northern industrial buildings and American faces

and voices on the other. The first soothed the senses, the second promised opportunity for making a bit of profit before departure. With big factories running there must be plenty of money in pockets on pay days; so when his capital ran short a little strong arm work should furnish funds for a vacation elsewhere—perhaps up in Arizona, where he was not yet known. The news of the Mattison affair would not have traveled that far; it was only a small store robbery; and besides, the robber was dead. For a corpse, Hoke was sitting pretty.

With a satisfied smile he poured another drink of the pale mescal, tilted his chair back against the wall, lighted a cigar. Hat over eyes, he drowsed, drawing occasionally at his smoke. Soon the cigar slipped from his fingers, and knowledge of his whereabouts from his mind.

Some time later voices reached to his slumbering brain. They were talking at his right, between him and the street door. One, argumentative, had spoken a word which might have aroused the dozer even if he had not been already on the point of awaking—

"Gold!"

His eyes opened, slid sidewise. At a near table sat two men; one young, tall, slender, blond; the other middle aged, stocky, swarthy. Both were dressed somewhat baggily and had their slouch hats shoved well back. Between them stood bottles and glasses of beer. The young fellow who had raised his voice was leaning forward assertively. His more stolid companion regarded him with a tolerant grin.

"Huh-huh-huh!" chuckled the latter. "Gold's nothin' to git steamed up about. Mexico's lousy with it. Trouble is, most of it's fool's gold. So's yours."

"How d'you figure that? There can't be pyrites in—"

"Ain't talkin' about pyrites. Talkin' about the other kind o' fool's gold. Kind that fools go after. Long ways off. When you git there, 'tain't there. Or if 'tis there and you do git it, some wise guy hijacks you."

"I'll take a chance on that."

"Uh-huh? Awright. 'T's your funeral. Go to it."

With another good natured chuckle, the swarthy man quaffed more beer, sucked his heavy black mustache and lazily regarded the tall youngster. Although dark as a Mexican, he was indisputably American; an old-timer, devoid of all illusions. The slender chap was as evidently a recent arrival and yearning to chase a rainbow.

Hoke's lids closed again. Motionless, he sat as before, chin on chest.

"Oh, come on, Lyons. Take a chance with me," urged the blond. "Are you going to rot here the rest of your life bossing a gang of spig steel workers?"

"Prob'ly," Lyons cheerfully assented. "And you better stick with me, Perry. Good pay, steady job, safe and sane—"

"Oh, to the devil with the safety and sanity! Work for wages, when I can rake a million or so out of that lake?"

"Soft pedal, kid. Needn't tell the world about it, even if 'tis a bunch o' boloney."

A brief silence. Hoke felt eyes scanning him.

"Oh, he's out," asserted Perry.

"Mebbe. Yup, guess he is. Any bird that inhales a whole quart o' mescal this time o' day would be."

AT THAT Hoke nearly lifted his head. The mescal bottle had been two-thirds full when he dozed off. Had the barman gypped him of the rest? But he caught himself in time. Lyons' next words rewarded his restraint.

"Uh-huh. He ain't with us. Well, spill the rest o' your pipe dream if you want. I've heard so many, one more won't hurt. Where's your funny lake?"

"Down south of a place called Guanajara. It's shallow, and the gold's out in the middle. The Indians dumped it there to keep it from the Spaniards a long time back, and never told—"

"Huh-huh-huh!" Lyons chuckle broke in. "That's a hot one! Kid, you haven't

even got the name right. You mean Guadalajara. And the lake south o' there's Chapala, biggest in Mexico, somewheres 'tween fifty and a hundred miles long. Figure pickin' gold out o' the middle o' that!"

The continued ridicule brought an angry flush to Perry's cheeks. But his answer was a cool counterthrust—

"Ever been there?"

"Nope," admitted the scoffer. "But—"

"But you know all about something you've never seen?" Perry laughed sarcastically. "Come off your perch! And laugh this off: The lake's not Chapala and it's not big. It's a little place called Tzuntzon."

"As how?"

"Tzuntzon. Know all about that too, don't you, old bluffer?"

"Nope," grudgingly confessed the other. "Never heard of it. But the yarn's the same old stuff. Indian gold hid in a cave, buried in some ruins, sunk in a lake—I've heard that one a hundred times. S'posin' it's true this time, how d'you git the gold out?"

"That's where you come in. The lake's shallow, I told you. You're a good swimmer. Dive down and locate the stuff and then—"

"Who, me? Nix! Do your own divin'."

"I can't."

"Why?"

"Never learned to swim. But it would be play for you. Then with a boat and rope and bucket or something—"

"Not me. That's out. Forgit it, Perry! Let fool's gold lay."

His refusal was decisive. Perry's mouth set, as if repressing some caustic retort. Wordless, he took a swallow of the cool amber liquid, loaded a pipe and soberly puffed. Then the half-door at the entrance swung, hard leather heels entered, and a new voice spoke.

"Howdy, Tom," it drawled.

"Huh! Well, well, howdy, Dick!" heartily responded Lyons. "When'd you git back? '

"Just now. How's tricks?"

"Same's ever. Squat. Meet Perry. Perry, this's Dick McConaughy. What you havin', Dick?"

"Oh—a schooner of suds."

Hoke sneaked a look from under his hatbrim at the newcomer, a tall, angular, leather faced American with light brown clothes and iron-gray hair. He reclosed his eyes just in time to dodge a keen glance from McConaughy.

"Who's the souse?" the latter casually inquired.

"Dunno. Stranger. What's new north o' the line?"

"Nothing much. Pretty quiet. Sort of a dirty murder the other night over Camargo way. Old fellow named Mattison got knocked in the head and robbed by a bum he'd hired. Well, here's how!"

Through the eavesdropper at the other table crept freezing paralysis. Murder! Old Mattison dead!

No—that couldn't be right. He hadn't killed the old man—only socked him with his bare fist . . .

Through his daze came Lyons' question—

"'D they git the killer?"

"Yep. Some of the local lads ran him down and shot him in the big river."

"Good! Know who he was?"

"Yep. He called himself Nick Maloney. But the sheriff found out he was a stickup man by name of Hoke, from the East Coast. Seems he broke jail over there some years back and never got caught. But there were police notices out with his picture, and they've traced him back."

"Hoke, hey? Funny name. What'd he look like?"

"Don't ask me. I didn't see the picture or hear the description. He's a dead dog now, anyway. Well, what's new in town?"

The answer did not penetrate to Hoke's brain. He still combated the charge of murder. Of robberies, by stealth or violence, he had committed plenty since his first and only arrest. But he never had killed anybody. And he had not murdered anybody now. If Dan Mattison was dead it was an accident. He remembered that the gray head had struck hard against the safe after the

expected blow from behind; also that the old man's heart was said to be weak. But that wasn't Hoke's fault. If a man couldn't stand a poke under the ear, that was his own tough luck. It wasn't murder. Murder meant deliberate, intentional killing.

The specious self-defense struggled within him, then steadied and subsided before cold practicality. Intentionally or not, he was a killer. If ever detected north of the line he would be executed. With police paper out against him he would be detected, despite his supposed death. He could not change his features, height, frame, hands, feet, voice, walk, and especially his finger prints, enough to elude recognition and retribution somewhere. His disappearance from the States, meant to be only temporary, must be permanent. He could never go back.

Moreover, he could not even remain in Monterey. Its distance from the Border, its cordon of mountains, were but false protectors. Already, before he was settled in the town, had arrived an American to tell of the "dirty murder." Soon or late would arrive some other who knew the Hoke face, with its unmistakable beak. And then, in a town as Americanized as this, his shrift would be short. With or without the connivance of the Mexican police, he would be taken for a ride.

CHAPTER III

BAIT

"WELL, Tom, it might not be all hokum. Those things have happened." McConaughy was speaking judicially, looking first at Lyons, then at Perry.

"There were Leahy and Powell, now, pulled a sweet pot of old gold out of a pond down Oaxaca way about ten years back," he continued. "And Sandiford, Adams, and O'Keefe located a big cache in a Durango cave. And so on. Yep, they do happen. But of course there's a lot of bunk floating around, too. I'm off that kind of stuff myself. Too old for it. But I wouldn't discourage any young fellow who wanted to try his luck. And, asking no questions about just where your lake lies, Perry, I might happen to know something or other that'd help you if it's north of—well, say Zacatecas."

"Thanks," responded Perry. "But it's away south of there."

McConaughy shrugged.

"Out of my range, then."

"Mine too," admitted Lyons. "I never been south o' Tampico. 'N' I ain't goin'."

A silence ensued. Lyons' repeated refusal to engage in the venture seemed to discourage further conversation. Perry frowned again, refilled his pipe, sat uncommunicative. McConaughy regarded both, let his gaze drift to the beaked profile of the hat shadowed mescal drinker, idly contemplated him a moment, yawned and looked down at his watch.

"Well, guess I'll *vamose*," he drawled, rising. "Coming my way, lads?"

"Yup," assented Lyons, kicking back his chair.

"Not just now," declined Perry. "See you later."

With casual nods, the lean man and the stocky one departed. Perry, slowly smoking, stared gloomily at Lyons' empty chair. For a minute or two the only sounds were passing footsteps and the buzz of flies. Then the seemingly comatose shape at the other table neatly fell off its seat.

Hoke had recovered from his funk and put his wits to work. He had listened anew, remembered the locations of Zacatecas and Tampico, recalled also the principal points south of there. He had a good memory, plus a habit, years old, of studying railroad maps. It paid a guy on the dodge to know in advance how to make his next move quick. And today, though no longer on guard against the rear, he had looked over a Mexican map with the same studious care. Now he could use the knowledge thus gained.

Sitting up on the floor, he stared about with comical bewilderment which made the bartender and the American grin.

Sheepishly he grinned in reply, arose, dusted himself, settled his hat and, abandoning his bottle, walked doorward. Beside Perry's table he paused.

"Gees, that mescal packs an awful wallop, don't it?" he proffered.

"Does it?" countered Perry.

"I'll say so." Hoke looked at the beer before the smoker, then flattered, "You're a wise guy to stick to that."

No reply came for several seconds. The blue eyes, decidedly cool, took in the stranger's twinkling gaze, tanned face and hands, neat clothing. Meanwhile Hoke observed that the youngster, hitherto seen only in profile, was wider of shoulder and chest than he had seemed. Powerfully framed, and some ten years junior to the refugee, he would be a very bad risk in bare handed combat. Contrariwise, he probably was not fast with a gun. Young men confident of their fistic force seldom are.

"Beer's strong enough for me," came Perry's casual answer.

"Me too, I guess." Hoke grinned. "I ain't used to mescal. Fact is, I been on the wagon a long time. Fella has to, down south, when he's playin' a lone hand. So, hittin' this burg on my way north, I slipped off my dry seat in more ways than one."

He nodded back toward his upset chair. The listener's impersonal watch had shown a spark of interest at the words "down south." Now, as the intruder concluded, he smiled.

"Last chance before turning camel," he remarked. "I see."

"Right. And if I ain't botherin' you, what's goin' on up home? I ain't seen a paper the last three months, exceptin' one in Mex City the other day. Been back in the hills."

"You're not bothering. Sit down."

HOKE slid into Lyons' former chair, turned to the drowsy bartender and ordered a couple of cigars. The demand was voiced in Spanish, of which he had picked up a working vocabulary since invading the Southwest. When they were brought he paid with his Mexican silver. The brief byplay, meant to support his claim to having come from the interior, was not ignored by the younger man.

"You haven't missed much," he continued, more companionably. "There have been some bad airplane accidents, but that's about all that's happened recently. What's doing down south?"

"Nothin' big. Just the usual shootin's." Hoke's tone was bored. "And I been too busy to keep track of them."

"How far south were you?"

"Oh, kind of west and south and north from Mex City. Knockin' around, what I mean. First and last, I seen a lot of territory. Been prospectin'."

"Oh. Any luck?"

"So-so. I located somethin', but I can't swing it alone. So I'm goin' north to git backin."

"Gold?"

"Uh-huh. But it's in the rock, and breakin' it out ain't a one-man game, and so—"

Hoke paused abruptly, as if realizing that he was revealing too much of his private business to a new acquaintance; then took his turn at questioning.

"Been down that way yourself?" he queried.

"Not yet."

"Not yet, hey? Sounds like you was thinkin' of goin' some time. Well, it's interestin' country. And there's plenty of stuff to pick up if a fella can find it. But that ain't always so easy."

Another pause. Hoke smoked meditatively, eyes fixed on the farther wall as if seeing things far away. Perry, too, seemed to be thinking. Presently the older man yawned.

"Ho-hum! Golly, I'm gittin' sleepy again. Guess I'll go upstairs and lay down till supper time."

"Staying here?"

"Uh-huh. You?"

"No. I just drop in here once in awhile for a beer. Er—want to see the town tonight?"

Hoke's head shook. There would be scant pleasure or profit in showing himself around town now.

"Tired," he evaded. "Just blew in today, and I guess I'll go on tomorra, so I'll stick in the house and rest up. But thanks for offerin'. Glad to've met you, Mister—uh—"

"Perry."

"Jackson's my name. If you got nothin' better on hand, drop in awhile this evenin'. Seems good to chin with a white man again after bein' amongst greasers so long. Otherwise, *adios!*"

He stood again.

"So long," guardedly responded Perry.

Hoke turned away. Walking steadily, he departed toward the lobby. The man at the table watched his solid, well dressed shape disappear, relighted his pipe and glanced down at the gift cigar. After an interval he pocketed it, sauntered away to the hotel desk, scanned the register, found the entry: W. B. Jackson—6.

Then, glancing at the clock, he swung out and away toward his boarding house.

Up in room No. 6, Hoke, alias Jackson, grinned out at the mountains, which had proved to be unreliable defenders. He must take a quick, long jump south of them, and he would. But unless his judgment was at fault he would not go alone.

That big blue eyed kid down below, rebellious against workaday monotony, thirsting to hit a treasure trail, half encouraged by McConaughy, subtly baited by a well dressed stranger going north, would return for the suggested smoke talk with the experienced wanderer from "down south" who had already made his own strike. Then, leave it to Hoke to hook him. His big idea might be only a dream, his mysterious lake only a mirage. But then again there might be something in it. And in that case . . .

His grin grew thinner, colder, and his left biceps rubbed softly against the hidden holster. Dirty murderer, was he? Well, all right!

CHAPTER IV

SOUTH

SOME five hundred miles south from Monterey, a little blue lake nestled at the bottom of a deep green bowl. All around it were gently sloping shores, luxuriant with mingled palms and hardwoods; and, half a mile or so from the edge of the placid water, lofty hills, densely timbered, arose in steep upshoots toward the far white clouds.

Other lakelets, as small and blue and lovely as this one, lay in other depressions among those shaggy heights, hidden from all eyes but those of native birds, beasts and men. The men were short, brown, secretive mountaineers who traveled their own dim trails, went forth at times into the outer world for purposes of trade, but told no outsiders anything about their own rugged territory. They were the Tarasco Indians, lees of a once warlike nation, and never forgetful of the tortures inflicted on their ancient chiefs, four centuries ago, by Nuño de Guzman and his gold seeking Spaniards. Although now comparatively few and long subjugated, they were not likely to guide any white men to those hidden tarns, in one of which might lie treasure unfound by the rapacious Conquistadores.

Yet now, on a squirmy path which led for leagues into the fastnesses from the highland town of Guanajara, a shabby Tarasco was conducting two white strangers toward the sapphire gem in the emerald hollow. Moreover, he was uncomplainingly carrying a bulky pack basket laden with their equipment. But the smolder in his dark eyes, the hard set of his mouth, the sullen plod of his advance, all told that he was not serving willingly. So did the rope around his neck, the other end of which was knotted to the belt of the Northerner who followed. Without that noose he might long ago have thrown off the tump band and plunged to freedom in the thick forest.

His slavery was directly due to the short, sharp nosed *gringo* who now trod behind and watched him. The other

foreigner, younger, taller, more regular of feature and frank of gaze, had remonstrated against the use of that halter, but had capitulated to the assertion:

"Perry, I know how to handle these birds. They'll all ditch you if they ain't hitched. I made a deal with the headman back there, but that don't mean this fella will go through unless he's got to. We're payin' for him, so we got a right to work him."

Most of which, though Perry did not know it, was an arrant lie.

The burden bearer was not a peon, hired out by a boss, but a temporary slave, captured by Hoke at an outlying hut and convinced that the revolver against his stomach would blow him inside out unless he kept his mouth shut, walked fast and led true. Thus intimidated, he had entered the village, assumed his load and departed without a word to any watchers. As soon as the forest hid the trio his captor had looped his throat. And now, as the serf plodded ahead and the young treasure hunter trod behind, Hell Diver's thin mouth quirked repeatedly with self-satisfaction. Once more he had outsmarted everybody.

As expected, Perry had come to his room that night in Monterey to pick up pointers about the country and the people "down south." The spurious expert had invented various generalities and spun several smooth yarns of imaginary exploits, one of which revealed his ability to swim and dive. Continuance of this sly baiting had eventually incited the dreamer to make the proposition of partnership for which the refugee had angled; also to disclose the source of the discloser's information.

The tale was not a street rumor or a barroom babble. On the contrary, Perry had chanced to overhear two Mexicans, one of whom was known to have come from the south, soberly and secretly discussing plans for getting that gold. Both of these schemers had gotten into a brawl later that night and been found the next morning, plentifully perforated. Since then the fortuitous eavesdropper had dreamed night and day of retrieving the sunken hoard, only to be blocked by practical realization of his own deficiencies —inability to swim, inexperience in such quests and paucity of funds. He had come not long ago from an Arizona city, gone broke in Monterey, taken a job in one of the American owned factories, saved a little money since then; enough, perhaps, to take him to Guanajara. But this sum could not buy the other things he needed.

"YOU'VE got the experience with the natives and the swimming power," Perry summarized. "I've got the knowledge of what's there and how to get to it. The place isn't on any map, by the way. Each of us needs the other, because it's at least a two-man job, one topside and one down under; and, besides, the Indians might not be very friendly if they knew what we were about. But both of us working together can put it over, I bet. So it's a fifty-fifty game, straight through."

To which, after some pretense of skeptical consideration, Hoke had acquiesced—with mental reservations.

"All right, *hombre*, I'll give it a whirl. My own hard rock gold can wait awhile. If this lake of yours comes through we can work that mine ourselves, and if it don't I'm no worse off. And the quicker we hop to it the better. Know where we can outfit cheap?"

"You bet. I've been nosing around second hand shops ever since I got the news. And I figure we'd better go as bird hunters or naturalists, or something of the sort. That'll bluff both the Indians and the officials, who are likely to get nosey if we carry rifles, but won't think anything of shotguns. How does that sound to you?"

"Sounds like you had a good head on you," flattered Hoke. "I was thinkin' the same way myself. Let's pick up what we want and drift out tonight, nobody the wiser."

So they had done. And so they had reached Guanajara, equipped with hunting paraphernalia; also with revolvers concealed under their coats. They were, they said, interested in lake waterfowl, and would pay a guide well to lead them to good shooting among the southern hills. But somehow the offer failed to interest the outwardly apathetic, inwardly shrewd Tarascos, who, after looking unblinkingly into Hoke's eyes, ambled away with curt grunts of refusal. Therefore, at the end, the elder of the two outlanders had resorted to the hidden gun, the snarling tones, the deadly eye which so often had served his purposes in another land. And, as usual, they had worked.

Now, forging steadily into the wilderness, both aliens walked with mingled eagerness and wariness. Neither was yet accustomed to the dense forest, so different from the Eastern woodlands or the Western wastes.

Occasionally they glimpsed water down a steep slope; and twice, crossing a space bared by a landslide or emerging at the verge of a perpendicular cliff, they saw fair blue lakelets smiling skyward from deep verdant chalices. At each of these views Hoke growled to the captive:

"*Aquí?* Here?"

Each time the answer was a negative grunt. As the second pond vanished behind them Hoke threw over a shoulder a grin and a bit of self-praise.

"Told you I knew my stuff, didn't I? The feel of that rope's keepin' this bird from tryin' to switch us off on to the wrong pond."

"You know how to run 'em, Jack," admitted Perry. But, as he glanced at the stoical native, he frowned. He still disliked the use of the rope.

At length the Americans found themselves swinging downhill toward a bright surface which did not fade away. Instead it came nearer, broadened to full size, finally lay before them in naked beauty. On its margin the Tarasco stopped and announced:

"Tzuntzon."

CHAPTER V

FISTS

THE GAZE of both the Northerners swept the lake from end to end, then centered hungrily on its placid middle. Slowly Hoke's eyes came back, to rest on the shallows at his feet. Perry, on the contrary, scanned the heights along the farther side. The Indian, sweaty, stooping under his load, watched him covertly.

"This," asserted Perry, turning a sharp look on the Tarasco, "is not Tzuntzon!"

"Hey?" snapped Hoke, mouth hardening. "Did he give us the wrong steer? B'gees, I'll give him—"

"Tzuntzon," insisted the guide.

"Tzuntzon," disputed the blue eyed alien, "has a big white rock high on the west wall."

Hoke's lids narrowed. He had not heard of this. Perry had been holding out on him, hey?

"East wall," contradicted the pilot. "*Este.* No *oeste.* Come. I show."

He turned westward, but, brought up short by the noose, drew back. Perry pulled out his watch, which showed the time to be 1:40; eyed the shadow cast by a near sapling, which proved that the shore on which they stood was the eastern; and admitted:

"Maybe I heard wrong. *Este* and *oeste* sure sound about the same. Let's go see."

"*Vaya,*" Hoke grunted to the Indian. "Go."

The captive went, a peculiar glint in his beady eyes. Along the edge lay a faint trail, almost indistinguishable, yet easily followed by a competent woodsman. It curved around the near northern end and worked on southward. After awhile the Indian stopped again at a break in the brush.

"There," he designated with a hunch of the left shoulder.

Far up on an eastern mountainside gleamed a small white precipice, brightly lighted by the westering sun.

"*Bueno!*" approved Perry. "Jack, he's

square. Now let's give him a few pesos and a feed and turn him loose."

Hoke eyed him sidewise.

"Why for? We can use him awhile yet. We got to make a camp and git settled. Let him do the work. And givin' away pesos when you don't have to is soft stuff. He's lucky to keep on livin', if you ask me."

Perry's lids drew down as he searchingly studied his partner.

"Is he? Why so?"

The other laughed easily. As if explaining something to a child, he declared:

"If we was greasers we'd knock him off to keep his mouth shut. Bein' white men, we won't. But we better use him while we got him, and keep our jack in our jeans. He don't need it, anyways. And we might."

A pause. Then Perry conceded:

"Well, all right. I'm about broke, and if you don't want to give him anything that's your business. Anyway, let's eat. I'm starved."

"Me too."

With that, Hoke turned to the prisoner, unknotting the rope from his belt.

"Drop the basket. Make some food," he ordered. "Then build a house. *Pronto!*"

"No need," differed the brown fellow. "Good place farther on. I show."

"What kind of a place?"

"House. All ready."

Hoke stared. So did Perry. They had seen no sign of human habitation here, except the faint lakeshore path, which might have been made by either men or animals. But, hungry and tired, they wasted no time in further questions.

"*Vaya!*" commanded Hoke. Again the trio got under way.

Step, step, step, feet mechanically eating distance, eyes finding nothing new—

Suddenly there opened a clearing in which stood a mud walled house. The Northerners momentarily checked their march. This was no abandoned place, with ground overgrown by brush, walls cracked, door sagging. In a broad field, well tended maize, banana plants, *papaya* trees, and other crops flourished under the bright sun. In the neat dooryard bloomed vivid flowers, about which brilliant butterflies floated, hummingbirds darted and bees droned. The house was smooth walled and thick thatched, with wooden windows and door almost closed, yet ajar to admit lazy breezes. Over all brooded the somnolence of siesta.

ABRUPTLY the Tarasco emitted a startling screech. A few seconds later a yellowish visage showed faintly at the edge of the door. Curt, clicking words in aboriginal dialect passed back and forth. The man from Guanajara advanced without hesitance while he gave his news. The man of Tzuntzon stood still, peered at the aliens, then slowly drew back his barrier.

At the portal the village Indian sank and let down his pack. The yellow forester inside, armed only with a bow and arrow, took another look at the white men and their guns, then cast his puny weapons aside and stepped back. The burden bearer, still wearing his neck noose, trudged into the cool, dim interior and squatted against a wall. The whites dominantly followed.

The wilderness habitant, clad only in short breeches, gave them another deliberate look, then placed two low stools at a crude table. The uninvited guests glanced all about, halting their inspection at the same point. In a mud wall at one side opened another doorway, and beyond it, silent, stood a girl.

"Oh, boy!" was Hoke's amazed tribute. "Look who's here!"

Perry looked without comment, but with interest. She was short, but shapely; draped in a blue Tarascan *rebozo*, which she had hastily flung around her on arising from siesta and unconsciously drawn tight; even lighter of skin than her father, and undeniably pretty. Contrasted with the indigo garment and the drab background, she seemed white.

On the other hand, she was evidently unaccustomed to seeing white men. Wide eyed, motionless, she looked from one to

the other of the newcomers. Her gaze dwelt longest on the tall young Arizonan, who, hat off, ran a hand through his damp blond hair. She was still looking at him when a few quiet monosyllables sounded from her elderly companion. Thereupon she came forward, crossed the room, opened a rear door, and began kindling a fire under a clay fireplace in the shade of an adjoining shed roof.

"Sit," invited the householder, nodding toward the stools.

"*Gracias*," accepted Perry.

Hoke made no such courteous acknowledgement. He sat, flung off his hat, laid his shotgun ostentatiously on the table, gave the two Indian men hard looks. Then he gazed sidewise toward the girl squatting beside the growing dinner fire.

"Looks like we'd fell in soft," he remarked. "This old jasper's got things we can use. Prob'ly a boat, for one thing. And that ain't all."

The other followed his gaze, then contemplated the long nosed, small eyed profile, finding on it an expression distinctly predatory. His mouth tightened.

"I guess," he drawled, "that'll be about all."

Hoke's eyes darted to his, suddenly antagonistic. For a second the two wills locked. Then the Easterner laughed it off.

"Aw, you git me wrong, fella," he declared. "What I mean's what I say, no more or less. The girl's a good cook, prob'ly. We'll eat her cookin' while we're here. Nothin' wrong with that, is there?"

"No."

"All right. That's all I meant, and—Hey! Where's that dummy gone to?"

He started up. Perry wheeled. The spot where the captive had squatted was empty.

In the brief interval while the white men gazed elsewhere, he had vanished. So silent and swift had been his flight that the pair at table now stared in amazement. Then Hoke, rasping an oath, leaped to the door.

Outside the portal stood the pack basket. On it lay the Indian's rope, noose open.

At sight of that mute farewell taunt Hoke voiced another curse, louder and more vicious. Yanking his revolver from its holster, he ran across the clearing to the path through the woods.

Perry, emerging from the doorway in turn, watched with a puzzled frown, then called:

"Oh, let him go. We're through with him. What's the idea?"

The pursuer disappeared into the shadows without answering. The idea was that he had intended to keep the captive in subjection some time longer, make him work at whatever hard jobs became necessary, and prevented him from carrying his tale of serfdom home to his fellows. Now his raging impulse was to finish him with a bullet.

Within the house, the yellow Indian cast a swift glance over the shotguns incautiously left behind by the whites, took one step toward them, but then left them untouched. They were hammerless and, unacquainted with such modern pieces, he could see no way to cock them.

STEPPING outside, he stood beside the pack basket, arms folded, face expressionless. His girl, drawn by the excitement, forsook her fire and came through to the front entrance.

There all three were waiting when Hoke returned, ugly. The fugitive had been too canny to run along the path known to his tyrant. By now he was safe in trackless forest.

Straight to the doorway came the baffled manhunter. His gun was back in its sheath now; but his fists were clenched, his mouth like a steel trap. Beside the basket he stopped, looking down again at the rope. The open loop, previously a sarcasm, now seemed sinister; a suggestion that some time soon it might go around his own neck and draw tight. Under his skin crept a queer pallor, succeeded by a new suffusion of choleric red. His eyes

rose to fix savagely on those of the quiet lake dweller.

"You give him a free gitaway," he accused. "And you got somethin' comin'!"

It came with the force of pent fury. Both fists hit the defenseless woodsman violently in the face. Knocked sprawling, the old fellow dropped beside the wall, lay dazed an instant, strove dizzily to get up. Teeth bared, his assailant sprang at him again, kicking him vindictively in the body.

The girl, paralyzed, gave a low moan.

Perry's temper, already smoldering, exploded into volcanic wrath. With an inarticulate yell he leaped and struck.

His knuckles smote Hoke's cheek and jaw with cracks like pistol shots. Hoke lurched headlong, fell sidewise, landed with a bump at the base of the wall.

"You dirty thug!" rasped the Westerner. "Take some of your own dose!"

Hoke blinked up at him, half stunned. Waveringly he sat up, left hand fumbling at his jaw. Then his foggy gaze cleared, his eyes glowered and his right hand crept toward his left armpit.

"Quit that!" warned Perry, his tone chilling.

His right arm hung ready beside his belt. The other's motion stopped, then continued; but now the creeping hand went up to assist in rubbing his head. Over his malevolent eyes seemed to slide an opaque shade. Slowly he looked around as if recovering clear vision after a period of mental blur.

"Hell of a mess, ain't it?" he meditated aloud. "Thought we was pardners."

The plaintive tone and brief reproach took his punisher aback. But his retort was quick and hard.

"And I thought you were a white man!"

Hoke sighed, slowly arose, stood loose.

"Got the devil's temper," was his only extenuation. "When it bursts I go cuckoo. Can't help it. But what's the use of talkin'? What's done's done."

He walked dispiritedly away toward the lake shore. The three watched him go, silent. Then Perry gave the Indian a hand and lifted him to his feet. When the hurt man had gone inside, stooping somewhat and stepping painfully, the young American sat on the sill and scowled at the farther forest.

For the first time he doubted his partner. In all the long trip from Monterey the man Jackson had been a congenial companion, somewhat reticent, sometimes blunt, yet always outwardly a good fellow and a square shooter. Not until today had he revealed the underlying brutality and vindictiveness of his nature. Now that his false face had slipped, the thinker in the doorway felt increasing distrust. Perhaps, something whispered, the fellow was also a crook and a liar, unable even to swim. If so . . .

His face grew stony. Rising abruptly, he strode toward the fringe of lakeshore woods into which the other had disappeared.

CHAPTER VI

SUSPICION

HELL DIVER, entering the waterside growth which masked the clearing from the lake, glared back toward the house. In sibilant whispers he cursed the man sitting on the threshold, and his fingers twitched on the butt of his gun. But he did nothing further to relieve his rage. Caution and cunning advised him to make no more breaks at present.

Moving onward a few feet, he emerged at the edge of the water. The sight of its tranquil expanse cooled his hot mind and lured him to lave his body. Tired, sweaty, dirty, headachy from the recent blows, he found the call irresistible. Laying clothes and weapon between projecting roots of a huge tree, he waded in and struck out.

The bottom was muddy and black. It clutched his legs clammily while he walked on it, and a sunken snag bruised his shins before he reached swimming depth. But thereafter the water was delightful. He lazed along the surface with easy strokes

sinking his head at times to look downward. Vague but visible, the irregular bed showed humps and hollows, rocks and submerged fragments of wood, all overlaid by sooty sediment. As Perry had said at Monterey, the place was shallow, shelving gradually toward the middle.

"This'll be soft." Hoke grinned. "I bet it ain't more'n twenty-foot down to the gold out there."

With one of his grebe-like dives he went to the bottom, eyeing it more closely and swimming farther outward. Progress was oddly easy. The dark undersurface flowed past beneath him as if moving of its own accord. Coming up again, he looked with surprise at the shore. It was considerably farther away than he had expected.

"That's funny," he muttered. Then, abandoning further exploration for the present, he swam back to the tree where waited his clothes; dressed, and walked houseward, good humored.

Meanwhile Perry, unnoticed, had stood watching him for a time, the grim lines around his mouth smoothing out. Slave driver though Hoke might be, he was no liar, at least regarding his skill as a diver. As the watcher retraced his steps he felt slightly ashamed of his suspicion. However, he left to the returning man the first move toward cordiality.

The swimmer found him inside, eating a hot stew served by the girl, who, standing silent behind him, took no steps to wait on the assailant of her father. The older Indian was squatting in a corner, stoically concealing any pain of inner hurts.

Nonchalantly seating himself and dishing his own meal, Hell Diver announced:

"It's like you said, Perry. I been takin' a swim, and went pretty far out. It's shaller. Lot of mud on the bottom, but I can claw that loose from the stuff we want."

His practical tone and tacit bid for resumption of friendly relations brought brief but quick response—

"Good!"

Thereafter they ate until the capacious cook pot was virtually empty. Hoke chewed with some difficulty, and once reddened resentfully as he caught the girl gazing with satisfaction at the swollen side of his face. But he held his tongue.

Drowsiness succeeded the heavy meal and its dessert of cigarets. Both men yawned repeatedly, decided against further exertion that day, and yielded to the natural lethargy of siesta time. Before surrendering completely, however, they considered the next step in their progress.

"We got to have a boat to work from," Hoke reminded. "The basket the dummy toted here's a good tough one and'll do to lift the gold; and we brought more'n enough rope. But I don't remember seein' any canoe down along shore. Hey, *Indio! Oigal* Where's your boat?"

The Indian stared, remaining dumb.

"Speak up!" Hoke's voice sharpened.

No answer. The passive face was blank.

The questioner growled. Then Perry interposed:

"Let me try him. *Amigo*, you have a boat, *sí?*"

"No," came the quiet denial.

"*Cómo?* No canoe?"

"*No hay.* There is none."

"Boloney!" scoffed Hoke. "Course he's got one. Fella livin' by a pond always has, so's he can go fishin'."

"Wait. I'll ask him."

He did so and again received reply. Although the native refused speech with the man who had abused him, he was willing enough to enlighten the one who had befriended him.

"I fish only from shore."

"Why not farther out?" quizzed Perry. "Fish must be larger there."

"No. That would be death."

"Death? How?"

"The great snake."

"Snake!" ejaculated Hoke, startled. "Is there snakes in there?"

His dismay was reflected in Perry's face. When the latter put the question in Spanish, the lake dweller affirmed:

"*Sí.* A huge water serpent. A swallower of men."

Hoke paled and glanced nervously at the door.

"Gees! And I was swimmin' out there!"

Perry followed his glance and meditatively rubbed his chin. The presence of such a deadly reptile would be an insuperable obstacle to recovery of the gold, unless—

"Aw, I don't believe it," said Hoke, though his voice betrayed doubt. "There ain't no snakes big enough to swaller a man, is there?"

PERRY regarded him queerly. Better read than his companion, he knew of the tropical anaconda, and had no doubt that the gigantic constrictor could devour human beings. The unguarded question of this man who claimed experience in the southern forests revealed ignorance of something concerning which he ought to be positive.

"Well, if there are, we have guns, haven't we?" the Westerner parried. "And there's no snake that can't be killed."

Turning then to the Indian, he promised:

"We'll shoot the serpent and make your lake safe. Where can he be found?"

"He can not be found. He can not be shot. He lies always under the water."

The questioner's gaze turned slightly skeptical.

"He must come out to feed and breathe sometimes," he argued. "Haven't you ever seen him?"

"No."

"Has anybody else seen him?"

"No."

"Then how do you know he exists?"

"That is well known. He is a demon snake. He is old as the world. He has always been in this lake."

Perry laughed and looked back at his companion.

"Guess that settles that, Jack," he said. "A snake as old as the world, but never seen by anybody—he sure must be a demon, all right. About as real as the old fairy book giants."

"Sure, a hunk of hooey," quickly agreed the other. "Nothin' but an Indian yarn, made up to scare fellas off from tryin' for the gold. Huh! It'll take somethin' tougher'n that to stop a hell diver, I'll tell 'em."

"A what?"

"A—er—a hell of a good diver like me, what I mean," Hoke covered up. "And about the boat, we can use a raft just as well. Prob'ly better. Yup, this is goin' to be soft. Ho-hum! Well, I'm goin' to grab me some shut-eye."

Yawning, he arose and walked to the other room, where hung the two hammocks vacated by the owners. His own hammock and Perry's still were in the pack basket outside, and it was easier to dispossess the Indians than to put up his own bed. Into the nearer net he dropped, to doze comfortably, yet with habitual caution. His face was turned toward the door, and his right hand lay across his chest, almost touching the shoulder holster.

Perry, still at table, regarded him sidewise, then contemplated a blank wall, thinking again of his telltale question about the size of snakes. Presently, with a shrug, he glanced at the Indian pair; then he went out and brought in the basket, extracted the hammocks, and tried, with inexpert fingers, to hang one from a rafter.

The girl smiled at his awkwardness and came to aid him. She had to mount a stool in order to reach the overhead pole, but her knotting of the ropes was deft and sure. Then, as she tested the foot rope by a hard tug, came a small mischance which made the watcher's eyes widen.

The long blue shawl, loosely fastened at one shoulder, became untied and slipped down her back to the waist. Swift seizure recovered and replaced it in an instant. But during that fleeting second, Perry had seen that below the golden shoulder blades her skin was pure white.

Laughing lightly, unembarrassed, she secured the garment again and put up the

other hammock. Meanwhile he stared at her and at the elderly man. Her golden color above her usual dress line was indubitably mere tan, bestowed by many forest suns; and her blood must be unmixed Spanish. Yet her father—if he were that—was unquestionably Indian.

A question rose to his tongue, but he did not utter it. Silently pointing, he indicated that the native and his girl were to use the newly hung couches and resume their interrupted rest. He himself sat again at table, back toward them, and laid his head on his forearms.

The pair stared at him. Then, as the situation took shape in their minds, they accepted it. The tall, friendly alien was again between them and the short, cruel one, against whom he had sprung in their defense.

The forest man lay down. His girl then reclined in the other hammock, again regarding Perry through half shut lids. The Westerner, eyes closed, body relaxed, drowsed with recurrent lapses of consciousness, yet with ears attuned for any stealthy sound.

In the other room Hoke, hitherto covertly observant, closed his eyes with contemptuous indifference. Belatedly he had recalled Perry's odd gaze when the mythical snake was under discussion, and realized that he had made another break. But now he didn't care much. He had reached his lake, seen its bottom, assured himself that it was not deep, figured how to retrieve its treasure alone, if necessary. He could anchor a raft, dive and fill the basket, rise, haul up the load, and keep repeating. Perry's aid would save him considerable work, so he would use him while he could. But if the big stiff tried to get tough again—to hell with him!

CHAPTER VII

ATTACK

IT WAS that smoldering belligerence in Hoke, probably, which brought the crash sooner than he expected. That, and pain, and liquor.

Near sundown, which came early to the bowl lying so deep in the mountains, he got up, feeling mean. During siesta his battered face had grown exceedingly sore and his neck painfully stiff. Emerging scowlingly from the rest room, he dug from the basket a quart of Mexican rum, opened it, rubbed cheek and neck with the strong contents, and then took a stiff drink. Within the next quarter hour he swallowed several more.

Perry watched without comment. The house owners, silently observant, gravitated together at the back door. The man leaned against the jamb, while his girl, beyond, cooked another meal. Outside, as day turned to dark, resounded a riot of noise from animals and birds of the wilderness. Inside ruled a foreboding silence.

Cooking done, the girl set the table, then entered the other room and donned other clothes, emerging in a loose, low necked blue dress which evidently was her usual attire. Tossing the *rebozo* into a hammock, she stood again behind Perry. To Hoke she gave not one look.

The meal progressed in silence. At one end of the crude table burned a small clay lamp, bare flamed, fed by some sort of oil known to the forest habitants. Its wavering light cast variant gleams and shadows over Hoke's beaked visage, accentuating the merciless set of his champing jaw, revealing also the hard glint in his eyes when he glanced at his partner, or at the golden face beyond. As time passed, the girl's scornful indifference to his existence aggravated the malignance generated by the rum. Ending his meal, he put his elbows on the table and regarded her with a sneer.

"Hey, you!" he growled. "Look here!"

She did so—with cold hostility.

"Hereafter you'll wait on me too," he asserted. "And you'll start now. Come here and pour me a drink, *muy pronto!*"

Her mouth tightened. With a sharp gesture of refusal, she walked away toward the rear door.

"Hold everything," coldly advised Perry. Reaching for the open bottle, he

inserted the cork and set it down on the earth floor.

"Come back with that!" snarled Hoke.

"Nope. You've gone far enough."

Eyes locked. Into those of the older man shot a greenish gleam. Through his teeth came metallic tones of menace.

"Yeah? Think so, hey? Look at here, guy, I ain't gone half as far as I'm goin'. And one more crack out o' you and you're through! Git me? I been nursin' you along, you big sap, but now you're gittin' weaned. Lap that up and like it! The boss of these works is me, Hell Diver Hoke, and I don't mean maybe!"

His name slipped from his tongue unintentionally. Perry's blue gaze, rapidly firing up, suddenly chilled. For several seconds it bored into the distorted countenance of the killer of old Dan Mattison. In the tense stillness that killer realized his blunder.

Abruptly Perry swayed on his stool, right shoulder rising, right hand plunging toward his belt. At the same instant Hoke's gun hand streaked to his armpit. His pistol leaped out and spat flame.

The blond head jerked back. The long body slumped sidewise, one shoulder hitting a corner of the small table. The table upset. The light went out.

At the rear door sounded a gasp of horror, an urgent grunt, a patter of bare feet receding into the dark. The Indian pair had fled.

Hoke stood swaying a second in the gloom, gun frozen in his fist. Then he backed away. The wall, meeting his shoulders, halted him. Tense, he peered toward his unseen victim and listened. He heard nothing.

Silence and darkness pressed against him, empty, yet palpable. Outside all forest noises had subsided. Inside was no sound but that of his own breathing, short and seemingly loud. Impenetrable blackness hid everything in the room. Beyond the rear door a dying coal in the fireplace glowed dully, like a spying red eye. As endless minutes dragged away, the man against the wall shuddered.

"Gees!" he croaked.

THE MALEVOLENT heat of rum and revenge was gone from him, replaced by clammy chill. Cold sweat trickled down his spine. The hand which had been swift and sure as a striking snake now trembled, and the revolver felt heavy as lead. In the darkness around him seemed to be crouching ghostly, ghastly things, invulnerable to bullets, waiting for him to move.

"Gees!" he muttered again. "I didn' really go for to— Gawd! What's that?"

Somewhere outside, near the lake shore, had sounded a hideous scream, suddenly cut short. Out there, too, was a murder; a leap and a kill by some wild beast destroying another. The agonized shriek of the victim threw the human assassin into blind panic.

With a hoarse moan he dashed toward the rear door, where that little red eye still watched. Out! He must get out of this black coop—out somewhere, anywhere—

His feet tripped on something. He fell headlong, gun flying from his grasp as he hit the floor. Scrambling up, he lunged through the exit and ran, frenzied, into the maize beyond. Stumbling again, falling again, he writhed over and up, sprinted between two rows to the dense wall of towering forest. There he halted, blocked by impenetrable growth and by fear of what might lurk within it.

Far above shone stars, dropping faint light from a partially overclouded sky. Elsewhere was only the funereal gloom of the surrounding woods, the shadowy multitude of tall plants, the ominous quiet of unseen creatures warned by his mad rush. Once more, standing still, he felt the nearness of inimical things ready to leap on him. Perhaps no such things were at hand; perhaps the fearful feeling was only the inheritance of mankind from primitive ancestors who must barricade themselves in caves against enormous beasts and reptiles which prowled by night. But soon it drove him back to his only refuge, the house.

His return was more doggedly defiant than his flight had been. To some extent

he had mastered the overpowering fright which had driven him forth. But when he reentered the place and struck a match, the tiny light quivered uncontrollably. And when he looked down at Perry, it fell from his fingers.

The face which had been blithe or bleak, smiling or stern, sometimes tempestous, but always full of life, now was a blank mask drenched with blood. The virile body lay limp, hunched sidewise, just as it had dropped. As the match went out Hoke again shuddered.

Then, gritting his teeth, he stooped, felt in the dark, found the lax hands and, exerting his strength, dragged the body out through the front doorway. A few yards off he dropped the long arms, grabbed the undrawn revolver from the holster, and hurried back inside.

Once more within the house, he closed both doors to the place. Then he scratched another match and sought his own revolver. Against a wall he found it. With two guns, he felt more courageous.

Other matches enabled him to bar both doors and the thick wooden shutters of the few small windows. The little clay lamp, he found, had smashed on the floor, and there seemed to be no other. And when, digging into the basket, he got out an electric flashlight, it proved unworkable. Carelessly stowed, it had suffered some bump which broke both lens and bulb. So, except for the fitful flares of the tiny sticks, he was again in the dark; a dark more dense than ever.

Into the sleeping room he retreated, carrying the rum bottle and both shotguns. Long swigs of the liquor deadened his senses until, at last, he sank into sodden sleep. Before that relief arrived, however, he started at every small sound, looking fearfully toward the black outer room. There was no door in that doorway, and sounds, intensified by stillness, were recurrent and alarming. Small creepings and bumps, perhaps caused by rats, in the room where he had shot his comrade, seemed movements of uncanny creatures stealing toward him. Rustles and creaks on the thatch roof, possibly made by night birds, sounded as if grisly phantoms were stealthily working through. The unconsciousness which finally obliterated these vague alarms was not restful. Even then he glimpsed horrible things gibbering at him in fragmentary nightmares.

A queer state of mind, perhaps, for one who had long been a criminal, who had already killed a man, who had coldly resolved to kill any others obstructing him, and who, only a few hours ago, had ached to slay the companion now lying outside. But never before had Hell Diver Hoke remained on the scene of his crime. Always he had dived, dodged, twisted or plunged away to immediate escape, giving no second look at what lay behind and, in the exhilaration of successful flight, virtually forgetting it. Moreover, never before had the place been such as this, a lonely spot engulfed in a ferocious black wilderness wherein prowled nameless fiends. Now that he was penned in a hole where he must abide for a time with the blood he had spilled, innate cowardice gnawed subconsciously but ceaselessly at his crust of bravado.

The night crawled along. Outside the little house, various things came and went. Toward morning, heavy clouds belched torrential rain for an hour or so, then moved on, leaving soaked earth awaiting the sun. Dawn brought strident clamor of wild life which aroused the sleeper within the walls. Lurching up, he unbarred a shutter. In flowed the early light and damp coolness of a fresh, fragrant day.

For a moment he looked fixedly at the sky, meanwhile drawing long breaths of the clean air. Then he lowered his gaze to the flowery dooryard in which he had dropped Perry. His bloodshot eyes widened. His jaw sagged. His breathing halted.

Except for drooping flowers, the space was bare.

In the dark hours something had come from somewhere, found the body and taken it. Something big enough, strong enough, to carry it off completely, leaving

no bones, no blood, no other trace. As this fact sank home, Hoke's knees shook.

"Cripes!" he gasped.

His eyes moved toward the lake. Then, turning, he grabbed up the rum bottle from the floor and shoved its mouth into his own.

It did him no good. It was empty.

CHAPTER VIII

SOLITUDE

FOR THE next two days Hell Diver moved with wariness worthy of the watchful bird whose name he bore.

On the first morning of his lone tenancy of the little *casa* he was especially cautious, wheeling toward every vague sound suggestive of stealthy approach. Just what he feared he did not know. Dead men seldom return, nor do escaped captives of a tyrant. But the ingrained habit of half expecting consequences of crime to overtake him worked with full force now, as did also the brooding watch of the surrounding thickets. The brightness of day, the unbroken peace, the fact that he now was sole owner of the sunken treasure, all failed to lull apprehension. He now was afraid even of the lake.

Several times he stood scowling out across the pleasant surface, then turned from it. Although yesterday he had scoffed with Perry at the tale of the man swallowing snake, although the Indian had said the destroyer never left the water, although he himself had swum out there without harm, the disappearance of his partner's body hinted at possibilities which he did not yet dare test.

But when noon passed without developments he grew more confident. He had plenty of arms and ammunition, and any one wanting trouble with him could come and get it. He had two men's food supplies in the pack basket, and could find more on the plantation. He had all the time in the world, and could tackle the treasure whenever he felt like it. In short, he was monarch of all he surveyed. Such was the effect of a big meal and gradual subsidence of anxiety.

Disregarding siesta, he went rambling around the lake, stepping slowly, listening alertly, hunting for whatever life might be discovered. On his back he carried all ammunition, stowed in the otherwise empty basket, which he had dumped on the floor. The weight of bullets and shells was rather burdensome, but added to his confidence. Nobody could reload Perry's shotgun, which now stood empty in a corner. Neither could any one use the poor Indian's bow and arrows. He had broken these before departure. In the house now remained no useful weapon.

The path, he learned, completely encircled the water, substantiating the Indian's declaration that he used no boat. Here and there faint trails led off into the woods, but these, after short investigation, proved unmistakably made by wild animals. The one exception was the hill path, slightly more plain, down which he and Perry and the Tarasco had come yesterday.

On that footway he found no fresh human imprint. Continuing his tour, he walked with redoubled assurance. And when, rounding the northern end, he chanced to espy a monkey drinking at the water's edge, he shot the defenseless beast without concern for the reverberating echo.

The killing was wanton, for he did not know how to prepare monkey meat for eating, nor even know that it was edible. But somehow this minor assassination made him feel bigger and braver, since it was a defiance to the wilderness wherein the creature had lived. He threw the lanky corpse into his basket and carried it to the plantation, still deriving from his pitiful conquest savage satisfaction. At the clearing, however, he found a more practical use for it.

A breeze had risen, blowing offshore. And for some reason, no more tangible than the cause of that vagrant wind, a queer idea came to him. Reassured that nothing dangerous lurked near, he cut up a sapling with a machete found in the house, fashioned a small float, impaled the

monkey on a sharp stick amidship, rigged a crude sail from a banana leaf, and set the thing adrift. It was a miniature man on a little raft, traveling the water which the Indian had never dared try in a boat. On that clean surface it could not fail to attract the attention of any predatory creature below.

Slowly but steadily, the wind carried it to the middle. Little waves aroused by that wind made the monkey sway with lifelike motions as his craft rose and fell. At the center of the expanse it slowed awhile, eddying about as if wilfully tempting assault. Then it cruised gradually on toward the farther shore. And not once did anything, even a leaping fish, break water in attack.

The observer grinned, turned away from his experiment, and went houseward to prepare supper. Obviously the dreaded serpent was, after all, nothing but a hunk of hooey.

When darkness again engulfed everything, however, he made haste to bar all entrances. And through the long night he slept intermittently, starting awake to listen, drowsing away again with underlying readiness for sudden defense.

The next day he labored at building a larger and more solid raft. It was a long, hard job. His only tool was the same old machete, for neither he nor Perry had foreseen the necessity for using ax or hatchet. The trees which he chose proved astoundingly resistant, some repulsing his blade without showing even a scar. The hardwoods of Mexico, he learned, were not so vulnerable as those of Pennsylvania, where his last chopping had been done. Moreover, his chopping muscles were soft from long disuse. There had been no good reason why he should use them in recent years, when it had been so much simpler to shove a gun against the stomachs of workers and collect their earnings. So now he had to stop frequently for rest and breath, as well as for vigilant survey of his surroundings.

By sundown he was tired to the bone. But his work was finished, and while he refreshed himself with a short swim near shore he looked complacently at his handiwork: a rather poorly constructed but serviceable float, with a long pole for propulsion. It had no anchor, for he had failed to find any stone small enough for such use; the few rocks near shore were enormous boulders. But there was little likelihood of losing the slow moving craft. In fact, he probably could moor it to the sunken gold.

The fancy tickled him. And as he waded back to the shore he voiced a derisive promise to the legendary serpent coiled about that treasure.

"Tomorra I'm comin' to you, fella," he said, "and show you some hell divin' that is hell divin'."

He predicted more truly than he knew.

CHAPTER IX

REVELATION

PERRY, murdered by the man who had previously perished in the Rio Grande, was somewhat more dead than his slayer, but not in need of burial. On the contrary, he was steadily storing up new life.

The bullet which knocked him down and out had ripped a long groove in his scalp, and dealt severe concussion to his brain. But it had not broken the skull. And now, bandaged and faithfully attended by the girl who had so willingly served him at the house, he was biding his time, though somewhat impatiently, to settle his score with the gunman. As yet he was unable to walk far without incurring a sickening dizziness. Moreover, he knew not which way to walk in order to find his false partner. He was in a strange place. It was a hut of poles and thin thatch, which seemed a hunter's camp, not a permanent habitation. It perched among woods atop a steep ledge, commanding a view of a little lake. In shape and size that blue jewel closely resembled the pond of sunken gold, but it was not the same. Whether that other sheet of water lay north, south, east, west, and how far off, his little nurse would not

tell him. Nor could he remember anything of his journey to this spot, except vague sensations of being alternately carried and laid down while his bearers rested. These bearers, he knew, must have been the lanky, injured Indian and his small but strong daughter. There had been nobody else in that pocket of the hills.

During the first day in this refuge he had gradually emerged from coma, but lain virtually motionless, since any attempt to rise had resulted in excruciating headache. The only answer to his infrequent questions had been the invariable admonition from his nurse—

"You must be quiet."

Her voice was soft, soothing, yet firmly persuasive, compelling involuntary obedience. So he continued to rest on his low bed of yielding sticks. Meanwhile the father came and went, bringing food which he had managed to obtain somewhere without weapons. He spoke no words at all to the man who yesterday had been his protector and now was his protégé, but his slow smiles and friendly glances made speech unnecessary. Obviously these wilderness people meant to take good care of their stricken benefactor; and with this he was, for the time, content.

On the second day there came a slight acceleration of action. The mild old aborigine, after studying the recuperating white man at breakfast time, muttered a few sentences to his girl and went out. His voice and eyes were not so gentle as before, his departing stride not so slow and silent as on the previous day. Tone, face, and motions were purposeful. Into the greenery he disappeared. When night fell he still was absent.

Perry was able to sit up at sunrise, to stand before noon, and to walk short distances after the midday meal. The girl, ever attentive, stayed with him at all times, foregoing her usual siesta without visible sleepiness, answering his questions more fully, but withholding all information as to the direction or distance to her home.

"When you are strong again the way will be made plain," she promised. "Until then, be patient."

Grudgingly he accepted the dictum, realizing that he could not force himself up and down mountainsides for at least another day. But he fretfully asserted:

"I must return as soon as I can. There are important things to be done at Tzuntzon."

The barbaric name brought to her steady eyes a look strangely intent. After a moment she asked—

"At what place?"

"Tzuntzon." He pronounced it clearly. "You know."

She made no reply. But in the deep dark pupils something seemed to dawn and die—something suggesting a hidden smile. Then she turned her gaze across the lake.

They were sitting outside now, backs against adjacent trees, in the cool shade and languid breezes of afternoon. The ledge was on the western wall of the steep basin, and the thick timber rising behind them excluded the slant rays of burning sun. The bare top of the stone, he idly noticed, was white, like that of the landmark on the eastern slope of the other lake.

After awhile she asked—

"What have you to do at Tzuntzon?"

His lips hardened.

"To square an account."

"*Sí*. Of course. But then what?"

He eyed her shrewdly. She still looked out at the sun drenched heights over the water. Something told him, however, that she knew the answer to her own question.

"To find something long hidden," he guardedly admitted.

"Hidden in what?"

"In water."

"In what water?"

"Tzuntzon, of course." The reply was a trifle impatient.

Again the name made her lashes flicker, and again she was quiet for a time. Then she voiced a question which gave him a dismayed pause.

"How are you to get the thing which is hidden?"

SO DOMINANT had been his determination to take vengeance on Hoke that he had lost sight of his own inability to reach the treasure unaided. For the moment he sat nonplused. But then a grim smile banished his soberness. Hoke would, he felt, find a way to bring up that gold for himself. All right, let him work. The settling of accounts could take place just as well when the stuff was all on shore.

Forthwith he lost his impatience. Lolling back more easily, he said:

"There are ways." Then, changing the subject, "It's about time we exchanged names, isn't it? I'm Fred Perry. Call me Federico."

"Federico. I am Zera."

"Zera? Zera what?"

"That is all."

A faint flush crept into her cheeks as she confessed lack of a family name, but her clear gaze did not waver.

"Well—er—who is the man you live with? Not your father, surely."

"He is Jalichan, my second father. My real father is dead. Bad men killed him."

"How was that?"

"I do not remember. Then I was very small. But Jalichan says there was a war, and many bad men rode around shooting and burning, and they killed my father and mother and others at a big house somewhere north. Those men had women with them, and one of them took me. But she tired of carrying me on a march near here and threw me away. Then a Tarasco brought me to Jalichan. So he is my father, and his wife was my mother until she died."

"Hm! Well, what is Jalichan? A *mestizo?*"

"No!" The denial came with a touch of resentment. "He is a son of old Tarasco nobles. The Tarascos of the old time were very light in color. Now most of them are mongrels, and dark. So he will not live among them."

Perry was silent a moment, thinking. Hitherto, like most Americans, he had regarded all aborigines as on the same level, with no superiors except tribal chiefs. Existence among them of an aristocratic class, and of a patrician pride of blood which would make a thoroughbred dwell apart from mongrels, seemed a novel idea. Thinking further, he surmised that the pale recluse could, if he would, exert strong influence on his inferiors, to the benefit or detriment of friend or enemy.

But of this he said nothing. Instead, he began talking of his own country far to the north—the *arida zona*, Arizona—which was so different from this luxuriantly verdant region. She listened with absorbed interest, searching his face and voice for signs of yearning for that other land, but finding none. At length she asked, naively direct—

"Have you a woman up there?"

He laughed.

"Woman? No. I have no woman anywhere."

A smile curved her lips.

"If you find what you hunt here will you go back at once to your *aridzona?*"

A careless shrug was his reply. He looked leisurely at her, observing anew her glossy black hair, clear dark eyes, regular features and winsome lips. And, although ordinarily impersonal toward all girls, he now found himself saying:

"Just now I don't want to go anywhere. I'd rather stay here a long time with you."

A moment later he was mentally kicking himself for that utterance. It seemed mushy. But it brought amazing results.

The brown eyes glowed. The golden bosom lifted with a swift breath, and the golden face moved toward him, lips parted. Then she caught herself, turned her head abruptly aside, held her gaze fixed on the low lake. Suddenly she announced—

"This is Tzuntzon."

He stared. This could not be the same lakelet. He had studied it long enough to be sure of that. Moreover, if it were the same, the plantation and the house now held by Hoke would be visible from this high coign. The entire rim of the blue

water below was in view, its woods unbroken by any clearing.

"No," he contradicted.

"*Sí*," she serenely maintained. "This is Tzuntzon. The other lake is Tzontzun. That is the false lake. This is the true one."

He started again, rubbed his eyes, blinked, looked abroad, mind quickening. The slight difference in pronunciation recalled the unwilling guide's differentiation between *este* and *oeste*, east or west side, where stood the white rock marking the treasure lake. This rock on which Perry now sat was at the *oeste*. Memory still insisted that the Monterey Mexican had said "*oeste*." And this rock was white . . .

HE STARTED up, staggered from a fierce stab of headache, reeled toward the brink of the precipice. The girl sprang to her feet and steadied him. As the rending pain subsided he grinned, shook off her grasp and, more carefully, stepped to the verge. She came close behind him, ready to clutch him again if he swayed. But he did not. Surely balanced, he looked down.

The face of the stone, sloping outward, was long and white; longer and cleaner and brighter than that overlooking the other spot of blue among the hills. Moreover, although foreshortened by the precipitous angle of view, it seemed to approximate a gigantic human visage, far more fitting for guardianship of an aboriginal cache than the shapeless thing jutting on the wrong side of the other pond. After one long look he was convinced.

His eyes dwelt joyously on the center of the smiling pool far below. Then he wheeled back so impulsively and laughed so hard that another agonizing streak darted through his brain and weakened his knees. Before it eased, the girl conducted him deftly into the near hut and pressed him down on his crude couch.

"You must be quiet," she reiterated. "Quiet, quiet."

When the paroxysm of pain grew dull he chuckled, visioning Hoke diving for handfuls of worthless mud. Then, sobering, he asked—

"You are sure?"

"Sure," she affirmed. "There are two lakes with faces of stone, one east, one west; one Tzuntzon, one Tzontzun. One holds wealth, the other death."

"Oh, yes." His expression turned skeptical. "Death from that serpent that never eats, never breathes, never is seen. Unless the wealth is more real than that—"

"Man, my man, do not doubt me!" she rebuked, softly gripping his hand. "What you seek lies yonder. I have seen it with my own eyes."

"You?" He stared. "But it's under water!"

"*Sí*."

"Then how did you—can you swim?"

She laughed lightly, as if he had asked whether she could breathe.

"*Sí*. And I have been at the bottom down there—" she gestured lakeward—"more than once. Until my Indian mother died, two years ago, we always lived at this lake. Then my father destroyed the house and made a new one at Tzontzun. But I still come here at times to paddle and play in the water."

"Paddle? There is a canoe?"

"*Sí*."

He sat up again, face aglow.

"*Vamonos!*" he bade. "Let's go! Show me—"

"Not now. *Mañana*," she interrupted. "Tomorrow, perhaps. Now you must rest. Your head—"

"My head's all right!"

But, as he spoke, his face contracted and paled with undeniable pain. And when she pushed him back once more he lay, feeling sick.

"Do not be foolish," she chided. "Lie still. You must."

"Guess you're right," he grudgingly admitted. And for some time he lay with eyes closed. When he reopened them she was gone.

She had gently stroked his head for a moment, then silently risen and walked out; stood looking out across the blue water, turned to a threadlike path among the trees, and vanished. Now the place was very quiet. For awhile longer he

remained supine, thinking of various things, half listening for sounds of her return. At length he called—

"Zera!"

No answer.

"*Zera!*"

Silence, save for a brief bird note among the trees. Carefully sitting up, he frowned around. Suddenly he started, struck by a strange thought.

"Good Lord! I wonder if she—"

Moving with deliberate slowness, he went outside and peered down. From his throat rose a queer sound, half a growl of self-reproach, half a groan of anxiety.

Out in the middle of Tzuntzon now was a short canoe. In it stood a small white figure which, an instant later, slipped smoothly over the gunwale and sank from sight.

Long seconds dragged away, each interminable. The canoe seemed drifting away, the swimmer gone forever. But then a tiny black dot appeared near the dark shell, moved toward it, stopped, rested. All at once it was gone again.

Another endless wait, then it reappeared; rested once more, and rose over the stern of the craft, as the slender white form expertly drew itself aboard. Squatting, the diver began swinging a paddle in short, rapid strokes. The canoe surged shoreward. At intervals the paddler paused and looked back, as if towing something; something perhaps too heavy to lift inboard, but dragged along under water in a loop of rope.

Soon the dugout slid into some narrow inlet and vanished. The watcher on the cliff drew a long breath.

"Man, what a girl!" he muttered.

And he sauntered back inside, lay down again, and waited.

Before long he detected faint footfalls. Into the open came Zera, breathing a little hard, carrying a short but ponderous black object cradled in her arms. Peering through his lashes, Perry tried to pretend sleep, but failed. As she advanced to the couch his eyes opened wide. Their smiling gaze told her that he knew where she had been.

Her teeth flashed in an answering smile. Unspeaking, she lowered her load to the floor. Dingy black, encrusted by wet sediment, it looked like a bar of worthless stone. But somewhere along her path she had paused to rub it on a real rock; and from the section thus divested of its dull coat gleamed the clean yellow of pure gold.

For a minute or two he joyously eyed it, ran his fingers over it, estimated its weight and value. Then he looked up, to find her watching him pensively.

"You see, Federico, I have not lied to you," she murmured. "There is more, much more. But this is proof."

His fingers left the hard bar and closed on the warm hand near.

"And I haven't lied to you, Zera," he responded. "I'm not going to leave you for a long time—if ever."

His straight look brought a glad glow to the deep brown eyes.

"*Bueno!*" she breathed.

Then, with a swift grip of the big hand, she drew away.

"Now I must make supper," she said, practically. "Food to make you sleep well, Federico, and give you new strength for the things of tomorrow."

She walked toward the stones forming the rough cookstove. Glancing outside, he found the sun now sliding down behind the crest of the western rampart and shadows rapidly graying the little wild world within the hills. For a few minutes he watched the twilight dull into dusk, while the cheery little blaze among the stones grew brighter. Then, with a contented sigh, he drowsed and dreamed, awaiting the promised new strength and the things of the morrow.

CHAPTER X

SURPRISE

"HULLO, lad! How's every little thing?"

The familiar voice, the easy drawl, the leathery countenance smiling down at him surprised Perry into momentary speechlessness. Then he started up with a suddenness that made him

slightly unsteady, but brought no recurrence of blinding pain. In the long night his brain shock had found its own cure.

"Dick McConaughy! What the devil are you doing here?"

"Oh, I just took the notion to ramble down this way and have a look around," grinned the lean veteran Perry had last seen in Monterey. "Tom Lyons sends regards and says when you're through chasing fool's gold he'll get you another mill job."

"That's sure tempting," dryly commented Perry.

Involuntarily his gaze dropped, seeking the black bar which, at nightfall, had lain beside the head of his couch. His glance met the warning eyes of Zera. Unnoticed in his surprised awakening, she was sitting there on her heels, concealing the precious metal beneath her loose skirt.

Looking up again, he encountered the keen watch of Jalichan, a couple of paces behind McConaughy. The Indian no longer was unarmed. Somewhere he had obtained a long musket, a powder horn and a bullet bag; and, though he stood at ease, he was in position to act swiftly against the newcomer, whom he evidently had guided here, and who wore a long Colt. In his vigilant regard was a plain question.

"This man," Perry told him, "is a good man, and my friend."

"Thanks for those kind words," drawled McConaughy. "This chap's been mighty decent, but not entirely sold on me. Now if somebody'd give me a bid to breakfast I'd accept with both hands."

He glanced out at the fireplace, where a pot was bubbling over the morning blaze. Forthwith Perry led him out, postponing talk until later.

Behind them Jalichan laid aside his gun and looked sharply at Zera. Serenely she arose, revealing the yellow streaked bar. His brows drew down. With a quick stride and shove he slid the telltale piece under the low bed. Straightening, he sternly asked—

"Why did you so, girl?"

Unabashed, she quietly replied:

"You have often said, father, that the gold at the lake bottom did no good, and never would do any good unless it should come into the hands of a good man. Now the good man is here. And he is *my* man."

With that concise but complete explanation, she stood tranquilly meeting his searching gaze. Soon his own eyes softened.

"You have been much too forward, child," he mildly reproved. "But what is done is done, so let it be. Come, dish the food."

And he walked out and squatted beside the stones, where he ate in thoughtful silence. The others, too, were quiet, until hunger was appeased. At length McConaughy rolled a cigaret, lighted it and announced:

"Well, here's the truth about my trailing you. After you and your barroom pickup flew by night I learned some things. And, feeling that I'd sort of egged you into hitting this fool gold trail, I got uneasy and decided to come after you and set things right, if there was anything left to set. That bird you fetched down here, son, is Hoke, the dirty killer who—"

"So he told me," interrupted Perry.

"He did?" McConaughy looked amazed.

"Unintentionally. He had a skinful and his tongue slipped. Then he smoked me up."

"Oh. Well, that's that, then. Going on from there, I nosed around some to get what dope I could about this section, and happened to hit on an old Spanish engineering report about your lake Tzontzun. Sorry, *compañero*, but the yarn's all hot air. 'Twas investigated long ago."

"Lake what?" queried Perry, poker faced.

"Tzontzun. You ought to know."

"Uh-huh." Repressing a smile, Perry glanced out across Tzuntzon. "Well, I'm not surprised. I'd about decided Tzontzun was a bum bet."

"Glad to hear it. I hated to smash your

bubble, but— Well, to finish my little yarn, I had a thin time trying to find you until this pale chap took me in tow. The brown bucks over at Guanajara seemed to be sore on white men, and acted about as pleasant as snakes coiling up to bite. I couldn't even buy a meal, to say nothing of getting a guide. But then in blew this fellow, and after I explained myself to him the atmosphere changed. Free grub came from nowhere, and everybody turned polite. He sure swings a big club in this neck of the woods. And you seem to have considerable pull yourself, judging by what I've noticed."

EYES a-twinkle, he glanced up at Zera who stood, as usual, behind Perry, obviously happy to be his handmaiden. Perry flushed slightly, but made no comment. With a chuckle, McConaughy flipped his cigaret butt into the coals and stood up.

"Well, if you feel like taking a walk, let's go join the gang and see what happens."

"Gang? What gang?"

"Your own, or this fellow's, anyway." The older man grinned at Perry's blank expression. "I forgot to mention that he brought along a young army from Guanajara, and it's waiting down yonder in the woods. Seems like there must be a surprise party brewing for somebody. Maybe for your little playmate, Hoke. *Quién sabe?*"

Perry swiftly arose, scowling at Jalichan, who, unnoticed, had reentered the hut while the white men talked, and now stood leaning on his long gun.

"See here!" Perry snapped. "That man at the house is mine—I will attend to him alone!"

The Indian tapped Perry's empty holster and laconically inquired—

"How?"

"Lead me there and I'll show you. You and every one else keep out of it."

A faint smile showed in the brown eyes.

"*Muy bien.* We shall lead you there."

With that equivocal promise he strode away. The white men followed at once, McConaughy smiling oddly, Perry fuming at Jalichan's assumption of the right of retribution. Yet reason compelled the boy to admit that the recluse had adopted the logical course. Himself unarmed, his protégé weaponless and wounded, the Tarasco could see no other way to cope with the gunman who had seized his home. Perry's own unspoken plan was vague and risky: to lurk near the house until Hoke went out somewhere, then slip in and get whichever of the two shotguns was left behind. This he was determined to do—if Jalichan and his men would give him time.

At every step, however, he became more dubious that they would do so. The Tarasco was swinging down the hillside with strides betokening a set purpose. And when, at the bottom, a horde of brown shapes materialized amid the thick growth, the Northerner felt scant hope that they would stand tamely aside while he made his play.

The villagers who yesterday had been sluggish, wooden faced creatures, clad in frayed garments, were today forest Indians on a war trail, stripped to clouts, armed with antiquated guns or strong bows, alert, resolute, relentless. Among their dark visages Perry spied one which he well remembered: that of the false guide to the false lake, who, escaping, had left behind him that suggestive noose. Now that ex-slave regarded him without either enmity or friendship, his steady eyes lingering a moment on the bandage around his head. After that brief look his inscrutable gaze, like that of the others, fixed on Jalichan.

The yellow noble calmly surveyed the men of baser blood whom he had not permitted to eat at his high camp; spoke several curt words in dialect and marched on. The disordered array quickly formed file. Voiceless, virtually soundless, it moved away through dense labyrinth, dimmed by perpetual shadows. Some distance at its rear walked Zera, alone.

Up at the hut the gold bar which she had concealed from the eyes of the stranger still lay under the stick bed, unguarded, but safe as if in a vault; for in this solitude was no thief.

Up a long slope the file wound by random meanders, following easy grades, reaching at length a narrow notch between precipitous stones. Through this pass it flowed without pause and, beyond, swung down a steeper declivity, still seeing only the crowding timber, but advancing with the added momentum of an attacking force nearing its objective. Down, down, down, then a halt.

Jalichan, lifting a long arm, had given a signal. Now, in tones barely audible, he spoke to two of the hard faced hillmen. They stole away, stealthy as stalking pumas. All others waited.

Perry, impatient, took one step after the scouts, but no more. The Tarasco commander stood blocking his path, saying nothing, but looking him straight in the eyes. So narrow was the trail and so thick the jungle beside it that the obstructor could not be removed without noisy violence. Grumbling something under his breath, the Arizonian held himself quiet.

Time dragged. Even the Indians began to stir restlessly.

When, at length, the two scouts reappeared, every head craned toward them. In low gutturals they reported something to their overlord. For a second his eyes narrowed with apparent displeasure. But then a queer, thin smile flitted over his mouth. With a short gesture he signaled the pair to follow at his heels, and moved on.

Slowly he went, stopping frequently as if listening, delaying the advance so exasperatingly that Perry growled and the brown men muttered. On the threshold of combat the leader seemed to have become timid. Had any of his followers seen and read his expression, they might have been even more angrily mystified by realization that, after bringing them to kill a man, he now had deliberately determined only to kill time.

CHAPTER XI

THE LAST DIVE

HELL DIVER Hoke, about to shove off from shore, grinned mockingly at the forest, which, despite constant frowning threat, had not only failed to produce danger but had tamely furnished the raft for his raid on the lake. As if taunting a human foe, he jeered—

"You big false alarm, watch this!"

The somber shadows withheld retort. But they watched.

Leaning on his pole, he pushed the clumsy craft out and away. Gradually gaining momentum, it moved easily enough toward the middle, following the course previously traveled by the miniature float bearing a monkey on a stick. To anything watching him, the present voyager also might look monkey-like, for his body, bare except for uprolled trousers, was furry with black hairs, his face darkened by unshaven beard, his head shaggy with an uncombed ebony mop. Ready for work, he had left behind him everything but the one garment, the pack basket, a long rope, and his revolvers. These, last, carried in pockets, went with him only because of long habituation to gun toting. Lulled by unbroken peace, he now was completely self-confident.

The dusky water steadily deepened. His pole, much too long for comfortable use at first, now sank far enough to make it more wieldy. All at once it nearly pulled him overboard. The latest shove had met no resistance.

"Ouch!" he muttered, catching balance and withdrawing. "Hit a hole that time! But we're 'most to the middle now."

He ran a calculating survey around the shores. The one he had left was nearly half a mile away; the opposite one somewhat farther. The ends of the lake were considerably more distant, but the watery expanse appeared about equal in both directions. He lifted the pole again for an experimental prod. Then he froze, arms raised, eyes staring.

Sudden yells broke the quietude. Louder noises followed. From the fringed

plantation edge hammered gunshots.

Deep booms of shotguns, blunt bangs of muskets mingled in a ragged roar. From the placid surface erupted silvery splashes. All were short of the raft.

For several seconds he stood like a shape of stone. Then, dropping the pole and grabbing his weapons, he crouched defensively. For the moment he was the Hoke of the North, in a tight place, ready to fight if he must, readier to flee if he could. Rapid scanning of the land, however, convinced him that he could do neither.

Brown shapes, half glimpsed, were fast flitting toward both ends of the lake, racing to reach the other side. They would be in position to intercept him long before he could work his sluggish float across; yes, even before he could make the distance by his best swimming. Fighting was futile; his enemies were out of revolver range.

On the other hand, he was beyond reach of their guns. The impotent spatterings of their missiles proved that. As this fact darted through his mind he relaxed, straightened, and loosed a howl of derision at all assailants.

Their retaliation was a medley of more yells and firings, all harmless. In conclusion came a wrathful challenge:

"Jackson! Hoke! You damn dirty rat, come here and fight!"

"Gees," muttered Hoke. "Perry!"

Shading eyes, peering hard, he made out the khaki clad shape of his erstwhile partner in the shade of a big tree. Flanking that form were two others, one clothed, the other not. At that distance he could not recognize McConaughy. But the other man's figure was unmistakably that of the yellow house owner.

"They sure have ganged up on me," he thought. "But I got 'em all stopped, at that."

Aloud he jeered:

"Blah! Who'd you ever fight, you hunk o' tripe? All you ever done was crack me down when I wasn't lookin'. And now you have to go git a gang before you dare try it again, hey? Brave bucko, you are! Now you're all here, come and git me! Yah-ha-ha!"

His raucous laugh was accompanied by insulting gestures intelligible to all Indians, as well as to whites. He knew well that nobody could take up his challenge. There was no boat; Perry could not swim; any one else able to do so could easily be shot before reaching the raft. And their shooting had proved that they had no long range weapons. Thus, while he remained in midlake, he was inaccessible.

On shore, Perry, gripping the ineffectual shotgun which he had snatched from the house, yelled furious response to the gibes. McConaughy drawled:

"Save your breath, lad. You might need it some other time."

THE SATIRIC counsel drew a resentful grunt, followed by a suspicious look. McConaughy had not fired a shot. Neither had Jalichan, whose musket now leaned against the tree trunk. The firings of the other Indians, the disappointed avenger now realized, were as futile as his shouts, amounting only to a clamorous venting of hatred on an enemy who had gotten beyond reach. He turned on the man whose dilatory approach had given the quarry time to voyage out of range.

"Jalichan, you're to blame for this," he charged. "You let him go."

The Tarasco looked at him as if faintly amused, then resumed watching the man on the raft, expectantly. McConaughy, too, regarded the killer with anticipative intentness.

"Humph!" grunted Perry. "What are you looking for? You don't believe in that snake yarn, do you?"

"Snake? What snake?" innocently countered McConaughy.

"Why—er—there's a wild Indian story about a snake that swallows men in this water."

"I'm a stranger here," reminded McConaughy. "And I haven't any girl friend to tell me stories while she soothes my fevered brow. I was merely thinking that this will be a long day, and a man

doing nothing gets restless, and maybe reckless. All of which might make Mr. Hoke start something. Anyway, it's his play next."

After a moment of consideration Perry set aside his gun and waited for that next play. It was some time in coming.

Out on the raft, Hoke sat and took his ease. The float had drifted by its own momentum to what seemed the exact center of the lake, and now it stayed there as if anchored. There was no further need of using the pole. There was no breeze to move his vessel onward. There was no more noise from shore. The abortive assault had died out. And he was sitting pretty. The longer he sat, the prettier he felt.

It sure was a lucky break, he thought. If that gang had caught him at the house, they'd have given him the works. In spite of his guns, they'd have managed to fire the dry thatch roof and smoke him out. Then they'd have just taken him apart. But out here—let 'em try and get him! He could stay right here, with no particular discomfort until night. There was plenty of water to drink and cool off in and, though he would get hungry, he could stand that. When night came he would make his getaway by stealthy rafting and silent swimming. The watchers would be sleepy by that time. He knew where the path toward the railroad started, and he would use it. Some other time, when Perry had given up the quest, he would sneak back here, knock off that yellow dog of an Indian and raise the treasure.

Thus scheming, he spent a pleasant half hour or so in complete peace. Over under the tree, the three watchers had squatted to rest. Elsewhere no besieger was visible or audible. Nothing at all moved. At length, however, the idler in midlake began to fidget. And as time went on the continuous silence and inaction, the increasing heat, the absolute monotony grew intolerable.

Lying prone, he dipped his face under the surface, staring down. Only opaque depths ending in blank darkness met his vision; the black bottom was beyond eye range. After a minute or two, however, he arose, grinning. He might as well utilize his time and amuse himself by doing just what he had come out to do: go down and locate the stuff, clean it off, bring up a few chunks for inspection. Perhaps he could find pieces small enough to carry away with him when he made his sneak by darkness. Anyway, it would make his powerless besiegers on shore froth at the mouth to watch him get the gold in spite of them.

With ostentatious deliberation he shed his trousers, lifted and lowered the basket, made plain to all watchers the fact that he was about to start taking the treasure. No wrathful response came from any quarter; but, feeling all eyes on him, he went over with a flourish.

Leaping high, he snapped to vertical in air and shot into the water like an arrow. A small white geyser erupted in his wake, dropped, vanished.

WITH strong strokes he swam straight down. Eyes wide, hands reaching, he sought the top of the metallic mass, against which he did not wish to ram his head. Deeper, blacker, colder grew the depths. Still he met nothing solid.

At length he turned over, throwing up his head, reversing his body, stroking hard toward the air. Far above, alarmingly far, was vague light. With redoubled vigor he struggled to reach it. His lungs were hurting. His brain was thickening. His eyes bulged. His whole being ached for air.

The light receded.

Ghastly panic stabbed to his marrow. Though fighting up with mad desperation, he was going down!

From some mental recess came flitting memories of the shallow bottom which had glided under him so easily two days past, of his surprising distance from land on coming to the top. Now he understood—too late!

Blacker—colder—insane anguish for breath . . .

On shore, McConaughy had moved at the splash. From a shirt pocket he had flipped a thick old watch. Now he glanced alternately at it and at the water.

Seconds ticked steadily away into minutes. Minutes followed one another in regular succession. From nowhere around the lake came the slightest sound. And nowhere on the blue surface broke a new ripple. At length the elderly white man looked sidewise at the elderly Indian, found the brown eyes fixed on his, and put away the timepiece.

"That's that," he remarked.

Nobody answered. The Indian, smiling, again contemplated the water, making surety doubly sure. The young American stared, amazed, confused, still unconvinced. It took an echoing yell of triumph from the posted Indians to start him into speech.

"Good God! Where is he?" he blurted.

"Well, offhand, I'd say he was in hell," hazarded McConaughy. "But of course, I'm a stranger around here."

The blue eyes shot to the leathery face, roved again along the lake.

"But how come?" he demanded. "He was a good swimmer."

"Well, making all due allowances for Indian fables, it looks as if there might be something in the snake story. Maybe that old Spanish engineers' report I spoke of would sort of dovetail into the general idea. Here's an abbreviated translation, if you're interested in those things."

As casually as if passing cigaret makings, he handed over a paper extracted from the watch pocket. Perry read:

Lago de Tzontzun: Natural monstrosity, deceptively dangerous. Shelving bottom suddenly drops in middle to bottomless depths. Subaqueous springs of great volume enter at ends, flow to center, sink into hole evidently connecting with unknown subterranean river sweeping to Pacific Ocean. Inflow and outflow are so evenly balanced that no surface whirlpool develops and floating objects are not pulled down. At depths of ten feet or more perceptible currents draw toward the great drain. Inside this hole the downward current is irresistible, increasing with depth. Strong sounding lines lowered by engineers broke at thirty fathoms from force of suction.

Any treasure ever sunk here is irretrievable. Investigators advise abandonment of inquiry. Two men of this expedition were lost by diving to learn reason for breaking of lines. Further attempts can result only in other useless deaths.

—HURTADO
—VIZARRON
—GALVEZ
Ao. Di. 1568

Silently Perry passed the paper back and stared once more at the treacherously innocent lair of the mythical but mighty serpent of water. At length he looked at each of his companions: the man who had come to save him, the one who had done so.

"You two are a couple of sly old foxes," he accused. "But you're sure white men. And—well, come on into the house, Dick, and I'll let you in on something that'll make your trip down here worthwhile."

He trudged away toward the walls within which Zera now was setting disordered things to rights. McConaughy and Jalichan sauntered after him, without words, but with mutual friendliness. The long, soft blades of the maize rustled faintly in a vagrant breath, the flowers nodded slightly, and the brilliant hummingbirds murmured and gleamed under the sun. To the plantation had returned peace.

Out on the lake floated the raft, bearing its useless basket. Around that water the brown tribesmen, jubilant but once more quiet, trod the shore trail, to converge and converse gloatingly a few minutes at the solitary settlement, then disappear, homeward bound. And far down beneath the feet of all of them, speeding through black tunnels forever hidden, a limp white thing swept seaward; a hell diver which had taken its last dive and was going the whole route.

OF POSSESSION

By F. R. BUCKLEY

To the Serene Highness of his Lordship,* his singular Good Grace my Lord Amilcar I, Duke of Rometia, Lord of Trastevere and of Imagna, Tyrant of Bugasto *and so following*** From Luigi Caradosso the pensioner, late Captain of the Guard; under favor; these:

GOOD my Lord:

The procurator who came with your Lordship's most generous offer hath been gone these two hours; and I am become uneasy in my mind lest he misrepresent me to your Grace. For fifty years a soldier about courts largely inhabited (strange to say) by courtiers, I have been many times misrepresented ere this, and lived through it; nay once (on a laughable occasion whereof your Highness hath but to command the details to receive them) I was devilish belied by enemies, to my most handsome profit.

*Henceforth rendered in the second person—F. R. B.
**Condensation of twelve minor titles—F. R. B.

But never before hath it been a question of my refusing an obvious benefit; moreover, I am not what I was aforetimes, thanks to seventy-eight years and some eighteen or nineteen wounds; so that presently I would rather suffer clerks' cramp than have the son of your father (whom God assoil!) look sidewise at me, wondering whether it be some plot or conspiracy hath caused me to decline freehold of this my farm and remain as I have been heretofore, a simple tenant for the duration of my life.

Your Lordship, as I have said in the excuse for this excuse, I am an old man; and possession, by any man to himself alone, of any feature of God's creation, be that feature human, animal, or inanimate, is a dangerous emprise, suited only to the energy and audacity of youth. Witness, in the first instance, the extreme peril of marriage, after the groom shall have passed his twenty-fifth year—ha-ha! I could tell tales. With regard to the second and third cases—animals and lands—it may be objected that your Highness' father was but two years my junior, yet to his last illness most busy and successful in the gathering of these properties; but on the contrary let it be submitted under tolerance that he was no man but a duke; and therefore, while not a youth himself, yet the untrammeled administrator of the youth of his subjects. Which serves as well. Ha-ha! Perhaps better.

But I am naught at statecraft—which art, meseems, is but the dressing up of common sense in a velvet gown and the pretending that it is something incomprehensible to any one under sixty. On the other hand I do tolerably well (so my friends say) in the narration of those events which have given me common sense.

So that I tell your Grace plainly that I prefer free-tenantry of this farm to ownership, because so no one will marry me for the property, nor even poison me for it; and I add that the decision is engendered by memories of Lodovico dello Castello Nero; which memories I write down as follows, in the name of God, Amen!

They may amuse your Lordship in his bereavement; or, at worst, cause him to think . . .

Well, I kissed hands to Lodovico in the year 1538; the year, be it remembered, of the great drought followed by the great hail storm in September which ruined such lords as had been rich enough to make their folk terrace the hillsides, while it spared those smaller holders who from lack of power had been forced to farm the bottom lands only. As a result, the great lords decreased the number of their servitors; the smaller lords then bidding furiously between them for the more celebrated of the servants dismissed.

Now, I was fresh from my victories of Pontresina and the Ford of Agagli; still more or less famous for my suppression of the Easter rebellion at Monterosso; wherefore I soon found myself—late Captain of the Guard to my lord Count of Ravelli—engaged as commandant of some twenty men in the service of Lodovico dello Castello Nero aforesaid; who controlled perhaps five square miles, yet paid me ten crowns a month more than his Grace the count.

Nothing is more expensive than poverty. Unless it be sudden wealth . . .

Well; I will not weary your Grace with generalities. I will propose forthright that at the time of my coming there was in residence at Castello Nero a cousin, or some such, of my lord; by name Alberto di Peruzzo, lord of contiguous lands much larger than Lodovico's. He was but recently come to succession, his father being but a month dead; he was hot to carry out the policies whereby his father had blessed Peruzzo with prosperity heretofore unknown; but, by the carelessness of a nurse that had dropped him in infancy, he was little better than helpless—some malady of the legs.

Seen on his couch, he was a fine lad; wonderful good humored in the face and seemingly of proper person; but when he essayed to walk—which he did very gallantly—it was with a writhing limp that soon sent him feverish back to bed. Despite which, he had tried to repay my

lord's funerary visit; whereby he had fallen ill at Castello Nero; aggravating his condition by fretting at the neglect of his lands.

I perceive that I have said naught of Lodovico; I draw him now—a great man with red hair and a red face like an Englishman's; a great eater and great drinker; a lusty fellow generally and five years a widower and yet (your Grace will comprehend me) well loved even by those peasants who had daughters, He was, it is true, inclined to exceed his means in gorgeousness of raiment; but devil a one of his pockets but had a groat in it to be thrown to a child or a beggar.

He was not like, you perceive, to let even a tenth cousin suffer for lack of aid; so while the young lord lay ill, he neglected his own lands to govern Alberto's. And right well did he carry on the policies of the old dead lord; riding the forty miles to Peruzzo without murmur, whenever necessity or the sick lad's fancies demanded; and staying up late of nights deciding with Alberto what was next to be done.

And when the immediate illness was past, lo, Alberto was become so fond of Lodovico and of Castello Nero and even, (strange to relate) of me, who had amused him sometimes with stories of old fights, that he was loath to go back to the loneliness of his own castle. Thrice, with that apparent cheer which never failed him, he set a day beyond the which he must not abuse my lord's hospitality; thrice, the day coming, he found reasons to stay on. After the third time, Lodovico laid his great hand on the boy's shoulder and, in his blunt way, came to the heart of the matter.

"Sithee, Alberto," he said. "Whiles my son is at the university, I am alone here. Thou'st no wish to go home—tut, tut; protest me not—"

"But the business of the state!" says Alberto, blushing to be found out.

"Can be done from here. Oons, man, 'tis but forty miles to Peruzzo; we'll hatch plans for thy domain in the evenings, and I ll ride to see them carried out. When my son Paolo comes home—if he be not stuffed with learning past all use—there will be three of us to look after your precious people. Come, come. I'll take no denial. Captain; see that his Lordship's traveling gear is put out of reach. Any hostler bringing out his nag shall have fifty lashes. Tut!"

He bustled out of the room, and Alberto sat on the couch looking after him.

"O good kind man!" says he, in a voice that trembled; and mark me, your Grace, I am persuaded that at that time he was right. At that time, and for long thereafter; I would give it a year. Ah me! Alas!

I AM confined as to the length at which I may write your Grace; both by consideration of your Lordship's time, and by the constitution of my pen hand, latterly more than ever liable to the cramp. And what a pity is any confinement when one writes of humanity! Perforce one must leave much to the imagination of the reader; and imagination is almost as rare as honesty. If I could say, "By such and such a cause, and on such and such a day, began the change in our lord Lodovico," all would be well; but who can say, regarding even the simplest act of any human being, when it began—or when it will end, for that matter?

And this change in Lodovico was not simple. Far from that.

The first sign I saw—not that I recognized it as such until later—was visible some eighteen months after Alberto had come to live with us; during the yearly session of the manorial court of justice holden at Peruzzo. It was the first (one having been missed after the death of his former Lordship) to be held since Alberto his accession; and despite much wailing by the doctors the young man had insisted on attending. He had traveled (much against his will) in a litter, most carefully borne; but nevertheless, for two days he had to be content to lie by and let Lodovico administer the justice.

On the third day, after the list had been

cleared of all the minor things—stabbings and wife stealings and the like—he was well enough to sit, half lying, on cushions in the seigneurial chair of estate during the important part of the assize—the civil suits between merchants of the county; though Lobovico continued the active judge. The cases were important first because such squabbles, prolonged, were detrimental to trade; and secondly, because in their mutual wrath the litigants oft dropped facts about their rivals' business—or their own—which enabled the state to revise taxation upward.

Well; fourth or fifth on the list—there were many, many suits, the prosperity of the county having risen by leaps and bounds—there came some kind of proceeding whose nature escapes me (indeed, since the case was presented by lawyers, I understood nothing of it even at the time) but which had some bearing on the affairs of Castello Nero. I dozed (though standing strictly to attention behind their Lordships) during the arguments; and only awoke when suddenly, into Lodovico's pronunciament of decision, there broke the voice of Alberto. It was the first time he had spoken, save in greeting, since entering the audience room.

"Your pardon, my Lord," he said, "I think there is an error here."

Lodovico turned to him.

"Error?" says he.

"Under pardon, I think so." From weakness, Alberto's voice wavered through most of the gamut; but his eyes were steady. "Your Lordship must see that a judgment in such terms would much prejudice both these merchants in face of the traders in Castello Nero."

Lodovico swallowed something, and there was a flush on his cheek.

"Your Lordship's folk have enough business to spare some to their neighbors, meseems," said he. "I try but to do my best for all."

"We must however remember," says Alberto, pale as death and as resolute, "that this court is for the benefit of this county's inhabitants, and not for those of any other. Litigants have a right to expect that it shall observe their interests, and theirs only."

Now Lodovico was fairly flushed.

"If your Lordship suggests that I am favoring—"

Alberto laid a hand on his arm.

"Come, Lodovico," said he in a low voice, audible to none farther away than myself, "quarrel not with me. I—"

"Am I to be humuliated before all these clowns—"demanded my lord, in a voice similarly low, but furious—"whose money bags I've wet nursed this year and a half? These hog fat burghers, grudging the sign of a soldo to any but themselves?"

Things had not gone well at Castello Nero, since that one year of miraculous vintage. My pay was two months in arrears as I stood there. I could see knowledge of the circumstances, and also pity for them in Alberto's face; but no sign that he might be swayed to the abandonment of his peoples' cause.

"Nay, nay," he pleaded, "such is not mine intent, uncle. Only consider—"

"Is my decision to be superseded?"

"I can not—"

"Aye, or no?"

"Aye," says the poor lad, reaching for my lord's sleeve with his thin hand. "But, uncle—"

My lord arose.

"Henceforth," he said between his teeth to the open-mouthed assembly, "my lord Alberto will hear justice. I am glad that his health is so far improved as to permit it; and rejoice that it hath been in some sort through my efforts that he is recovered."

Whereat, with a bow to Alberto, he was gone like a whirlwind; leaving me torn between decisions—whether to follow him or to remain in my assigned position behind the chair of the lord presiding. Which question was neatly solved by the fainting of Alberto, and his commencement to slip out of his chair to the floor. I picked him up in my arms—he weighed scarcely more than a well grown boy—and thus hurried after Lodovico, who was without, yelling boot and saddle in a furious rage.

"How now?" he demanded sullenly, thought he could see very well, and sullenness was far from his habit.

Around us, by this time, was a crowd made up of all the inhabitants of the audience room. He glanced up at them; and suddenly there came into his eyes a look I had never seen in them before—of which, indeed, I should have thought him incapable; a calculating look, as it were; a glance such as an actor throws at the place where the patron sits.

"Sure the foolish boy," says Lodovico, changing his tone surprisingly, "hath not taken me in earnest—why, by God's wounds, he is fainted. Ho, louts! Make way! A doctor! A doctor! Alas, alas, what is this? Stir yourselves, idiots, dog's sons!"

In which sudden reversal of manner, he brought a leech to Alberto, who gave him aromaticks to smell, and said that on no persuasion might he be moved for three months. The which verdict (his second that day) Alberto set aside the moment he had regained consciousness; putting his arms about the neck of Lodovico, who kneeled beside his couch, and kissing him on the forehead; imploring his forgiveness and saying that he would not recover anywhere but at Castello Nero.

"I could do naught but what I did in the matter—" he was continuing; when Lodovico laid a broad hand on his mouth.

"Hush," says he, in his old merry way. "Forgiveness, indeed! I'll stay here with thee until the blood letter says we may go. No journeys for thee yet awhile."

AND SO he kissed Alberto on both cheeks and said there was an end of the matter; which, nevertheless, neither put out of Alberto's mind his desire to go forthwith to Castello Nero, nor out of Lodovico's whatever had come into it. In token whereof—it was scarce three days, much less three months, before we were returning to Castello Nero with Alberto in the litter; and it was less than forty-eight hours after our arrival there, that I saw a new sign of my lord's preoccupation. Coming to his chambers in our castle, Alberto had fainted again; indeed, for one half-hour, the surgeon who attended him was of opinion he would die. Lodovico was standing at one side of the bed; his son, recently returned from the university, across from him; and when the leech spoke, they looked one at the other. For an instant only; but for me, who had thought over my lord's behavior at the audience, and who now remembered the scowl with which he had come, these last few months, to regard the heavy laden wagon trains at Peruzzo, that glance meant much. It meant—I will be plain and forthright—that while Lodovico was, and had been these eighteen months, lord of Alberto's lands in all but name, he was no longer contented with this high office.

The devil of possession had entered into him—and into his son though I doubt either of them was 'ware of it. Not content with use of Alberto's county to the extent of any possible desire; he now craved ownership, the holding of those lands as his to him and his descendants forever.

Such is the nature of man, from childhood (when he hides the common toys from his brothers) until the grave; excepting for special revelations, such as have caused me to decline ownership (your Grace will remember) of this farm.

And, being launched on the common course of mankind; going, as it were, with the current of human inclination, Lodovico traveled fast. I saw that, day by day; week by week, during the next year; and yet I thought his progress toward hell far slower than it really was. I noted (our grape crop failed again that year, and he had to draw heavily, Alberto praying him to take more, upon the treasury of his foster-county) that his manner was continually less free; his heartiness more forced; his eyes more veiled, as though he pondered everlastingly something whereof he never spoke; and yet, until the moment of his death, I never knew what horrors that veil concealed.

Indeed—Alberto having come under the care of a new leech from Bologna, who

had most marvelously improved him—I looked forward to that young lord's early return to his own place; the consequent removing of temptation from my master; and his becoming of his old self.

Alas! An arrow in the breast may be plucked out, and the wound will heal; but who shall pluck out an evil thought once entered into the brain?

The new leech, disagreeing with his forerunners even more strongly than these had disagreed among themselves, had commanded that Alberto, hitherto kept as near motionless as possible, should move about; gently at first, then with freedom gradually increased; meantime applying salves. And in six months—it was August—the lad had progressed from a mere bending of the knees to walking; in which exercise I was his chosen companion. Since he endured ill the heats of the season, we walked habitually by night; around the battlements at first, but latterly, toward the end of the month, we strolled farther; by preference about the deserted streets of the castle town.

It was a small place, of an ancient building which Alberto said he preferred to our modern style, especially by moonlight. On a bright night he would stand in the midst of unexampled stinks (for the old houses were utterly without the decencies) and recite Latin poems till my feet ached.

He was in fact reciting such one evening when from around a corner rushed at us four masked men with drawn swords.

Aye, it was as sudden as that.

So sudden that I, though by no means a stranger to surprise attacks, stood there gaping while I should have been arming myself; which is how the leader—a great tall fellow but no fencer—came to pink me through the spare flesh of the side. He regretted this a moment later when, having kicked him so that he doubled up, I plucked forth his own sword and ran him through the body lengthwise; indeed, I thought for a moment that his screams must bring the watch. Then I remembered—as two of the other three came at me, the third skulking away toward my left side—that Castello Nero had no watch.

Ordinarily a peaceful place, it was policed in time of riot by the guard troops from the castle; who would certainly not come to our aid now. And we were in need of aid. Not only had I to deal with the two men before me—hot breathed devils with some knowledge of sword play—but also I must protect Alberto from the third man, whose thrust at the boy's throat I just parried with a five-foot leap.

Ah, my Lord, if I kept a museum of such things I should point to that fight with pride as a fine specimen of its age and kind. There was, to be sure, no formality about it, either on the attackers' side or on mine; I doubt I kicked as much as I stabbed; one fellow that had run me through the upper arm I hit with my other fist, like an Englishman, so that he fell down, taking my blade with him. But he arose again, and with his next pass almost pinned me to the door.

Did I say that we were in a doorway? No, but we were. Not at first (we had been standing in the middle of the street) but immediately thereafter; following my leap to save Alberto. Alone, I should have preferred a flat wall behind me; but for his Lordship some sort of recess was necessary, and so I hustled him into shelter. But for me the doorway was no protection at all; it was narrow enough to hamper my movements, while sufficiently wide to let all three of my attackers give point at once from different angles. Two I could have managed indifferently well; by the third I should assuredly have been spitted from side to side, had not Alberto the cripple, the reciter of poetry, the brooder on moonlight, remembered suddenly the stock of which he came.

He wore, more for a mark of nobility than for use, a little toasting fork of a sword, hardly longer than a stiletto and extravagantly gilded; with the which, by Peter and Paul, behold him stepping forward valiantly to my left side! There was spirit in him, and more than that. The first parry (I saw from the tail of my eye) sent him to his knees, whence he

could not rise without help; the second caused him to fall sitting against the outer newel of the door; but he took cheerfully what God sent and from this position stabbed bravely upward at his adversary's belly.

My two opponents were such as I could not leave, even for an instant; but when I had knocked the one down as aforesaid, I risked all on the tossing of my sword from right hand to left, and the making of a wild slash at Alberto's man. My own remaining fellow sent in a blade which I had to catch in my bare hand (it is this scar which aches with penmanship) but on the balance, I won.

The very tip of my blade caught its object over the left eye, traveling downward to the extinction of his vision on that side; and while he clapped hand to this, and before he could step back, Alberto fleshed six inches of his toy sword in the ribs. A pretty stroke which nearly cost both of us our lives; for it was while I was watching it that the man I had felled returned with intent to make a butterfly of me.

Did I say that by this time the whole street was awake, and that folk were coming forth in their night-rails? No. It is hard to keep account of such details when a fight is to the fore; I bethink me of this now because the stir saved my life. The burgher in whose doorway we were fighting was aroused, like everybody else; and by the grace of God, when a knock fell on his door, he opened—instead of running upstairs and hiding under the bed.

And since the said knock was made by the point of the assassin's sword, driving past me an inch deep into the wood, naturally the opening of the door inward first pulled my man into my very arms, and then wrenched the sword hilt from his grasp. Whereupon, embracing him with the left arm which still bore my sword, I ran him very pleasantly through the back.

Whereat the fourth man took incontinently to his heels, going through the crowd like a hot knife through butter; and I, after following him some dozen yards, fell over in a dizziness.

MY LORD, all this is forty years gone by; but still, remembering the moment of my return to consciousness, I ask myself—and I have asked many others, natural and supernatural—whether in any way I was blameworthy. True, I had done my best; but show me the man who can be resigned to disaster by that reflection, and I will point forth a fellow whose best is not of much worth. For, when I came back to the doorway, Alberto was dead; aye, while I had been a-stabbing of the last man but one, he that had escaped was sending in one last coward thrust at the boy, fallen and weaponless as he was.

And since then, during sleepless nights, during the fevers of wounds or diseases; on the march, in tents and in this the retirement of my age, I have asked myself whether, by better generalship, I could not have prevented this. Had I been an instant quicker when the sword point stuck in the door; had I—but speculation is endless; it maketh the brain turn and the sweat to start out on the palms of my hands. And to what avail?

I am but explaining to your Grace why I desire to possess no farm. For this explanation let it suffice; I had done my best, but Alberto was dead. I was even unable, for cause of my wounds, to command the escort at his burial. He lies at Peruzzo; under a monument erected by my Lord Lodovico and shattered by a cannon ball within six months.

There was a mighty mourning, both at Peruzzo and in Castello Nero; indeed, I think our dole, as shown forth by my lord, exceeded even that of Alberto's own folk. Lodovico, giving more time than ever to the business of the lordless lands, went about it in black raiment and with a manner of the deepest grief; nay, his whole manner seemed affected by calamity befallen.

His temper was become uncertain; his eyes were haggard; he seemed to take interest in nothing but the welfare of Alberto's county (there was much doubt as to the next heir) and the sending and re-

ceiving of messengers from Florence. After the coming and going of some dozen of these, he went to Florence himself—of course properly escorted and with me in command.

Have I said that in addition to the mourning, there had been a most strict and stringent inquest into the killing of Alberto? No; indeed my wits grow feeble. It was an inquiry so stern as to cause me, then nine-tenths delirious from my wounds, to be carried into the audience room and required to tell all I knew of the affair.

The judges were Lodovico, sitting with two commissioners from Peruzzo, and by the time they were done they had examined (I heard) full half of the inhabitants of Castello Nero; nevertheless finding only *imprimis*, that the assassins were strangers to the neighborhood; and *secundo*, that before assaulting us they had attempted robbery of two houses in the town.

Whereupon Lodovico ordered the three dead rogues stripped naked and hanged by one leg in chains (one was just outside my quarters, and clanked damnably); and offered two hundred ducats of reward to who might bring the fourth fellow back to his domains for death by torture. Aye; even the Peruzzans were startled at his fury for the avenging of their lord.

Which, being so, let your Grace imagine my amaze at the words spoken to me by my Lord Lodovico, after his first meeting with the Florentine merchants. By his own orders, six men and myself, having accompanied him to the place of meeting, remained a horse outside; which betokened, according to my experience, either a financial meeting, or one more closely political than usual; apt to last a weary while.

I was astonished, therefore, when scarce half an hour saw my lord back in our midst—exceeding pale, and seemingly much agitated; which astonishment was nothing to my surprise when, on our arrival at our lodgings, he began to make me privy to his affairs.

"Caradosso," says he in a peculiar voice; having twice assured himself that we were alone. "There is a plot against me here."

"A plot, my Lord?"

"Aye," says he, wiping his brow. "Harkee, Captain; it is being said that I contrived the death of my Lord Alberto."

"That your Lordship—?" says I, all bedazzled.

"Aye. Thou knowest otherwise, eh, Luigi?"

"So much so," I said, "that if your Lordship's grief prevents his disproving the allegation, and if he will appoint me his champion in the matter, I will quickly stop such accusation at the source."

"Nay, nay," says Lodovico. "We are not so far yet. There hath been no accusation, or by God I would have refuted it without champion. Only—only; look you, Luigi, I am here to borrow money—much money; it was to have been ready for me today; but they withheld it, saying that they must look deeper into the affairs of Peruzzo."

"And your Lordship took that to mean—" I began.

"What else should it mean?" he demanded, eyeing me narrowly. And then, "But perhaps I am wrong. I—you are dismissed, Captain. Only—attend me at the council tomorrow. Into the room, understandest thou?"

Which I did, mightily puzzled and not a little uneasy; and sure enough, the very first thing after the greetings, up stands an ancient Florentine in a furred gown and goes straight to the heart of the matter.

"Between honorable men, Ser Lodovico," says he, using this damned democratic Florentine style, "evasion is insult. Before we go farther with this matter of the loan, therefore, we will ask your Excellency to take formal oath—"

I chanced to glance at Lodovico and noticed that he was sweating! His face seemed glazed.

"—that to your Worship's knowledge, none about the court of Castello Nero had criminal knowledge of this slaying of the Lord Alberto. As a matter of form."

Lodovico sat perfectly still. A crucifix,

made ready for the occasion on a pillow of black velvet, was lying on the table; and the clerk to the council had already picked it up, when it was taken from him by a second councilor—a little hunchbacked man, with a great head and enormous green eyes. Unlike any other merchant at the board, I noticed, he wore a long heavy rapier, which trailed behind him as he writhed forward to push the pillow under Lodovico's nose.

"Will you swear?" he demanded in a voice many sizes too big for him.

"I—" said Lodovico faintly, then rose to his feet and swore.

I forget just what he desired might befall him hereafter if he had art or part, hand or finger, in the slaying of Alberto; everlasting fire was the least of it; and he proclaimed the whole in a strong voice, barring a small falter when he mentioned his "almost-son, Alberto di Peruzzo." The councilors were visibly affected; which made it all the more stunning that the hunchback, having returned the pillow to the table, should turn about and with hand on his sword hilt say into my lord's face the word—

"Liar!"

Naturally, in the blood stilling pause that followed I laid hand to my own blade; rolling eye toward my lord for instructions; which, bless you, he was in no frame of mind to give. For an instant he stood there, staring at the hunchback as at an apparition of the devil in person; then, with a hoarse noise, he leaped forward, dagger in hand, with the most evident intention of murder.

Dagger against rapier, alack! Well for him that I was no more than a yard behind him. For the hunchback had not provoked battle by way of suicide; nay, his deformity notwithstanding, he was a subtle and a determined swordsman, with a great lust for the blood of Lodovico. It was by a bare inch—parrying forward over my master's shoulder—that I caught his blade on my own; and I had not recovered myself before he had disengaged, run Lodovico through the dagger arm, withdrawn and cut me across the cheek.

Lodovico, disarmed, was but in my way; I threw him aside and was at points with the hunchback when the watch arrived. Nor will I say that I was sorry to see them, what though they arrested both my lord and myself and flung us into dungeons scarce fitted for pickpockets.

None hath a greater dislike than myself for rats, darkness and a floor ankle deep in foul water; but even such accommodation is preferable to the grave; and during those few *passadoes* with the dwarf I had seen death and burial in his green eyes.

I WAS reflecting upon him and wondering just what was the secret of his attack in *tierce*, when the jailer came for me. And—to dismiss as vain my first thoughts of hanging and such-like—he conducted me with all grace to a room at the top of the prison; wherein there awaited me two of the former councilors—the furred ancient and another with such thin lips as to seem mouthless.

"Sirrah," says this last, "how now?"

I said nothing.

"Do you plead guilty to complicity in this murder?" he demanded.

Since I had seen the hunchback walk away—not arrested either—there was but one murder to which he could allude.

"Your Excellency," I therefore said, "I am not offered oath, nor am I fool enough to fly at your Worship with my bare hands. I therefore say that I am a soldier, late commanding in these battles—" and I named them—"and that I here state that on the contrary, I was near losing my life in defense of the young man."

The elder believed me. He nodded, but he of the invisible mouth was at me like a ferret.

"But your lord," he snapped. "Come! No evasion! You are before us for dueling—a branding matter, with loss of the ears. I doubt we could hang thee. Did not thy master hire bravos—from this very town—from Florence?"

Inwardly I started, but kept countenance.

"To my knowledge, no."

"Rogue—" began the thin lipped man; but old furry gown laid hand on his arm.

"Tch-tch, Andrea," says he in a mild, sweet voice. "The captain is a reasonable man. Look you, Signor Caradosso. My Lord Lodovico hath done us the honor of asking for a loan, with the which he may add the lands of his late Lordship to his own; the money to be expended for troops, wherewith unjust claimants may be defeated and turned away. The sum is very large; lending it, naturally we desire that the speculation employing it be successful. Since thou wouldst command the troops, we have no doubt on that score. Ahem! Thou seest I am frank with thee. I will be franker. To whom would we rather lend—of whom should we be surer, tell me; a lord who merely desired the lands, or one who had proved himself able to act vigorously for their possession?"

O furry fox!

"I should say, to the latter," I told him.

"Then thou seest," says he, putting the tips of his fingers together, "that if my Lord Lodovico was—ahem!—the contriver of the—er—little accident, it would be to his advantage that thou shouldst tell—"

"I do indeed see, your Excellency," I said, with the liveliest semblance of regret, "but no more than I would belie my lord, would I mislead your Worships. To my knowledge and belief, my lord knew nothing of the affair."

The nice old gentleman scowled at me and clapped his hands. Well for me I had behaved myself! The hangings of the room were alive with men.

"Away!" he snarled; and that was the extent of his knowledge-getting by me.

But I think—indeed I am sure—that he did better with Lodovico; for of all the invitations grateful to guilty men, "Come, let us be rogues together" is, I think, the hardest to resist. All I know, though, is that the loan was granted, at a rate of interest said to be utterly ruinous; and that within a month I commanded two hundred men instead of twenty. And there were more to come, and guns; so that the claimants who might have disputed Lodovico's present proclamation of himself as Count of Peruzzo and so following, thought better of it.

It was left for others, far humbler, to protest; the inhabitants of Peruzzo, to wit; whose protest was nevertheless effective. A week after my lord, hitherto the servant lord of these lands, had proclaimed himself owner thereof, down came his flag from the staff where it had floated beside the half lowered banner of Alberto; the townspeople closed their gates, having first driven within walls all the available cattle; and then, in set form, they defied Lodovico and called him a murderer.

"But—but—" says he when the news came. "I thought—but they loved me, Luigi!"

A-ha, they had loved him while he had no part in them, as a man may love a woman whom he would by no means wed. They had esteemed him as governor for Alberto; but as an owner in his own right, he was otherwise regarded. Besides, the rumor that had troubled us in Florence had come to them; that was very evident from their defiance. But I said nothing.

"Summon my son," says Lodovico, looking more hag ridden than ever; and when this was done, he dismissed me, so that I knew not the course of that conference.

Save that it decided to bring Peruzzo to obedience with the forces engaged to defend it against other lords; and so decided, I think, on the motion of Paolo. Aye, for strong though the lust of possession had become in my lord, it was stronger in his son. He was a mild mannered youth, of oily disposition; visibly unfitted to gain lands for himself either by force or contrivance, and so the madder for lordship by inheritance.

"Am I to command?" I asked my lord, when he had announced his decision.

"Under myself," says Lodovico. "My son thinks—we have decided that it will more impress the rebels if their defeat comes from mine own hand."

"And the Lord Paolo?"

"Will remain here, administering the affairs of Castello Nero," says my lord, looking at me sharply.

But he saw naught in my countenance save that bright soldierly look which is so useful for concealing thought.

"So that, if I should chance to be killed," says my lord, speaking that which he suspected me of thinking, "there will be some one to inherit."

I maintained my impassivity.

"The plan," lied Lodovico, "is my own. My son is all for battle. Now, with regard to the artillery—"

Well, your Grace, we gathered up our army, taking good store of powder and shot, and even of those newest balls that are filled with powder, and burst after firing; and we went to Peruzzo and called upon it to surrender, of course in vain; after which for nearly a week we fired our cannon at it, with very much the same result. Like most folk that know nothing of fighting, my lord was much enamored of his artillery with its bang and stink; it took seven days and the expenditure of many a good ducat in gunpowder before he would abandon the accursed things and follow my advice. Which was to build a cat, move it up to the walls and land a storming party armed with good plain steel.

"But oons, man," says Lodovico, "the tower on wheels was used by the Greeks! Have we not progressed since then?"

"I would rather use what hath been used before, no matter by whom," says I, "than entrust myself to engines that have never served any useful purpose yet, nor ever will."

"But their catapults," says my lord. "Will they not knock your tower to pieces?"

"Unless," says I, with sudden inspiration, "your Lordship will keep them out of mischief with his guns."

Which agreed him to my plan; though of course I relied not in the least on his cannon, but entirely on my crossbow men. So we went to work on the cat, building it out of tree trunks, with cross cuts of the same for wheels; while my lord burned up more and more money in the attempt to smash the great catapult which was annoying us in camp, and which would offer the greatest peril to the cat when this should be completed.

Never, I daresay, was there such a catapult as that; even as it was then; and later—as I shall show—it was remade into something more stupendous still; for of course my lord never damaged it with his bangings. It had a beam of fifteen paces long, and a twist rope to make the which every woman in Peruzzo had sacrificed her hair; and by preference it hurled bags or nets filled with five or six men's weight of the stone knocked loose by our bombardments.

Already, by dropping these missives on some dozens of men, it had caused us to shift our camp twice; we were out of range now, but barely so; and to go farther would have been to leave the town invested in naught but name. On my advice, even so, Lodovico had abandoned his captain's tent, which proclaimed his whereabouts to those on the city walls; and taken to a ragged shelter such as housed the under-officers.

Since no cat could be built to withstand the full blow of this engine, I must go to work differently; which I did, building a machine strong enough to bear more men than the usual, yet light enough to be moved quickly and zig-zag over the ground. It was a masterpiece; it went to my heart, when I passed there some months later, to see it standing forlorn and abandoned in the wood where we had built it.

FOR MY cat was never used. On the eve of the night planned for the assault, my Lord Paolo came to camp, full of business and tidings, and full of a desire to see for himself why we had made no better progress in the reduction of the town. He insisted on going forth under cover of darkness—companied only by a secretary fellow with a swivel eye and a manner oily as his own—to reconnoiter; and came back—having of course caused

our attack to be put off—with sneers at both his father and myself, and a demand why we had not assaulted the water gate.

We had indeed done this, on the insistence of Lodovico, and lost fourteen men; but there was no telling this to my young lord. Finding I had led the attack, he snorted with his nose and was on the point of saying that another attempt should be made, led by his father, but refrained. Aye, if he had said that, my prudence must have left me; perhaps he saw my eye. I saw his, believe me, and knew that a new lord would mean a new guard captain, if no worse.

So—the next night was set for the attack; the cat was ready; the guns were in position for their quite useless attempts to cover its advance; my bowmen, upon whom this work should really fall, were duly posted; and it was time to awaken Lodovico from the siesta he was taking, in preparation for the business of that night. Giving my last instructions, I was starting forth to wake him, when I perceived Paolo to enter his father's tent; whereupon I halted and turned a speculative eye on the town and the sunset behind it.

I was just wondering why it is that sunsets are always prettiest when a man is about to chance seeing no more of them, when I perceived something arise from above the walls; something black and ragged, which flew upward and toward me at a dizzy speed, rolling over and changing its shape as it flew. It was another net of stones from that catapult, and I waited with some interest for its crash on the ground short the usual hundred yards of where I stood. But it flew on; and now meseemed that it was higher in the air and traveling faster than similar nets of the past. Quite reasonlessly, I opened my mouth to shout; then, more foolishly still, I began to stumble toward Lodovico's tent. I was not halfway toward it when I saw the missile begin to fall; I saw whither it was directed, and now my throat opened in a yell of warning—of course too late.

Before the echoes of it had died away that vasty mass had fallen with a rattle and a deadly thud, squarely upon the tent containing Lodovico and his son; of course killing them at once and even erecting to their memory not one memorial stone, but many. Among others, there was the small head of an angel, chipped off a church; as I write it keeps the written pages from blowing out of window.

My Lord, if that were all, would it not be enough? But there is more; for within the ten minutes—before we had half unburied the would-be possessors of Peruzzo—behold a flag of truce issuing from the city gate; which, knowing naught else to do, I advanced and met. And lo! Besides the man who bore the flag, there were two others carrying a litter; and within the litter was none other than the old man of Florence—he that had worn the furred gown and examined me in prison. Seeing my jaw drop, he smiled at me.

"Ah. He is dead?" inquired the old gentleman. "And God's justice, too, Captain—though 'twas I had the catapult strengthened. We have found the bravo that escaped, and his confession is that Lodovico did hire him and the others. Murder! And of a guest. And then perjury! Tut to such doings! For shame!"

"My lord Paolo is also—"

"Ah, yes. And God's justice again, Captain. A son that comes to the enemy by night, telling where and what like is his father's tent, that a catapult may overwhelm it—"

I felt cold in the stomach.

"Conveying that his young Lordship—" I began weakly.

"Aye, certainly, man! Had been playing booty with Peruzzo all this week. By messenger from Castello Nero, yon slinkmanner fellow he had with him yestere'en. Had his plans made to the dot. 'A was to have proved innocence by leaving the tent but a moment before the bolt fell; but if there is a thing I hate it is filial impiety, and so we threw the stone a little early."

Seeing that my eyes bulged, he laughed

outright and patted me on the forearm.

"Ah, honest Captain," says he, "such little strategies appall thee; but they are of the most ordinary. How if I should tell thee that it was long decided that these lands should belong to Florence?"

"But then why," I said out of a daze, "did your Worship lend money to my lord?"

"Because it needed danger to throw the Peruzzans into our arms," says the old man, mightily pleased with himself and amused at my bedazzlement. "Besides, my lord might be killed, and thus save us the trouble of accusing him of murder, and thus voiding his title by attainder. I have been here since the day the gates were closed—though of course neither your lord or his son knew it. Ha-ha! As governor for the time being. As for the money lent, we take over the army it hath bought, losing very little, thanks to thine economies, Luigi; and since the loan is nevertheless not repaid in gold as specified, we seize Peruzzo for the debt. A double claim, thou seest."

He chuckled and scratched in his beard, and his eyes twinkled.

"Moreover, on account of the interest on the loan," says he mildly, "we take over the lands of Castello Nero. I see no service left for thee, Captain, but ours. Wilt continue in command for the Republic of Florence?"

I stared at him open mouthed, too dazed by these revelations to speak; or even, for some moments, to nod. Finally I accomplished the latter; whereupon the old man chuckled again and dug a bony finger into my ribs.

"That is well. I have a fancy for thee, Caradosso," he said, "and so I give thee an old man's advice. Wear a hair shirt if thou wilt; use the scourge daily and stand ten hours a night in cold water up to the neck; in short, mortify thy flesh in any way that seems best to thee, but on no account try to gain wealth. Ho-ho! I will return to the city."

And with your Lordship's favor, it is his counsel I have followed in the matter of the farm so nobly offered to me by your Grace. I am, as aforesaid, old, and without taste for griefs not obligatory to that state.

But if your Highness insists in the desire to give away this land (after the present writer's death) I can put forward as the recipient a man eminently worthy of the gift. His name is Martino Sammartino, of this village; a young fellow; strong; ambitious; and so handsome as to have lured from me last week the prettiest serving wench ever I had.

Commending whom to the generosities of your Grace, and with the humblest reverence, I subscribe myself truly the servant of your Lordship,

—L. CARADOSSO, *Tenant*

I Buy Me Couple Horses

By W C. TUTTLE

ALL I SAID was—

"I'm movin' out where I can have couple horses."

I didn't say when, how or where. The movin' vans ain't got quite all my worldly plunder through the front gate, when horses began to come. Trailers loaded with horses; a lot of peddlin' cowboys, workin' on commission—beatin' the Universal Zoo lions out of a meal.

"This here horse is worth twelve hundred, pardner. Five gaited, sound as a dollar, and as kind as a—as kind as a —well, he's kind, thasall."

"What's the extra thousand for—haulin' him out here?" I asks.

I took him on approval and found he was kind—the kind that eats your shirt. And I paid twelve dollars for that shirt. The next one was a polo pony, which whirled so quick that my hat was on backwards when we stopped. I got off and found that my chaps had turned around on me, too. That was too fast. I took another on approval, 'cause he didn't try to bite me—and found out his teeth were all gone. They told his age by the rings on his hoofs.

Then I got weak minded and bought a horse. But I sure worked up a reputation as a discriminatin' judge of horses. Refuse a couple hundred, and they think you know somethin'. One man cried over his animal. Hated to part with it. Said it had been in the family ever since they had been in California. I saw it and cried with him.

Then came a Horse. He came at dusk, and I choked with joy. Johnny had found the one horse in the world.

"Five hundred bucks. Mebbe can shade it a little. Man leavin' town and must have the cash."

"Gotta try him, ain't I? Too dark now, Johnny. Try him early mornin' and have check ready. Four hundred'll do, eh?"

"Lotta horse."

"Lotta money."

". . . See you *mañana.*"

I say to the wife:

"Honey, I've got *the* horse. He's in the stable. Whee!"

Wham! Wham! Wham! Bing! Bang!

I got there in time to save my other horse, but the stable and corral is a wreck. I found one box-stall door over in another man's place next mornin'. I managed to rope this cross between a batterin' ram, Bengal tiger and a rattlesnake, after almost getting kicked, chawed and trampled, and hog tied him to a two hundred year old oak tree. Then I ran to a phone.

"Tell Johnny to come and git this blankety blank sorrel!

"Whatsa matter—is he restless?"

"He ain't now. I've got him hog tied to a tree."

"What'll you bet he stays tied?"

My wife's yellin'—

"Honey, he's loose!"

"He's loose," said I over the phone. "But I guess the tree is still there."

"You're lucky. Your stable is the seventh one he's wrecked in six months. I'll send Johnny over to git him."

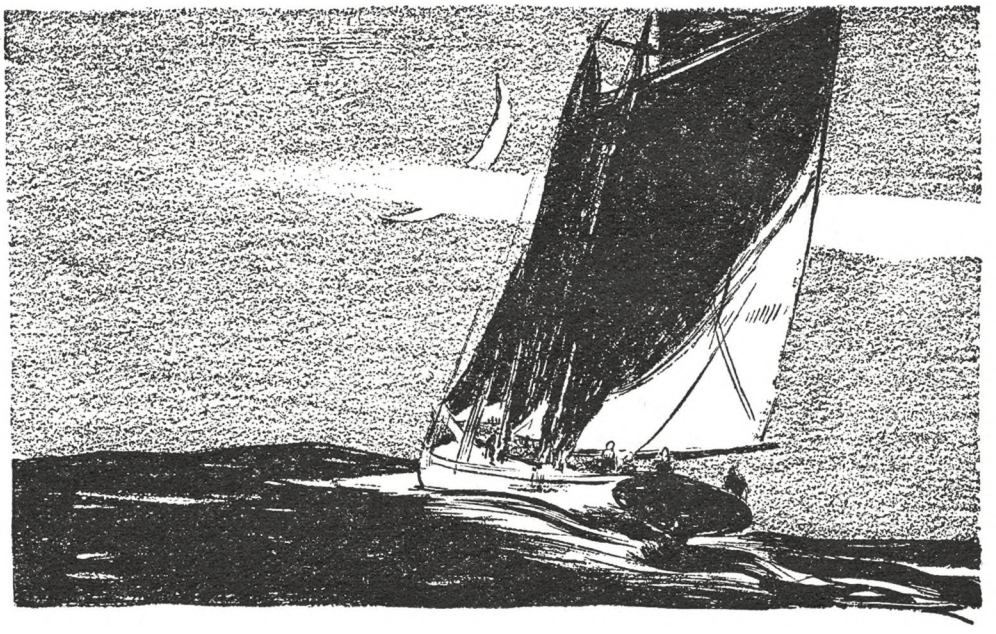
"Is the owner of him leavin' town?"

"Nope."

"Gimme his name, and he will."

"Boy, if we'd have told his name, he'd have been gone six months ago. Now listen, Bill. I've got a brown mare, five gaited, weighs a thousand pounds. She's a lady's pet, I tell you. You can crawl under and over her, she ain't scared of anything. What do you think?"

"I think you're lucky," says I—and hung up.



The STORY'S END

A Story of the Coral Seas

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

THE BOAT was a long, slim, thin skinned whaleboat, with only three men aboard but with so much of a load that she was just right in the water, and well trimmed. They had seen to that, naturally. Her rag of canvas bellied out and tugged her through the water, up and over the long rollers of the Arafura Sea; the man in the stern handled her with all the nicety required in handling a whaleboat with the wind astern. The other two, sprawled anywhere, smoked or talked or slept at will. They seemed to have small responsibility.

The boat and her cargo presented singular problems. Three canvas dufflebags showed the names of their owners crudely painted on them—Larsen and Berman, the two sprawlers by the man in the stern, Frome. Only, the painting of these names had clearly been done very recently. The letters were black and firm, not crackled and blurred by usage.

A seaman's eye would have marveled at the stack of stores and their quality. A case of fine Hollands, several cases of expensive mineral waters; no ship's biscuit, but American bread products; meats and fish and vegetables of the best quality everywhere. Delicacies too—jellies and condiments, a box of *foie gras* tins—things certainly foreign to such men as these three and taking up room which might have been better disposed. And.

lashed to the midship thwarts, a plain, dull green chest, a seaman's chest of the old type. In the top of it were hacks and scars as though a name had been chopped out of the wood, and the green paint, over all, was fresh.

"Look alive, George!"

It was the steersman who spoke abruptly. His voice was metallic, strong, as aggressive as his bold dark eyes and his high boned, brutal features. In voice and face alike there shone a certain alert intelligence which redeemed their brute characteristics.

"Up for'ard, George! Or should I call you Mr. Berman? Where you got that name beats me. I never heard of a circumcized Greek before."

Mr. Berman grinned and rose. He was obviously of Greek type; swart, craftily brutish, with narrow little eyes that spoke of evil things and abnormal vices. He made his way forward of the mast until his bare feet could straddle the boat there as he clung, his eyes on the water ahead.

The third man sat up. Easy to see why he had taken the name of Larsen; he was yellow haired, shock headed, his face long, his nose short, his ears sticking out almost at right angles to his head. His eyes were light blue, their bleached lids almost invisible; this gave his expression a peculiar and horrible cast.

"Good thing we brought George," he said with a cackling laugh. "George has an eye for the coral, huh? Old Cap'n Stockton felt safe enough when George was aloft to con—"

"You damn fool!" said Frome levelly. "Will you shut up usin' names?"

Larsen rubbed his head stupidly, frowned a little and stared at the sea.

"We're coming into Poanga by the back way," said Frome, as though explaining something to the others. "Plenty of coral this side, but we've figured pretty close—it'd be two days more if we went around, and we can't chance it. That's the island—the blue tuft."

"A whaleboat," said Larsen slowly, "is a hell of a craft in coral waters."

True enough, and these were obviously coral waters. Far ahead against the horizon loomed up a bluish blotch, the high palms of an island. Here and there, to right and left ahead, one might see an occasional patch of bare white coral rock; one of them jutted up ten feet above the water. These were visible dangers. Then there were places where the waves broke in lines of white foam; patches of reef barely awash. In other spots the water was of a light brown hue, showing half a fathom or less. Light green banks showed a fathom or more, safe enough for this craft. With the sun high and behind, as it now was, George had no difficulty in making out the patches and banks.

Larsen squinted at the man in the stern.

"Wind's goin' down," he observed. "Now see here, Patterson; I hope to hell you're right about that there boat from—"

The man in the stern gave him a straight, savage look.

"You blasted fool, will you get the name straight?" he snarled. "Understand it for the last time; I don't intend to swing just because you're a fool! Don't go giving your name as Knutson nor mine as Patterson nor George Berman's as Black George—hear me? If you do, sure as hell I'll croak you. Understand?"

"Aye," returned the fair man placatingly. "I'll remember, Frome, I'll remember. But I hope you're right about that there boat from Thursday Island."

"I am," said Frome. "With the monsoon right, as it is, she drops in on Poanga the first to third of every month. Hardly ever varies a day. Now get your lesson straight. What ship you from?"

"The *Jennie Parker*, trader, out o' Samoa. Cap'n Smith, master," said Larsen. "Two Kanakas come down with some sort o' sickness that broke out all over them, and all hands caught it. We piled up on a reef one night, calm sea—all hands sick. I dunno where it was. Me and George and Frome was some sick, not much. Cap'n Smith, he was dead. We took off in the boat. The mate and another hand, a Portugee, was with us, but they come down sick and died. The mate

had laid a course to reach some island and Frome held it. That's all I know."

"How you come to have all them fine cabin stores aboard?" said Frome.

"The mate had us put 'em in," returned Larsen. "Said we might's well have 'em."

"Uh-huh." Frome nodded. "Did the mate bring the ship's papers?"

"I dunno," said Larsen. "Ask Frome. He might know."

Frome smiled. Rather, his thin, wide lips curved in a grimace.

"No, sir," he said. "The mate—Thornberg his name was—had some sort of package in his jacket pocket, but he came down heavy with the sickness and we just hove him over in a hurry when he died. I was afraid of contagion and we were taking no chances. And quite right, my man, quite right," he added mockingly. "All clear ahead, George?"

"All clear," returned George from forward. "Wind going down."

It was not going; it had gone. The canvas began a listless flapping, and at a word from Frome, the Greek came aft, as the boat swung to the long, heavy swells. Frome opened a tin of Capstans, lighted a cigaret and eyed the other two.

"All right, Larsen; break out a bottle of that gin. We'll fry here until about sunset, then we can get ahead a bit before dark. We'd better moor to one of those coral rocks, or lay over the ledge for the night. One touch of coral would rip the bottom out of her like paper. Then, with morning, we can make the island. George, cast off the lashings of the box and open her up."

With sudden alacrity the other two obeyed, Larsen at the case of gin, the Greek at the green seaman's chest, which he managed to lug aft. It was not very heavy.

"Wait a minute before we broach that gin," said Frome, dominating the pair of them with eye and voice. "We'll divvy up now and have the thing settled. I want no fuddled heads getting the straight of this. Did either of you men ever hear of the *Anna J.* out of Sydney?"

Larsen shook his head stupidly. Much of his stupidity, it became evident, was assumed. George Berman frowned, then his face cleared and his white teeth shone out.

"Sure!" he exclaimed. "I was cook in the *Anna J. Fraser* once—that was in New Orleans, see? A long while ago—"

Frome laughed and nodded satisfaction.

"All right. Pass me the stuff."

From the green chest, which opened to his touch, George took a long, heavy box of rosewood, mounted with handsome brasses; a key was in the lock. Frome laid it beside him and leaned forward, examining the chest. Inside this appeared clothes, neatly folded; two *Pilots*, thumbed and dog eared, a revolver and a long, dirty envelop with a rubber band around it. On the inside of the chest lid was the inscription:

Hartley F. Stevens,
care Sailors' Bethel,
San Francisco

Frome nodded again.

"All set," he said reflectively. "Whose chest is that, George?"

"The mate's, sir," said the Greek, grinning.

"Hm! So it is. And a matter of thirty quid in that envelop, saved up. Speaks well for you men—never touched it, eh? I tell you, seamen are honest!" Frome's voice was mocking again, and a gleam danced in his dark eyes. "All right, lads, close her up and we'll get to work."

With ill suppressed eagerness the other two slammed down the chest lid and turned to him as he unlocked and opened the rosewood box.

"Kits ready?" he said.

The others grunted assent. They were ready—Larsen with a large oilskin packet slung by a cord about his neck, which he opened up; George with a bit of cloth and a handy sewing kit.

Frome took a tray from the rosewood box, in which were various odds and ends —a notebook, some jewelry and an old fashioned watch and chain. He looked at it, then dropped tray and all overboard. Neither of the others offered any comment.

He took out a second tray. In this were some gold pieces, a good deal of silver money and several sheafs of banknotes, all sorts of money. He passed this to Larsen.

"Divide it into three, later."

Larsen laid it aside, intent on what came next. This proved to be a deeper tray, filled with little balls of cotton. Frome hesitated and looked at his two companions.

"Now, lads," he said quietly, "if we look 'em over, we'll get to making comparisons and squabbling. Let's avoid all that. We know this is the whole two-year pick from the main beds at Quoin Island and worth about eight thousand pounds at Thursday Island—prob'ly more in any real port. Suppose we take 'em as they come, blind, and leave 'em rolled up. Suit you?"

Larsen frowned, then nodded slowly. George assented with eagerness. Frome set down the tray at their feet, lifted the heavy box and dropped it overboard. Then he took a little ball of cotton from the tray.

"One!" he said, as the others followed suit.

Turn by turn, the three plucked at the contents of the tray, which dwindled rapidly. When it was empty, each of them had a neat wad of cotton beside him. There was one left over; Frome took out a coin in silence, as did the others, and they matched for it. The odd fell to George, who took the one remaining ball and began to sew it up with the rest of his share. Larsen was stowing his in the oilskin, carefully. Frome dropped the empty tray overboard.

"Pearls for luck!" he said. "Now let's have a drink and divvy up the coin."

ASA RYAN, master of the *Island Witch* and also owner thereof, was not only playing in hard luck; he was about done for. No one would have thought it from his looks, as he laid the course for the entrance of the Poanga barrier reef and brought up the schooner for it. He was lean, brown, hard faced; his own predicament had accentuated the rather savage set of eye and jaw and, as he wore only singlet and shorts, with a wide straw hat, the rippling muscles of his body stood out as he swung the wheel.

For the past month and more ill luck had dogged him. Fouled anchor chains at Port Moresby, a resultant smash, with repairs and damages and dockage, had hit him hard. At Thursday Island a fight with two Jap pearlers had left him legally in the wrong, and so adjudged, with a whacking fine to pay and his entire crew lured aboard pearling luggers; and a contract cruise among the islands to meet on time, with no men and little money. He had borrowed the money and scraped up four beachcombers for crew, with his cook and mate. Now the mate was down with fever of some kind, and here at Poanga would be work, plenty of it.

Captain Ryan went through with it, unhesitant.

He was through the reef now, and the curving outline of Poanga harbor opened out ahead. A prosperous little spot, this, with its palms and fisheries; he could catch the odors of copra and shell on the breeze. A white manager and a dozen laborers—they would get the stuff stowed aboard, at all events.

Interest quickened his gaze. He sighted a whaleboat moored at the dock past the godowns and copra sheds, saw one or two white clad figures near the manager's house. However, he had no time to conjecture; his voice lifted sharply, and the four slatternly men forward slouched to the lines. He could run up alongside the dock and moor, for it was eight fathom close in, but ticklish business none the less.

However, Ryan's was a masterly hand at the helm. The canvas fluttered, and the *Island Witch* drifted like a phantom across the still waters of the lagoon. A shout of welcome from the shore, the shrill, gay cries of the laborers came to her as they gathered to make her fast. Her way fell off; barely moving, headed cunningly, she crept in until a line was flung

and caught, made fast. Another two minutes and she was at rest.

Ryan flung a snarling command at his four beachcombers to make things shipshape, then he was over the rail and shaking hands with Lambert, the manager—a morose man who had given up hope of life elsewhere. They passed on up to the house together, and Ryan saw the three figures awaiting them.

"Came in yesterday," said Lambert, with a flick of his thumb toward the whaleboat. "Off o' some trading craft that went down. All A. B's, too. Were talking about getting a passage out with you."

"They can," said Ryan grimly. "My boys skipped and I've got four lousy rascals off the beach; no more. So I can use these chaps fine. What craft are they from?"

"I dunno," said Lambert.

On the veranda Ryan met the three of them; this was luck for him, as the first glance proved. With three such men he was saved. His appraising eye told him what they were—Larsen, a sullen animal, used to obeying; Berman, a lithe, vivacious, obscene rascal; Frome, a most unscrupulous blackguard who had probably fallen from some higher estate to his present position. Frome did the talking for the three.

"The *Jennie Parker*, eh? Never heard of her," said Ryan, when the man had finished his story. "And you want passage, do you?"

"Yes, sir," said Frome. "We can pay you with the whaleboat and her stores—all cabin stores, too. And we'll work our passage besides."

"Hm!" said Ryan. "Can use the boat and the stores, certainly; but if you work, you'll get regular wages and sign on to Suva. I'm on a contract cruise to pick up copra and shell and stuff for the company and land it at Suva. Suit you?"

"Yes, sir," said Frome eagerly.

"All right. My mate's sick; you'll be acting mate. Get aboard, stow your whaleboat on the stern chocks where a boat ought to be but isn't, and let's see how you take charge. When I come aboard I'll sign you on and log your story."

The three departed, Frome striding along, Larsen slouching, the Greek swaggering. Captain Ryan looked after them, half frowning, but Lambert was already speaking of freight and the noon meal was awaiting them inside, so for the moment Ryan was more than content. Lambert was worried about the mate's sickness, too; in his petulant way he did not like it. He was afraid of sick men and said so.

When Ryan returned to the schooner he found a marvelous change. Frome had taken charge; boat and cabin stores were stowed away, the four beachcombers were working in fear and terror, copra and shell were flowing aboard and things were shipshape. When Ryan went down to the cabin, however, it was another matter. His mate was dead. And no one aboard knew what the sickness was.

Ryan called Frome down and put it squarely up to him.

"This is some sort o' fever; may be bad. After what you've just been through, I couldn't blame you and your mates for not wanting to risk it. Say the word and stop ashore."

Frome rubbed his cheek reflectively and smiled in his sardonic fashion.

"We'll risk it, sir," he said.

"Then call down two men and get him sewn up for burial."

Frome would risk it, but not Lambert. He refused pointblank to let the dead man be buried ashore; he was frantically afraid of contagion, said he'd get out his rifle and open fire on any burial party that set foot on his wharf. Might be bubonic or influenza, and he wouldn't have it, couldn't afford to chance it. Ryan had no right putting in here with a sick man, anyhow.

Disgustedly, Ryan went back to the schooner, put his boat over the side, and with four men at the oars took the corpse outside the lagoon and buried it. He came back, got out his rough log, entered up

the business, then called Frome to the cabin.

"Let's have the details of your story, mister. You'll be mate now, of course." Frome gave the details and Ryan jotted them down; George and Larsen were called, and all three read and signed the story. Then Ryan signed them on the articles and everything was set.

"How does it happen," he asked them. "that you three didn't loot your mate's chest after he died? There's money in it. You preserved it carefully enough."

Frome shrugged.

"We had other things to think about, sir."

"I suppose so. Well. Let's get the rest of this stuff aboard and be out of here."

When the cool evening drew down, everything was aboard and the hatches down. Ryan did not delay, but went out with the tide and the night breeze; he disliked Lambert and wanted to be away. So the *Island Witch* slipped gently out, a phosphorescent wake trailing in the sea behind her.

Ryan took the deck until midnight. He had taken three of the beachcombers in his watch, three sodden wrecks of men, good only to be kicked into labor and held at it with hard driving. By the time the night breeze dropped the schooner was clear of the vigils around Poanga and out in the open sea. Ryan was standing by the idle wheel when one of the men shambled aft and touched his forelock.

"Well, Bill?"

"Beg pardon, sir. Summat queer about all this, to my way o' thinking." Old Bill was sober enough now, and once, before the beach claimed him, had been a prime seaman. "Did 'ee happen to note that 'ere Levantine, sir—Berman, his name is?"

Ryan was lighting a cigaret. He stood motionless, silent for a long moment. The lines and canvas were slatting gently as the schooner rose and fell, her spars drifting across the stars and back again. The glitter and coruscation of those far worlds across the universe with their eternal mystery, their problems that had no answer, fascinated Ryan now, as always. From somewhere forward came a gentle recurrent drone of snoring. Bill's two companions were standing watch in their own fashion.

"Yes?"

Ryan scarcely heard his own voice, was unaware that he had replied. He was not paying attention to old Bill; his body was here on the deck, yet for the moment he felt far off, suspended somewhere in space, waiting for something unknown and unforeseen to happen. The stars, the night, the calm, all seemed to surround him with queer things and to bring upon his spirit a singular prescience of unwonted happenings. His mate's death, perhaps. Would the essence and soul of the man cling and hover about the schooner? Ill luck, some would say; he had seen the men look at one another and mutter that afternoon.

And through this dreaming drift of thought he heard old Bill's voice again.

"And I was up at Jack's Place havin' a mug o' beer, sir. I took note of him account o' that 'ere job o' tattooing on his arm. Green and yeller and red it is, sir, if you've noted; it's a hoctopus, sir, and that 'ere is a specialty o' Frisco Mike down to Sydney. It's rare you find a good yeller that takes 'old, sir, but Frisco Mike gets it—"

The voice drifted out of Ryan's consciousness again. A star had fallen, trailing a sharp blaze of light among the constellations and vanishing as though it had never been; like a man's life, thought Ryan, like the mate who had vanished that day from mortal ken, his place already filled by a better man. That's the way with all of us, came the reflection. The world is essential to our petty desires and ambitions, but none of us is essential to the world. Plenty of better men waiting to step into our shoes and do our jobs. We're not even essential to our families, our loved ones—

"Eh?" Ryan turned, for a name had caught his attention, jerking at him subconsciously. "What's that again? Who?"

"Why, sir, Cap'n Stockton. I expect

you know him. He had put in with the *Anna J.*—"

"Put in where?" demanded Ryan.

"At Thursday, sir, like I'm tellin' you, with the *Anna J.* She had new petrol engines for use in a calm and he needed to refill his petrol tank. He was taking her up to Quoin Island for the Inter-Island Company; you know, they've leased the beds there from government, sir, and I hear they'll make a whacking rich thing out of it, too. Them beds've been protected these ten year back."

"What are you driving at, Bill?" said Ryan sharply. He was all attention now. "Get to the point of it, will you?"

"Why, sir," came the reply in an injured tone, "that 'ere Levantine, sir. I could take my davy he's the one I seen in Jack's Place that night. I mind 'im by the hoctopus, sir, and his bally mug, too. He was off the *Anna J.*"

"When was this?" asked Ryan.

"About three weeks since, sir."

Up through the open skylight floated the soft, mellow chime of Ryan's cabin clock. Four double notes; midnight.

"Eight bells, sir," said old Bill mechanically.

"Make it so," said Ryan.

He had found that the old rascal loved this byplay, this ghost of old time sea routine, so out of place on a little trading schooner. The clang of the ship's bell sounded loudly on the quiet night. Ryan finished his cigaret and tossed it away, as Frome came on deck.

"Course N.N.E. a quarter east, Mister," said Ryan. "Won't have any breeze before dawn, though. Hot below?"

"Not bad, sir," said Frome. "N.N.E. a quarter east, sir."

Ryan glanced around, then went down to his cabin. He was thinking of Captain Stockton, a fine old man, one of the vanishing type of seamen. Ryan had been with him for a year, in one of the Inter-Island Company's schooners, when working up for his master's ticket. Odd about this fellow Berman, or George—could not be possible for him to have been with the *Anna J.* only three weeks ago, though. All three of those chaps were from some Samoan craft. Old Bill must have been drunk at the time, or had seen some one else decorated with one of Frisco Mike's famous octopus tattoos.

"Too bad I missed seeing Stockton at Thursday Island," thought Ryan as he undressed.

TWO DAYS out of Poanga, the *Island Witch* was leaning over to a freshening breeze, close-hauled, with George Berman at the wheel. Captain Ryan had finished working out his noon sights and came on deck to give Frome a slight change of course. He stood beside the helmsman, drawing at his pipe and watching the rigging with satisfaction. Frome had taken hold well since coming aboard.

Presently Frome went forward, giving Larsen and the third man in his watch some work to do. Ryan met the sidelong glance of the Greek, and then, on sheer impulse, uttered a jesting remark.

"A sweet thing to steer, eh? Suit you better than the *Anna J?*"

To his utmost astonishment, the man's eyes widened upon him in swift, stark terror, and the swarthy face turned to a pasty white.

"Sure, sir, sure—I—I sailed in her once," said George, stammering.

"Eh?" Ryan was incredulous, yet he knew fright when he saw it. "You were ashore from her at Thursday Island about three weeks ago, weren't you?"

George positively gulped. His eyes flew about in desperate search of aid, but found none. Ryan was puzzled by the result of his idle question.

"Where's your tongue?" he demanded with a smile. "Give you a start, eh?"

"Y-yes, sir," returned George. "I was —was aboard her, sir—I skipped ashore. Them others don't know it."

Ryan's face lost its amused expression. He caught the frantic note in George's manner and wondered at it.

"I don't understand," he said. "The *Jennie Parker*, the ship you three men are from, was not in at Thursday. I'd have

heard of it when I was there. There's talk of any strange trader."

"Yes, she was in there, sir," exclaimed George eagerly. "She come in for water, same day the—the *Anna J.* was there. I signed up with her that night. She went right out."

"With sick men aboard?" said Ryan incredulously. "Not much she didn't, my man. Pratique isn't worked that slick, by a good deal."

"They kep' it quiet—Cap'n Smith did," said the Greek sullenly. "I didn't know it or I wouldn't have shipped aboard her."

Ryan puffed at his pipe, making no comment. Somehow this was all a tissue of lies; he felt convinced of it. But why? With what purpose? He could see no reason for the man's lies. He knew that Captain Stockton had put into Thursday overnight, three days before he himself had arrived there; but he had heard of no other schooner putting in. In fact, he did not believe for a minute that the *Jennie Parker* had put in there.

"Easily enough settled," he said to himself, and walked forward.

He did not see the eyes of George gripped upon him with stark fear, nor did he see the signals the helmsman made to the uncomprehending Frome.

"Was that ship of yours in at Thursday Island, Frome?" he asked, coming up to the man. Frome turned and regarded him in surprise.

"The *Jennie Parker?* No, sir. I have an idea Cap'n Smith was headed for there, but I was up for'ard and knew nothing for sure."

Ryan nodded, and went aft, going straight below. Frome caught the signal of George, and also went aft; the Greek spoke with him hurriedly, and Frome's brows drew down and murder leaped out in his dark eyes.

"You blasted fool!" he exclaimed in a low voice.

"How'd I know?" cried George. "Listen! He says I was ashore—and I was ashore that night, too. Remember? But how'd he know, huh?"

"He knows something now," said Frome savagely. "He knows you're a damned liar. If he says any more, tell him you lied just for fun. You give us away and I'll put my knife in you."

"I won't," muttered George sullenly. "Don't be scared."

Below, Captain Ryan was examining the green sea chest that had been turned over to him from the whaleboat, for ultimate forwarding to San Francisco. He went through it carefully, and found clothes, knicknacks, souvenirs, books; but nowhere, except on the inside of the lid, did he find the name of Hartley F. Stevens. Nor were any other names in evidence. Still, there was the long envelop with the thirty pounds in it—three ten-pound notes. Evidence enough of honesty.

He picked up the revolver and examined it. On the nickel plated center of the butt were scratched initials, HFS. Ryan laid it down, half frowning, then picked it up again. He broke the weapon. Four empty shells were ejected, two unused cartridges; the barrel was foul from recent use. Ryan sniffed it, turned it over and over in his hand.

He looked at the scratched initials again. They were freshly and hastily made, full of little lines running off at tangents, where the knife point making them had slipped. A seaman, doing this job, would have done it carefully, with time on his hands to make a fair job of it. And the paint on the chest was scarcely marred; this was fresh, also. Then, the gouge marks in the lid, where some other name had been carved out.

"Something queer about all this," thought Ryan. "On the other hand, what looks queer may have amazingly simple explanations. Usually does."

He flung himself down on his bunk and slept for an hour. What had been almost suspicion died into nothing. He wakened, looked at the green chest, laughed at himself and went on deck. There he found Larsen at the wheel, Frome whittling at a bit of stick, the other two men at work forward.

Ryan did not like Frome particularly,

but liked his way of getting work done and done right. He stood for awhile, talking. Frome admitted he held no ticket of any kind, had only a slight knowledge of seamanship, none of navigation.

"By the way," said Ryan, as his glance fell on the whaleboat in the stern, "I learned a good trick from an old friend of mine once—have followed it myself ever since. Here, I'll show you—"

He went to the whaleboat, which had not been covered over, and reached in for the plug in her bottom. Then he checked himself. He stared at it for a moment, drew back, sent his gaze along the outside of the boat and turned away.

"Put it off till tomorrow," he said with a careless laugh. "After all, it'd take too much time now. Getting on to eight bells. What say to a drink? Come along."

Frome assented, and Ryan went on down into the cabin. He was wondering furiously. Old Captain Stockton had a hobby about the plugs in his boats; he always cut them small and gave them a twist around of adhesive tape. No one else Ryan knew had ever done this. He was thinking about it as he came into the cabin and got out a rarely used bottle, with glasses.

Frome came in and took a chair across the table from Ryan, who had sat down and was pouring a drink. Frome took the bottle and poured his own. Ryan pulled open the table drawer and took out an automatic pistol.

"How did you happen to have a boat from the *Anna J*, Frome?"

The mate looked up, met the intent gaze and froze where he sat.

FOR A moment the two men looked at each other. Then, abruptly, Frome slumped in his chair. He set down the bottle and leaned over, fingering his glass, staring at it with a morose expression on his dark features. Then:

"I need this," he said, and tossed down the drink. Ryan sat watching him, astonished by this attitude, then spoke sharply:

"Out with it, now! I know you three men are from the *Anna J*. No use lying about it any further. What's the game?"

Frome lifted a tortured face, a face twisted with dark thoughts. Then he nodded.

"You're a white man, Ryan," he said in a low voice. "I didn't know we'd strike a man like you. I've hated to lie to you; been damned sorry about it. Here, I've no weapon; hold your gun on me if you like. I can talk better on my feet. I'll come out with the whole thing."

As he spoke, he rose deliberately. He began to pace up and down the cabin; words came from him, awkwardly at first, then more fluently. He did not notice Ryan, sitting at the table, did not look at him; he was absorbed in his story.

"Yes, we were aboard Stockton's craft, Ryan. Stockton's a fine old chap; but bitter hard in his way. Believes in discipline and all that—makes no allowances. Perhaps you know him. If so, I don't need to go into it."

Ryan grunted a half assent. Frome went on with his nervous stride; there was no menace in his aspect, merely a tortured anxiety to set forth everything clearly.

"He had a new mate who came aboard at Sydney. Chap named Barnes—a big bully boy, the kind you hear about but seldom see. Black George had sailed with Barnes before and hated him. From the start Barnes rode him, rode me also; Larsen, a good seaman, was in his watch also and caught it heavy. Captain Stockton knew nothing about it, of course, but he's the sort who backs up his mate to the limit, right or wrong."

Frome paused and Ryan nodded slightly. After a minute Frome came to the table, poured himself another drink, then went on with his pacing the deck.

"Things went from bad to worse. By the time we hit Thursday Island, Barnes was deviling us beyond endurance. We couldn't hope to skip the ship there, of course; we got shore leave in spite of

Barnes, and the three of us went up to Jack's Place. We framed it up there, that night. Framed up everything, in case an appeal to Stockton failed. Barnes had threatened to kill George that day, see?"

"Where'd this Barnes come from?" demanded Ryan. "Is he the same chap who was with Bert Hopper up in the Solomons last year?"

Frome nodded.

"Heard of him, have you? Then perhaps you'll understand. Well, we got out next morning for the run up to Quoin Island. Barnes had liquor aboard; he was a perfect devil. A couple of days later I got a chance at Stockton and put it up to him. The old chap was fair and square about it. He gave Barnes a stiff call down, said he'd allow no brutality aboard his ship. Barnes found out I was the one to blame and he laid for me."

Again Frome paused at the table and again poured himself a swallow of liquor.

"You know what a mate can do when he's set to do it," he resumed.

He got out a cigaret, lighted it, puffed as he strode back and forth.

"We got up to Quoin, and while we were there loading shell, Stockton came down with rheumatism. It laid him out. He had spells that way, at times."

This was true enough, as Ryan knew.

"With the Old Man out of the way, we had a hell of a time," went on Frome. "Twice Barnes nearly got me; he was trying to make me turn on him and then log me for mutiny. He was riding George and Larsen worse than ever, too. The three of us agreed that we'd take the whaleboat and skip, the minute we got away from Quoin. Of course, others of the crew were in the know; they were glad enough to see us get away from it safely. George had a cheap old revolver that he'd hidden, and I got it from him in case of trouble. We got the whaleboat fixed up—stole cabin stores and so forth. I fixed up the whole story, just as I told it to you. We put some paint in the boat and so forth. She was tarped and it was safe enough."

Frome halted at the table, where a tin pannikin served as ash receiver, and pressed out his cigaret butt.

"The first night out of Quoin, as soon as our watch went below and Barnes was off deck, we made the break," went on Frome nervously. "As the devil would have it, Barnes came back on deck and caught us at it. He had us cold. Larsen hit him, he pulled a gun—and then I let him have it, four times. Before any one knew what had happened, we were down in the boat and standing off into the darkness. Stockton was still laid out, Barnes was dead and we were safe enough. We got away. Of course, we're wanted for murder now—but there's the whole thing for you. You've got us—"

He ceased speaking abruptly as Wong, the Chinese steward, pattered into the room. Wong was a little scrawny Oriental, a fixture with the *Island Witch*. He stood looking at Ryan, glanced at the pistol, glanced up at Frome, then spoke.

"Catchum key, Cap'n."

Ryan nodded and gestured toward the key hanging inside the door. Wong needed cabin stores, which were kept locked up. When Wong had taken the key and departed, Frome went on speaking.

"Now I've got it off my chest, Ryan, I feel better," he said, coming back to the table. "If you want to turn us in, we can't help it. Give me one more drink, if you will—"

Feverishly, he leaned over the table and picked up the bottle. Ryan, half frowning, was staring abstractedly before him. Frome's hand shook as he poured a small drink—

Swift as light, he drove the bottle against Ryan's head. A short, heavy blow that smashed the nearly empty bottle. Ryan slumped down, the pistol fell from his hand and clattered on the floor; his head and shoulders drooped across the table, blood pouring from a bad gash the broken glass had chopped in his skull.

From Frome broke a sharp, wild laugh of exultation; then he fell to work.

When Ryan opened his eyes, he was

lying on the floor, thoroughly bound hand and foot, helpless to move. Frome was kicking him back to consciousness, having stuffed and tied a rag in his mouth to serve as guide.

"You're a sweet innocent fool, eh?" said Frome mockingly. "Swallowed the whole blasted yarn, didn't you? Ho, you're an easy one, you are! Thought yourself so damned smart, ferreting things out, huh? Well, Mister, you lose, that's all. And if you want to know what's what, the *Anna J.* is laying in sixty fathom, with every soul aboard her dead, from that old fool Stockton down. And now that you've logged everything, including your mate's sickness and death, we'll just rattle along to Suva with this here schooner."

He darted to the entry and was gone in a swift leap. After two minutes he returned, with Larsen and George clattering down after him.

"There he is, boys—sweet little package, eh?" Frome chortled as he pointed to the prostrate Ryan. "That's what comes o' being too blasted smart."

"Hell!" exclaimed Larsen. "How you fix him, huh?"

"Easy. I'll log him sick, then buried at sea. Larsen, you hop along to the sail locker and get some canvas down here, with a palm and needle; you may have to break out a spare topsail and cut it up. Sew him up like he is, get me? Just like he is. Leave him to think about it. Along toward sunset we'll bury him openly—same sort o' sickness that got his mate. Want to see those pearls we got at Quoin, Ryan? Pearls and other things. All divvied up among the three of us. Too bad you don't get a share in 'em, eh? All right, boys. Larsen, get busy. George, you keep those blasted fools busy for'ard—tell 'em the cap'n is down sick. I'll attend to the log."

The other two disappeared. Ryan, his head still bleeding badly, lay silent; it was of no use to struggle. Frome got out the rough log and set to work making the entry, chuckling to himself the while.

Presently Larsen returned, staggering under a heavy bundle of canvas. He opened it on the floor, set palm and needle and cord on the table, then reached for his sheath knife.

"Got to cut her up," he said laconically.

Frome nodded and rose.

"All right, I'll leave the job to you, old-timer. Needn't bother with weights. Let the son of a dog float!"

He went up on deck, there to take open charge and spread the word of Ryan's sickness. Once he looked down through the open transom of the skylight and saw Larsen sitting on the cabin floor, cross legged, slicing up canvas. Frome chuckled and went about his business.

If he had looked down again, before the transom was mysteriously closed, he might have seen a strange sight—a wrinkled little yellow man standing behind the unsuspecting Larsen, meat cleaver in hand. But Frome did not look down again.

FROME, with Ryan's automatic pistol in his pocket, found no one to dispute his sway; word of the captain's illness, indeed, spread something like panic among the four beachcombers, until they received a bottle of squareface all around and were content.

Eight bells sounded. Some little time later Frome realized that Larsen had not come on deck, but his attention was distracted by the appearance of a white speck on the horizon. He altered the schooner's course a trifle and sent for George.

"Better get rid of Ryan right away," he said. "Where's Larsen?"

"Haven't seen him," said George, grinning. "Prob'ly asleep for'ard."

Frome beckoned to old Bill, who was slouching aft.

"You two men fetch up Cap'n Ryan's body. It's sewed up and ready," he ordered. "All hands, stand by for burial of the dead. One of you chaps go look up Larsen."

The three beachcombers and Wong gathered in the waist, but no sign of

Larsen appeared. George and old Bill appeared with the canvas wrapped figure, obviously not liking their job. Frome beckoned them to the rail.

"All right, over with him!" he commanded. "And may the Lord ha' mercy on his soul!"

The two men grunted, swung and let go. In the wake of the *Island Witch* the long gray bundle bobbed once or twice, then vanished. Frome looked around, frowning.

"See anything of Larsen, George? Go down and look him up. The fool's probably lying drunk somewhere below."

George vanished down the companionway. Wong came pattering up to Frome, cheerful and smiling.

"Catchum meat pie fo' supper?" he demanded.

Frome nodded and lighted a cigaret. Wong went down the after companionway, also, but Frome paid him no attention whatever.

Time passed; the sun was touching the western sea rim when Frome, with a start, woke to the realization of it. George had not returned, nor had Larsen appeared.

"That Greek devil!" he muttered. "He's found liquor too. By Godfrey, I'll settle him! Give 'em both a lesson, I will—"

With angry determination in face and bearing, he went below.

He glanced into the large cabin beneath the skylight. It was empty. In one corner was a long Singapore chair, over which were heaped fragments of canvas—the bits cut off by Larsen. Frome went on to the small cabins, looked into them one after the other, found them empty.

Astonished, he came back into the large cabin and stared around. Neither Larsen nor George were to be found anywhere. He went to the locker and found a bottle of squareface, half full, and got it out. Then he heard a voice behind him.

"Looking for something, Frome?"

Frome turned, saw the heaped fragments of canvas in disarray, and beside them, standing with a revolver in his hand, Captain Ryan.

For one moment Frome went ghastly white with pure terror; then he rallied. This was a real man, no phantom; a man of flesh and blood—indeed, one whole side of his face was black with dried blood.

"Looking for George, are you?" said Ryan. His voice was mocking, and a curt laugh came sharply to his lips. "He's here under the canvas, Frome, tied up, saved for Admiralty court. And who was it you buried, Frome? Why, that was your old pal Larsen—Larsen, but without his loot. He left that behind him. And this is the revolver you were kind enough to plant in that sea chest—the old gun you murdered poor Cap'n Stockton with. You forgot you'd left two cartridges in it—"

A snarl contorted Frome's lips. He dropped the bottle, flung himself forward, one hand going to the pistol in his pocket.

The revolver in Ryan's hand burst into flame; and a second time. The two shots banged out thunderously in the cabin. Frome jerked spasmodically and came down full on his face at Ryan's feet. He lay there motionless, and blood ran into a pool under his arm and reddened across the deck as the schooner canted over.

"So!" observed Captain Ryan, and flung the empty revolver to the deck. "So! And that's the end to your story, my friend."

Frome's head wagged a little to a lurch of the schooner, as though in grim assent.

A Stirring Novel of

Part II

THE DARK ROAD

WHEN young Enos Halwood of Virginia came to Plumstead, the family seat of his distant kinsmen, the Doanes, to serve as schoolmaster, he found that family of swashbuckling, hard riding brothers little interested in education. It was Nancy, their pretty sister, who had written cousin Halwood to come. The Doanes, led by the giant Moses, were more concerned with the dice table, the cup, and their lucrative business of supplying horses to British General Howe's officers in the nearby city of Philadelphia.

Informed in a measure of the conditions in Philadelphia by Nancy, Halwood nevertheless was amazed and troubled on his first visit to the city with Moses, by the dissipation of the British, and the dark stories of cruelties inflicted upon American prisoners in the Provost, the military prison. The Virginian returned to Plumstead with his natural American sympathies strengthened by what he had seen and heard.

The Doane house was a rendezvous for British officers. Wine flowed like water and there were few hours of the day or night when the King's gold was not changing hands over the gaming tables. Halwood had little liking for the arrogant,

Old Revolutionary Days

By
HUGH
PENDEXTER

supercilious officers he met, and avoided them as much as possible. One he particularly detested, a Captain Long of the Light Horse, persisted in his half insults to the young Virginian until Halwood seized him and tossed him bodily through a convenient window. Choleric with rage, Long rode off, promising vengeance if the Virginian ever came to Philadelphia.

Shortly after Halwood had occasion to revisit the city. On the road he was overtaken by a storm, and took shelter in a deserted manor house. He discovered the place to be a stronghold of highwaymen. Overhearing plans to murder a prisoner they were holding, Halwood interfered, rescued the man and made off with several head of horses belonging to the outlaws.

The rescued man gave his name as Sam Lydyg. He said he was a deserter from the American army and boasted he was the cleverest thief in the country. Halwood was amused. He advised the "cleverest thief" to return to the American camp, and made him take along the horses which had been captured at the manor house.

In the city Halwood visited the Provost. He was enraged by the cruelty and suffering he saw, and it was in a black frame of mind that he met with Captain Long. The Virginian welcomed the occasion.

"The man I tossed through the window!" he cried.

Long's companions swarmed around Halwood, demanding satisfaction. The Virginian, only too willing, agreed, and

having the choice of weapons, decided in favor of pistols.

The party repaired to a deserted field nearby, and the seconds paced off the ground. A count of three was settled upon, the duelists being at liberty to fire after the third numeral was called.

"Gentleman, are you ready?"

Halwood sighted, and saw the malevolent eye of his adversary blazing along the long barrel.

"One—two—"

CAPTAIN LONG'S weapon exploded as "three" was being said. Halwood felt the swish of the lead as he pulled trigger. His opponent exclaimed aloud, dropped his pistol and staggered back.

"You've bagged him most mortal!" whispered FitzPatrick. "Ride for Plumstead like the devil."

"Nonsense!" Halwood sharply corrected. And, speaking so that all might hear, he added, "I aimed for his shoulder; and that's where I hit him."

The surgeon hurriedly examined the wounded man, who was lying on the grass, and announced:

"Top of the shoulder smashed. Captain Long, are you too feeble to stand?"

Grinning broadly, FitzPatrick hurried Halwood to his mount and insisted again that he ride at once. He hurriedly explained:

"The man's brother officers are disgusted with him for firing a bit too soon, for falling down with only his shoulder broken. And being disgusted with him, they are angry at you. Regimental honor gets a dent. Others will pick up the quarrel. You're a marked man. Keep out of Philadelphia!"

"If they'll come to Plumstead to pick a quarrel I'll promise to throw all such through a window," wrathfully answered Halwood as he swung into the saddle.

"Damme! But I like you. And those clothes fit you better'n they did me, anyway. But ride! Don't loiter."

It was not until three miles away from the dueling ground that Halwood remembered he had neglected to take back from his eccentric friend the hurried bit of writing.

CHAPTER VI

THE DECISION

NANCY DOANE noticed a change in Halwood after his return from Philadelphia. At first she was curious to hear his experiences, and especially was she interested in the lot of the Walnut Street prisoners. He could only tell her:

"Terrible. Don't ask me. I can't talk about them."

Then came the Doane men, riding in a pack, like the wolves they were at times. Moses was in a fearful rage. With a curt order for one of the youngsters to care for the horses, he stamped into the Big House and, without any preliminaries, hotly demanded of his kinsman—

"What the devil do you mean by shooting my friend?"

Nancy's eyes grew round with amazement. Halwood had said nothing about wounding a man. The Virginian surveyed the infuriated Moses for a few moments and then asked—

"You refer to a Captain Long?"

"You know I do!" roared Moses.

"He pinned a duel on me. He resented my tossing him out of the schoolhouse window. I shot him in the shoulder. I could have killed him."

"Why, Enos Halwood! He's one of Howe's officers!" gasped Nancy.

"And I am an American," coldly reminded Halwood. Until that moment he had been a Southerner—a Virginian. The new term came easily, and he was scarcely conscious of having used it. "If you want the facts of the duel, Moses, talk with your friend, Captain FitzPatrick. He acted as my second."

Moses' ire lessened considerably. In a more moderate tone he conceded—

"If Captain Fitz acted for you, it must have been regular."

"British officers were present, paced off

the distance and in other ways gave their approval," added Halwood.

"I'm glad to know that. But it's made a rare rumpus at headquarters. Makes it mighty awkward for me, too. Long is a friend. I enjoy having him come here."

"I understand, Moses. I'm leaving Plumstead at any time now."

"You shall not!" cried Nancy. "I hate this murdering in the name of honor. I hate it! But if he picked the quarrel he's served right."

"Long won't be about in public for some time. There's no hurry about your leaving Plumstead," surrendered Moses.

But his eyes were moody as he foresaw a curtailment of his rich profits from dicing and playing cards with the wounded captain and his friends. Yet there was a bright side to the picture, and by degrees he became amiable. From the Carolinas and Virginia horses were being hurried north on his account. As the greater number of these were obtained by theft, he would profit accordingly. Never were gains so rich or gold more abundant than now. There was no reaching the bottom of Howe's military chest if one but catered to the betterment of the King's army. FitzPatrick shared in this harvest, often being in partnership with the Doanes. Had the graceless scamp been less lured by the risk of personal adventures he could have cut deeply into what was becoming a Doane monopoly.

Moses stroked his big hands together softly, and a cunning glint shone in his dark eyes as he suggested:

"Why not let this trifling school teaching go, Enos, and cast in with us? We'll get another schoolmaster. I need a good lookout man in North Carolina and Virginia. One who looks the gentleman. You can make your everlasting fortune by acting as my buyer down there. And there's no danger, no risk."

"But most of the horses are stolen," reminded Halwood, laughing a bit to take the bite out of his words.

"Taken, not stolen, Enos. Taken from damned rebels! Well, we'll wait and you can think it over. But nothing can stand between me and a goodly chunk of Howe's gold. There'll never be such a chance again."

"General Washington is still at White Marsh?" queried Nancy.

"Yes—and doing nothing. Ragamuffin army. No food, scant shelter, little to wear, many barefooted. How can such an army expect to do anything?"

"Then why doesn't Howe march out and make an end of the war?"

Moses lowered sullenly at his sister; then his expression changed and his eyes brightened. He answered:

"Howe has too many sweethearts, Nance. That's the plain truth. A handsome woman can delay a battle and stop a campaign. He made one of them a colonel and sent her to review a regiment. Bad for the army, but fine for us. So long as he dilly-dallies, so much longer will we take our profits . . . Abraham, you dock the big roan's tail, crop his mane, change his ears. Use a little paint. I've sold him twice, but they might recognize him, now they are getting settled."

School was resumed, but the master often found his mind wandering. September gave way to the glories of October, and Washington maintained his position at White Marsh, only fourteen miles from Philadelphia. Edward Marshall returned to the settlement and remained for a few days, or until haze in the west suggested the smoke of an Indian camp. From his talk Halwood gathered he was free to enter and leave Philadelphia at will, because he was supposed to be under protection of the Doanes. Moses returned from a halfway camp on the valley road to the south, bringing two score horses. After these had been conditioned and curried until their coats shone, they were started for Philadelphia. Moses urged Halwood to accompany him, and expressed a desire to patch up a truce with Captain Long. Although heartsick of the daily grind, and soulsick because he could find no way out, the Virginian refused the invitation.

That evening, after the men and horses had departed, Nancy was downcast in spirit and requested Halwood to remain after supper and talk, instead of retiring to his cabin. Being depressed, Halwood was but poor company. He essayed to converse and discovered that the girl was not heeding him. She sat with her somber gaze focused on the fireplace. The rising wind rattled a window. She started convulsively and tilted her head, as if listening.

"Your nerves are in rags," said Halwood. "Why don't you get out of this sort of life? You can't like it."

"Like it?" she repeated, and the flatness of her voice bespoke great mental depression. "Would to God it would end!"

"Aye to that," heartily indorsed Halwood. "But you go to bed and forget it for awhile. I must return to my cabin to look over tomorrow's work. I wonder how long this war will last. Washington can't hold on for another year."

"But General Howe doesn't seem to be getting anywhere in particular," she reminded.

"Yet his army isn't starving, or freezing. Still, he has much to answer for—the Provost—Cunningham."

"Sir William is not a cruel man," Nancy slowly said. "He's easy going and careless. Yet he must take the blame for all the cruelty of those under him."

HALWOOD came to his feet, one hand half raised in a gesture for silence, and tilted his head in listening. He fancied he had heard the drumming of swift hoofs above the weird whining of the wind. The girl was quick to catch it, the thudding of galloping horses rapidly approaching. With the Doane brothers away Halwood knew he must act in their stead; and visitors after sundown aroused suspicion. He stepped to the fireplace shelf and selected two pistols, and then resumed his seat by the table, the weapons in his lap.

The girl was on her feet, staring at the door, both hands pressed over her heart. Without shifting her dilated eyes, she tremulously whispered—

"Something must have happened!"

"Some one comes in haste," said Halwood. "Keep from the window until we learn who they are."

But now the night riders were in front of the house, bawling for a light and cursing violently.

"Your brothers!" cried Halwood. And he lighted a lantern and threw open the door.

Moses reeled into the light, his face a bloody mask. With a shriek the girl fell back in her chair, her hands over her eyes.

"In God's mercy, what's happened?" gasped Halwood.

"Small mercy! It didn't happen!" roared Moses, as he crossed the threshold and rubbed an arm across his face to clear his vision. "Tricked!" he shouted, his passion verging on insanity. Then his bull of Bashan voice was explaining, "Some damned traitor has betrayed us! We ran smash into an ambush of damned Continentals!"

"Any of the boys killed?" whispered the girl, her face the color of parchment.

"No. My scalp's ripped by a hunk of lead. Filled my face with blood. But we've lost all the horses!"

Abraham came in, his face ferocious. To Halwood he said:

"It's mighty lucky for you, cousin, that you've been here all the time we were down the horse path. Some one passed the word to the ragamuffins. We'll cut that skunk's throat once we find him."

"And if I didn't have an alibi you would suspect me?" asked Halwood gently.

"We'll suspect any one who can't explain," cried Moses.

"I'll be saying good night, Nancy. Try and sleep, or you'll be ruining your health."

"You don't seem much upset to hear the Yankees have gobbled up our prime herd of horses," complained one of the younger brothers.

"I am vastly surprised you should ride into a trap on your own hunting grounds," Halwood replied coldly.

"Shut up that blatting!" commanded Moses. Then, as he tied a handkerchief around his head to keep the blood from trickling over his face, he lamented: "What miserable luck! And after fetching 'em all the way up here! I was just working for that damned Virginian."

Halwood started to reply, thought better of it and, with a low bow to the sad faced girl, he passed out into the night and to his cabin. Despite his seeming calm he inwardly was seething with conflicting emotions. He could not find it in his heart to lament over Moses' misfortunes. Continued acquaintance had revealed an almost unbearable insolence in the big man. Nor could he tolerate the coarse characterization of his famous brother Virginian. For some time he had realized that, with the exception of the girl, the Doanes were all for self, and were brutally insistent on working their will. There was none of the five who would hesitate a second to cheat a brother. For some time he had sensed that the brothers looked on him as a poor pensioner.

Then his thoughts drifted to that burlesque of an army that Washington led, and he wondered. What held such a shifting collection of men together? Always returning home at the end of enlistments, usually replaced with much difficulty; yet, such as they were, they were encamped within fourteen miles of Philadelphia and Howe's thoroughly trained, equipped and well fed army. The camp at White Marsh was a challenge to Howe to march forth and give battle. Queer how such impoverished creatures could persist in their resistance. He brooded long over the mystery of it all before falling asleep. When he awoke, without being conscious of giving it any thought, he found himself saying aloud:

"Spirit! That must be the answer. They must have the spirit to win, or die. Howe's army hasn't that. Washington—a great man."

That day school might as well have been closed. The children were alive with gossip of the lost horse herd. They were but poorly prepared in their tasks, yet the schoolmaster took no heed. They repeated what they had heard their elders say. As one in a stupor Halwood finished the day, and when he had dismissed the scholars he knew he had arrived at a decision. He went to the Big House and found Nancy alone, her brothers having departed on a desperate raiding venture to replace the lost stock.

"I'm going away, Nancy," he abruptly told the girl.

The blood receded from her oval face, yet her lips smiled and she nodded her head as if understanding.

"I'm not positive where I am going," he continued.

She glanced from the window to make sure none were within hearing, and told him:

"You're going to White Marsh. That's what you've decided."

He bowed his head, lifted her slim hand to his lips and left her. He did not look back toward the Big House until he had packed his gold laced hat and best suit in the blanket roll, placed his stock of gold in a saddle bag, and had added a second pistol to his armament. At the last moment he took a Deckard rifle from the corner. Then he was whistling to the mare and the faithful creature came on the run. With head studiously bowed, he saddled, made the blanket roll fast and mounted. Then he looked up.

Nancy was framed by the doorway, ready to wave her hand in farewell. He rode to within ten feet of her and, in a voice that sounded very hoarse, apologetically explained:

"I think it was the little drummer boy who turned the trick for me. You will try to understand—not be too harsh in your thoughts."

"You were my friend before you turned rebel," she managed to say, and stepped back.

He wheeled the mare, and her soft voice was calling after him—

"I give you safe faring, Enos Halwood."

Then, before he could turn his head, the door slammed, and he feared she was weeping.

HIS COURSE was across the Neshaminy and to the southwest. He knew that his destination was only six miles north of Germantown. But for the first few miles his heart was heavy and his thoughts were behind him, picturing the forlorn state of Nancy Doane. As the journey progressed some of the worry slipped from his shoulders, and in visioning the adventures awaiting him he experienced a bit of elation. At the least, he believed, he was trying to do something in a man's way.

The isolated homes he passed revealed more fully than did those in Plumstead the distressed condition of the country. Women were working in the fields, securing what foragers had left of the harvest. He saw no cattle, horses, or sheep; an absence that spoke eloquently of the partisan raiders' rapacity.

Almost before he was prepared for it he found himself on the left wing of the American army in the beautiful little valley north of Chestnut Hill. From the right wing on Wissahicon Creek to the left on Sandy Run, were huts of logs and stone. A sentinel, whose feet were bundled in rags, halted him and called for the corporal of the guard.

The corporal, wearing broken boots, advanced and demanded to know the newcomer's business.

"I came to join the army," said Halwood, as he swung from the saddle.

"Then I opine that next to General Washington and General Wayne, you'll be the best dressed man in the army Whole clothes and shoes—glory be! It's a long time since I wore the like." The man's gaunt face was creased with a grin as he added, "And you've fetched a rare bit of horseflesh for some officer. I'll take charge of that prime rifle. You'll carry a musket."

Halwood was glad to surrender the Deckard, but his heart gave a twinge at the thought of parting with the mare. He had not foreseen that sacrifice.

"You will follow me," ordered the corporal. Halwood walked behind him, the mare's muzzle on his shoulder. The corporal was inclined to gossip; and there was pride in his voice as he said, "While we ain't strong on clothes, we've got a mighty fine house for the general."

He pointed to a spacious mansion of stone, situated on the edge of a wet meadow at the head of a little valley. The structure was fully sixty feet long and more than half as wide. It stood two stories high and was almost baronial in appearance.

A meticulously dressed officer approached them. The corporal, over his shoulder, announced:

"General Anthony Wayne coming. Known as Dandy Wayne, along of his love for good clothes."

Halwood had heard of this officer, who later was to be known as Mad Anthony; and he surveyed the well groomed figure with much interest. Wayne halted before the two men and glanced appraisingly at Halwood, and noted the excellent fit of the "second best cloth" suit. He inquired—

"Whom have you here, Corporal?"

"A recruit, sir."

"Your name?" asked Wayne of the newcomer.

"Enos Halwood, of Virginia."

"From what place last? Your mare doesn't show signs of hard and long travel."

"From Plumstead, northeast of here."

"I was born and raised in Chester County. I know Bucks County well, and the foul brood that nests there—the Doanes."

Halwood's face grew warm as he explained:

"They are distant kinsmen of mine. I have been teaching school there. Miss Nancy Doane would grace any circle."

"God forbid I ever should traduce a lady! But I will hang her brothers, or some of them, if I catch them." He motioned for the corporal to retire, and inquired, "Why do you come here to enlist? I should quicker think, from your connections, you would be with Sir William Howe."

"I have been in Philadelphia twice. I have met a very pleasant gentleman—Major André. I fought a duel with a Captain Long. I went through the Walnut Street prison and saw that which fair sickened me, sir. I have been visiting relatives in England until this last summer. I was asked by the Doanes, whom I never had met, to send them a schoolmaster. I took the work myself. It has been something of a struggle, sir, to come to the state of mind which results in my being here, instead of Philadelphia . . . Ah! There's a travel acquaintance!"

The exclamation was spontaneous as Halwood beheld Lydyg marching by, with bayonets ahead and behind him.

"A rascal who will be soundly whipped before the regiment tomorrow," impatiently said Wayne. Then he added, "But just how did you meet our superlative thief?"

Halwood explained briefly.

Wayne exclaimed: "Why, we're really indebted to you for the horses the thief brought in. It saved him from the whipping then due him."

He called out to a sergeant and told him to bring Lydyg back. Halwood rightly assumed this move was to check him up as to the correctness of his statements. Lydyg, between the bayonets, came up, his sly face apprehensive. The moment he beheld Halwood he grinned broadly and cried—

"The man who licked the houseful of murderers and got me loose and sent me here with the hosses!"

"Take him away," snapped Wayne. Then, to Halwood, "We will go to headquarters. His Excellency may desire to question you. I will have the mare stabled. You will not need her, now you're to be one of us."

"I realized that. I had to weigh it in my mind," said Halwood.

He whistled softly. The mare, feeding a few rods away, promptly came to him and nuzzled his neck with her velvet muzzle. In a strained voice Halwood said:

"Before stabling her I would advise you to have the saddle bags and the two pistols removed. The weapons are excellent ones, and there is a hundred pounds, gold, in the bags. I brought it for General Washington's military chest."

"You are an unusual recruit," mused Wayne, after a brief pause. "You are almost too good to be true. We'll let the mare follow us."

Halwood was left with the sentinel at the outer door while Wayne entered and passed down the long, broad hall. Soon he reappeared and motioned for Halwood to follow him. Then he opened the door of a big room where Washington, in his buff and blue uniform, was seated at a table. Wayne announced—

"This is the recruit, sir, who offers to enlist."

"And you are a Virginian," said Washington, rising and thrusting out his hand. "I have not been back there since this war began. Be seated, Mr. Halwood. I know of your family. Your parents have been dead nearly a score of years. Tell me all about yourself, say, for the last two or three years."

Halwood sketched that period of his life, and found it awkward to explain his mental struggle in arriving at his great decision.

"I understand you perfectly, sir," broke in Washington. "Many patriots have had their hours of indecision. It does you great credit to arrive at the right conclusion. I am frank to say I believe General Howe would gladly give you a commission."

Then he commenced a minute cross examination on Halwood's experiences in Philadelphia. He wanted nothing omitted, no matter how trivial. Disturbed by this insistence, Halwood finally exclaimed:

"Good heavens, sir! You believe me, don't you?"

With a rare smile the great leader assured:

"Implicitly, young man. I should scarcely bother to question a liar. Mr. Halwood, I've come to an important decision. Of great importance to you—of much importance to the army. You shall

have the opportunity to serve your country in a bigger way than you have anticipated. You will be free to accept, or refuse. First, how many know you came here?"

"But one person. Mistress Nancy Doane."

"And she will tell others; has told others before now." There was disappointment in the mellow voice.

"Not she, sir. She makes no confidants of her rakehell brothers. She has small liking for the British officers who come to Plumstead to gamble and carouse."

"That is better. Much better. You may retire to the front of the house while I talk with General Wayne."

HALWOOD obeyed and threw himself on the grass under a big catalpa tree. As his gaze idly swept the valley he beheld something that caused him to half rise and rub his eyes. He was beholding the horse herd taken from the Doanes the night before. At the end of ten minutes an orderly summoned him to Washington's presence. Wayne was there. It was the latter who leaned forward, his eyes sparkling, and announced:

"His Excellency has decided you may do us a great service by proceeding to Philadelphia and remaining there. You will, if you accept, renew acquaintance with any officers whom you already have met. If you accept you should learn much which will be worth more than half a dozen regiments to America. We have agents there who do not know each other. You will not know them; none will know you. This, to guard against even a shadow of a chance of betrayal. None here, aside from his Excellency and myself, will know of your mission. If you believe the hazard is too great, and still wish to enlist, you will be sworn in at once."

"We have one agent whom none of us know," added General Washington. "We know his messenger, who brings us information. That information is always correct."

Halwood was in a dilemma. He detested the rôle of spy. He greatly disliked the thought of refusing the first duty offered him. His admiration for Washington was great. Then he was again hearing the pleading of the drummer boy; was seeing the soup kettle kicked over; was hearing the thud of the loaded whip stock. That was what he would be warring against. He was recalling Nathan Hale, hanged summarily by Cunningham. This last thought could not deter him, as he was confident he could play the game and escape discovery.

He bowed his head in acquiescence. Wayne, true to his love for fine raiment, insisted—

"But you must have better clothes."

"I have a rare suit. Gold laced hat and all, in my saddle roll."

"You should have one that's very fine," mused Wayne.

"This is new and very elegant. One I secured from FitzPatrick, the partisan."

"The highwayman, FitzPatrick," tersely corrected Washington. "In what fashion, sir, could you secure such a gift from him?"

"By my Virginia style of wrestling, sir."

Whereat Halwood sketched his first encounter with FitzPatrick. Washington's eyes twinkled as he listened. His only comment was:

"Wrestling is an honest sport. It smacks of the soil. It has stood you in good stead. General Wayne will examine the trophy and determine if it meets with his approval. Now you will need hard money."

"I have gold sufficient to sustain my position for awhile," said Halwood.

"He brought it for your military chest, sir," added Wayne.

"Then all seems to be ready. He will take the oath of allegiance, General, and later will receive his final instructions. You will attend to that. It's necessary that he leave here after dark tonight. The fewer who see him the better his chances. I greatly appreciate the gift of the gold, which I now turn back for you to use for the benefit of the United States of America."

Halwood's head was in a whirl as he followed Wayne out a rear entrance of the manor house. He realized something of the importance of his mission. Silence and continued secrecy if he be successful—ignoble death in the noose if he failed through discovery. He asked Wayne:

"My contact with headquarters, sir? I shall need a trusty messenger."

"That is provided for," assured the general. "Here is a ring. It is peculiarly chased inside. Our messenger will identify himself by handing you such a ring. Feel inside the band."

Halwood did so, and said—

"A slightly embossed diamond shape and two circles."

"Trust whoever gives the like to you. None but the right man can deliver it, as but one man knows, or will know, the identity of the person to receive it. Now, what else?"

"I recognize the Doane horse herd. You must be well served to know what's going on in Plumstead,"

"Only one man knows who brought that message. No man, I am sure, knows who sent it," gravely replied Wayne. "Now, as to the rôle you will play?"

"A reckless spendthrift."

"So? But that will call for much gold."

"It will be play-acting, largely. To get results I must be with those who know what is about to happen. I shall be much at the City Tavern, and shall secure a room close by."

"Have two rooms," advised Wayne. "Hire one while wearing the suit you now have on. At night it might be convenient to slip into. Of course you will ride the mare. What else do you think of?"

"I wish it understood that I can not implicate the Doanes in any of my news."

"They can't count in a large way, and they already are implicated."

Wayne would have closed the talk then and there had not Halwood had an inspiration. He begged:

"Just a moment, sir. I believe I have a rare thought. I saved that fellow, Lydyg, from being murdered."

"Almost to be lamented," sighed Wayne. "A chronic thief."

"And cunning when cunning is needed, I'll swear. I'll vouch for his honesty to me. Let me have him in Philadelphia. I may need a master thief. Tell him his court-martial is suspended if he serves me well. Thief though he is, I am convinced he has the quality of loyalty to one who has helped him. Let him have his buttons torn off and be drummed out the army. Then tell him to go to town and loiter around the City Tavern. Once I see him I can communicate with him. He can read?"

"You'd believe so if you could see the forgery he perpetrated in securing a gallon of spirits from the commissary. Will you talk with him here?"

Halwood shook his head, saying:

"After dark. There are genuine deserters from this army in Philadelphia. Others will go there. None must see the two of us talking here."

CHAPTER VII

HOWE'S FERRET

HALWOOD entered the city in the evening, after giving Lydyg a day's start. He suffered no inconvenience, and was not even called upon to display the pass which Major André had countersigned. In fact, there was a going forth and swarming in of all classes, from raw rustics to the socially élite. Finding lodgings where he could stable his mare, Halwood changed to his best suit and proceeded to the City Tavern. One of the first men he encountered was Moses Doane, who was considerably in liquor, and who professed much joy in finding his Virginian kinsman "true blue".

"I thought you were off hunting for horses," said Halwood, as he accepted a glass of mulled cider.

Moses grinned broadly and answered:

"I started. Found a prospect the first thing. Sent the boys. A goodish bag. Come here to have a surgeon look at my

head. The hurt doesn't amount to anything. Where are you lodging?" On being told he grimaced in high disgust, and insisted, "You must do better by yourself. You must live like a gentleman. Maybe I can find some gold for your purse."

"I have plenty of gold," said Halwood. "I shall seek better lodgings tomorrow. Is there room here?"

Moses shook his head.

"It's out of the question, even if every room was empty. Are you scared of madmen? Rather, of men who are unbalanced?"

Considerably taken back, yet curious, Halwood said:

"Naturally I do not care for the company of a crazy man. What a queer question!"

"I put it rather blunt. But there is a man, along in years, named Kinney, who is queer in the head. Yet he owns a big house on Sixth Street, quite near to Sir William Howe's mansion on High Street. Funny old coot. Quite a number of our swaggering dandies have tried to get in with him because he is so near Sir William. I saw him when he came to headquarters to ask for a sentinel to be posted before his door to keep brawlers from disturbing him. If he would take you in it would be fine for you. I know he has let rooms recently."

"I'll think about it. It would depend upon just how deeply afflicted he be. Just now I'm hungry."

"Then come along. I have the run of this place. If you are here to stay you better reserve a small table."

Moses, swaggering, led the way into the dining-room and, although the place appeared to be crowded, he promptly was provided with a table in a corner. Throwing up his shaggy head he boasted:

"Bucks County gold can buy whatever any other gold can buy. Wait a few minutes. I must speak to a friend."

He rose and made for a long table up the room, filled with officers, and Halwood took occasion to look about him.

"Don't eat any fish. Spoiled," warned a waiter over his shoulder. "Roast beef is perfect."

There was something vaguely reminiscent in the subdued voice. Halwood casually glanced up and beheld Lydyg, correctly garbed for his menial position.

"For heavens sake! How could you manage it so soon?" the Virginian mumbled.

"Borrowed a horse I found straying. Sold it in town. Bought these clothes. Want a good watch?"

"A watch? I have a watch. Where did you get it?"

"It belonged to the landlord. I'd like to get it out of the tavern."

"Damn you! You should be whipped to death. Your thieving will spoil everything," said Halwood from the corner of his mouth.

"Lawsy, sir! It won't be found on me. After he hangs up a reward I'll find it and give it back. No stealing in that. You lodging here?" Lydyg talked with barely a flutter of the lips, all the while fussing with the silverware.

With similar furtive caution Halwood gave his temporary quarters, and mentioned the house on Sixth Street, and the mental peculiarity of its owner.

"I know him by sight. Studies the stars. That's mostly the reason for calling him crazy. You'd better look farther."

"He is sane enough to secure protection for his property."

"In a moment look up the room. Man just entering," warned the low, flat voice.

Halwood casually glanced toward the entrance, and instantly was very disagreeably impressed. A second look, as the man squarely faced down the room, and his aversion was tinged by a decided uneasiness. The man was dressed in black. His features under the tightly drawn yellow skin were bony, and the thin lips revealed both rows of teeth. To accentuate the suggestion of a death's head, the eyes were in deep sockets and had a fixed stare. There was no change in his facial expression.

"Looks like a dead man," murmured Halwood. "Who is he?"

"The only man in town I'm afraid of. He's Howe's Ferret. Any officer, going wrong, rather'd have the devil after him. Behind his back they call him Captain Death. He ain't human. He's a corpse walking on two feet. It's no joke to the one he takes an interest in. Good Lord, he's looking this way! He's coming down here! God ha' mercy on my poor soul!"

"You fool! Pull yourself together," warned Halwood. "You're only a waiter. Bring me a decanter."

By an effort the Virginian concealed his revulsion as he glanced up and met the fixed, ghoulish gaze, eye to eye. Never once did the man shift his eyes to look at others as he threaded his way among the crowded tables. Halwood also noticed the expression of relief on the faces of all the men passed. Mustering an air of nonchalance, he waited until the weird creature halted and made to take the opposite chair.

Meeting the staring eyes frankly, Halwood said:

"Sorry, sir. But the chair is taken."

In a low, sibilant voice Howe's Ferret explained:

"I am attached to headquarters. Whoever planned to use this chair won't come while I'm here."

"Damn your impudence!" And the Virginian's voice carried. "I tell you this table is taken."

The official Ferret clasped his bony hands on the back of the chair, leaned forward and stared intently. The scene was being watched closely by the diners. Halwood met and held the steady gaze, although he feared the effort would cause his eyes to water. There was something horribly sepulchral in the frozen visage. The yellow skin, the unchanged expression of the mouth, with the lips drawn back and exposing the clenched teeth, the deep set, glaring eyes, all was so disturbingly unusual as to cause acute repugnance, if not fear.

"You are a civilian," whispered the man. "I am General Howe's secretary. Blidgett by name. I usually sit where I will."

Halwood smiled in honest mirth. The spell was partly broken. He would not be afraid even of a walking dead man who owned to the name of Blidgett.

"If you are attached to headquarters I suppose you will sit where you wish," carelessly said Halwood. "Just what rights you have in a public tavern I don't know, or care. You wear nothing to show your official standing. I assume Sir William has quite a number of secretaries."

"I am different from any," whispered Blidgett as he sidled into Doane's chair and rested his elbows on the cloth, supporting his chin in his skeletal hands. In a low, sibilant tone he went on, "Your friend will not return while I am here. I sometimes fear he is not over honest in dealing with his Majesty's army. Honest men have nothing to fear from me."

"What the devil's the meaning of this lecture? I came here to dine."

The secretary leaned forward, and in an almost inaudible voice murmured—

"I smell rebel."

Halwood's hand smacked the table smartly, causing more than one onlooker to start convulsively. He announced:

"Blidgett, or whatever your name is, you are a most confounded nuisance. It's absolutely immaterial to me what you smell, so long as I have your room in place of your company. Clear out, or I'll throw you out!"

THE YELLOW skin, heretofore tautly drawn, wrinkled in tiny creases across the forehead. The sardonic mouth changed none. The hollow eyes remained implacably fixed; but a slight tinge of color in the sunken cheeks testified to the strange creature's capacity for experiencing some human emotions. He noiselessly rose, and said—

"Your friend will not return to this table."

With that he stalked from the room, his gaunt head swinging from side to side and causing many eyes to be averted.

"God help you!" whispered Lydyg's

voice. "He's marked you. He's put a spell on you."

He had returned so quietly that Halwood did not sense his presence until he spoke.

"Find out where he lodges." The young Virginian filled a small glass and added, "He's suspicious. But he can know nothing. Report to me tonight if you learn where he lodges."

Howe's Ferret spoke by the book when he prophesied that Moses Doane would not return to the table; and Halwood dined alone. When he entered the taproom Moses was quick to join him and draw him to one side. His voice was hoarse with apprehension as he whispered—

"What did he say about me?"

"That you would not come back to a chair he had sat in."

"Mighty well right on that! But why is he trailing you?"

"Trailing me? That's silly. Why should he be after me?"

"Every one in the room knows he's on your trail," insisted Moses. "But he acts up that way with any newcomer he sees around the tavern. Luckily he can't find anything against you."

"You give him too much importance," said Halwood. "He depends on his ghastly appearance to frighten folks. And then admits his name is Blidgett!"

"He's death, or the devil," said Moses.

"To me he only claimed to be one of Howe's secretaries. See here, Moses. I don't fancy leading troops, or following an officer. Why can't Sir William use me as a secretary?"

"I don't dare help even by speaking a good word for you, now that Cap'n Death has clapped his hollow eyes on you," was the frank admission.

"Then I'll see if Major André is as superstitious."

"He's in the card room, watching the play . . ."

Until Blidgett had announced his vocation Halwood never had thought of seeking secretarial work with the English general. The more he considered it, the more the idea appealed. He sauntered into the big card room, where a roulette wheel and faro layout were being patronized by officers and Tory citizens. At small wall tables engrossed couples were playing piquet, *cinq cents* and throwing dice. Major André, apparently watching the hectic players, but in reality planning to paint a new set of scenery for the inevitable theatrical performance his brother officers gave in captured towns, remembered Halwood. His greeting was genial and he suggested a glass of punch. As they stood aside Halwood announced his ambition to act as one of Sir William's secretaries.

André's genial face lengthened. Almost apologetically, he said:

"That affair with Captain Long raised a devil of a mess, Halwood. Not that you are blamed, mind you. Several of the staff are glad it resulted as it did. Nor does Sir William approve of bullies. But it would be much easier for you to win high favor by raising an independent company, like Simcoe's Rangers. Do that, and you will receive a far richer reward than any clerkly work can bring."

"I have thought of it, but two reasons discourage me. Nearly all the men in this region are in service, or engaged in partisan warfare. The last means robbing the weak and selling their stock."

"*Hic habet!* You score on your big kinsman."

"It's true. Then again, I'm a stranger in this region. I would have difficulty in raising a file of men."

André nodded and pursed his lips; he bowed his head in cogitation. Then he was softly saying:

"There is another avenue which leads to much gold and his Majesty's approval. You are Virginia born. With you in the rebel army—"

He halted and waited.

"A spy!" Halwood exclaimed.

"An honest word for an absolutely necessary calling," stoutly insisted the officer.

"It's distasteful to me."

"I confess it's a rôle I could not as-

sume," continued André. "But my reasons are not based on ethics. It would be impossible for me to practise the necessary deceit. I'd be caught right off. I'd bungle it terrifically. But you seem to have a *savoir faire.* You are cool and self-possessed. I watched your encounter with our ghastly Mr. Blidgett. Halwood, the bringer of information which will permit us to smash that arch-rebel, Washington, can name his own reward, in both gold and rank."

Halwood made a little grimace, yet promised:

"I'll think of it very seriously. I must mend my fortunes. What's left of my property will be seized. The Whigs already count me a traitor."

"That's it! That's it!" quickly said André. "You have the name, why not the game? Of course, there is a vast difference between a spy and a traitor."

Halwood ignored this truism and requested:

"Tell me something about this Blidgett. His appearance is so theatrical I couldn't believe it to be genuine at first. Doane says he is called the Ferret, and other disturbing names."

"In my set he is jocosely known as Captain Death. I have no doubt but that he's proud of his graveyard face. We avoid him as we would the plague. Not that he can nose out any disloyalty among us, but because of the damned sepulchral reminder in his bony head and hands. He's offensive to the sight; but he must have his value or Sir William would not have him around."

Halwood thanked him and took the initiative in ending the conversation. André urged:

"You'll seriously think of my proposal? Perfectly honorable. It would give Sir William genuine satisfaction could he know you would undertake such a delicate task."

They parted in mutual amiability. There was a great charm in the play-acting, yet thoroughly martial, British officer. Halwood then looked into the parlors and found them filled with Tory belles and worshipful admirers. The outstanding center of attraction, a slim, beautiful girl, was Peggy Shippen.* Several civilians and officers were paying court to her.

The confusion of small talk and exaggerated compliments was not conducive to clear thinking, and the Virginian returned to the card room, where he could shut out the world and concentrate on his problem. He believed a secretaryship would be more valuable to General Washington than any other rôle he might play. It would permit of his coming and going at all hours, unquestioned. There was one possible barrier to his being accepted and trusted: Blidgett. The creature was hostile to him because of the defiance shown him in the dining room. After studying the situation from every angle there seemed to be left but one alternative. It was a gruesome conclusion to reach, although the Ferret had brought many to low, some to ignoble deaths.

HALWOOD joined Moses as the latter left the faro table, took him aside and told him of André's sympathetic attitude. Doane, believing the Virginian was to be appointed secretary to the commander-in-chief, swore with much gusto, and found it to be such rare news he needs must wash it down with brandy-flip. With a kinsman at headquarters what rare deals in cavalry replacements could be put through! Halwood wondered how one, with such a congenital dishonest viewpoint, could be the brother of Nancy Doane.

They bid each other good night, and Halwood left the tavern to go to his room. Just outside the entrance he met Captain Long and several officers. Long wore a short cape to conceal his wounded shoulder. Halwood would have passed on, but Long exclaimed—

"Damme well, if he hasn't the brass to return to town!"

Halwood halted and swept his gaze over the hostile faces; then said to his late adversary—

*Of a prominent Tory family. Married Benedict Arnold.

"I'm thinking you'd scarce have the brass to speak thus if not for your broken shoulder."

"By the Lord! If he's incapacitated there are others here who are not!" cried a major of the artillery.

"A mass attack?" jeered Halwood.

"Now may you be cursed for those words!" exclaimed the major ferociously.

"God is omnipotent. You gentlemen are seeking a quarrel. I prefer the short path to the roundabout way of bombast and ranting. You speak, sir—" to the major— "as if you had a grievance."

"For once you are right. I demand satisfaction without any unnecessary delay for your words and manners."

"You shall have it! My choice of weapons is the pistol. There is sufficient moonlight. We need only to go above the ferry to find a quiet spot. It can be finished before the watch, or a provost-guard, can interfere. Give me a moment that I may find some one to act for me."

"But by moonlight!" expostulated the major.

"Surely. Unless you prefer sleeping on it."

"Hell's devils! Find your friend!"

Halwood reentered the tavern and found Moses at the punch bowl. He unceremoniously drew him aside and explained the situation. Whereas Moses ordinarily would have been loath to figure in any such emprise, now, with a secretaryship just around the corner, he was eager to serve. When the two emerged from the tavern they suspected there had been some overwarm discussion. One of the group frankly announced:

"I do not approve. I will have no part in it, even as a spectator."

Captain Long ignored him and asked Moses—

"You act for this man?"

"By what right do you ask?" haughtily demanded Moses, the liquor and scent of battle making him belligerent.

"As Major Etwin's second," coldly replied Long.

"Very good. We have selected pistols. You and I will agree as to the distance. Being moonlight, I would suggest thirty feet."

"We can discuss that aside," angrily replied Long. "That distance would be murder."

"But your principal will shoot to kill, won't he?" asked Moses.

"He will shoot and he will kill," said Long. "But let us be going. Fortunately, we have a rare brace of pistols with us."

"Mr. Halwood will prefer to use mine."

They walked in silence along the approach to the Market Street ferry, but turned at a right angle before reaching it, and entered an area largely occupied by warehouses. Fearing an interruption, the seconds wasted no time in agreeing to the details. They reported to their principals that the distance would be fifty feet. Moses suggested that the word be given by an officer who had taken no part in the conversation. This man was obviously unwilling, yet he agreed, and carefully rehearsed the counting aloud.

As the men took their stations Halwood sighted a vague, slinking figure between two warehouses, and thought at first it was one of the watch. He held the long pistol aiming at the star strewn heavens as a final warning was given against firing prematurely. He was wondering what Nancy Doane would think, could she know he was fighting his second duel; and he hated those who had fastened the quarrel upon him.

At the word to make ready he mechanically half straightened his arm. The finale came quickly. The two reports sounded as one. Halwood felt his enemy's lead ruffle his hair, and then was beholding the major on the ground. He was fearfully afraid lest he had spoiled his usefulness to the Colonies by mortally wounding his opponent, and he purposely had sought to avoid such a tragic catastrophe. He breathed in great relief when he heard an officer announce the major's wound was in the thigh. Moses seized him by the arm and hurried him away. Again Halwood glimpsed the furtive figure, only now it was on his side of the

street. When they approached the shopping district he told Moses:

"Go on ahead. We mustn't be seen together. I am indebted to you for your service."

After Moses gladly had availed himself of the invitation, Halwood loitered. The slinking figure was glimpsed, then became blended with the background and was lost to view. Halwood waited. To his surprise, a man appeared from nowhere and crossed the street above his position and bore down on him. He paused in passing only long enough to whisper—

"Death lives in t'other half of the big house of the madman."

And Lydyg was gone—had vanished from Halwood's ken before covering half a hundred feet.

CHAPTER VIII

NEW LODGINGS

HALWOOD cursed the misfortune of the second duel. He blamed himself, although no avoidance of the affair had seemed to be possible. He knew the charge of cowardice must not stand against him if he were to maintain his dangerous rôle. The alternative was that he had become a marked man. He would be badgered and bedeviled into fighting until he was laid low. For one who would gain the confidence of enemy officers and serve America this was a sad situation.

That night he slept in his obscure lodgings, and he faced the new day much dispirited. He wore his second best suit, which was in harmony with his melancholy state of mind. It was difficult for him to enter the City Tavern for his breakfast, and for that very reason he was compelled to eat there. As he entered the taproom he nearly collided with Moses Doane. Without a word of greeting, Moses, dour of face, seized his kinsman's arm and led him aside. When isolated in a corner he whispered hoarsely:

"Devil's to pay, Halwood! Our fine game is shot to pieces."

"In what way? Explain," harshly demanded the Virginian.

"You can't fight any more duels with the officers without having your neck stretched."

"I don't understand."

"Orders posted early this morning," bitterly continued Moses. "Officers forbidden to fight duels with noncombatants. Civilians will be stretched if they fight with officers."

Halwood felt a pleasant glow pervading his being. His face was sober, however, and he shook his head dolefully. Lowering his eyes to hide his elation, he inquired:

"Major Etwin? How is he?"

"Shot through the thigh. Ought to be well soon. Bone wasn't touched. He is supposed to have accidentally shot himself.

"Why, then! Sir William can't be blaming me."

"Sir William knows the truth," gloomily said the head of the Doanes. "You'll never be one of his secretaries, my lad. And everything was going so smooth!"

"And you acted as my second," reminded Halwood.

Moses departed, and Halwood ate his breakfast in a much better frame of mind. His first business that morning was to go shopping. For elegance he purchased a suit of velvet, claret color, lined with satin, and a laced hat which was guaranteed to be "cocked by the most fashionable hatter in England." He added a velvet morning cap and a fine castor hat. His stock of shirts and cravats was sufficient for the time being. Determined to dress like a gentleman of fortune, or leave a decent wardrobe were life cut short, he further indulged in a slender walking stick; a gilt snuff box; six plain handkerchiefs and one flowered; double channeled pumps; stitched, high heeled shoes; and a pair of buckles set with brilliants. His bill was a hundred pounds, twenty-five of which he paid in Doane counterfeits. He left his purchases to be called for, and on leaving the store he all but collided with the ubiquitous

Blidgett. The man was dressed entirely in black, suggesting a hangman, with the tightness of his clothing accentuating the skeletal slightness of his bony figure.

He greeted—

"You have been shopping, my young duelist, and you have no fit lodgings to house such dainty gear."

He spoke with scarcely a movement of his parted lips and clenched teeth.

"You're partly correct," said Halwood. "As to the purchases."

"And about the duel. I witnessed it. Sir William knows all about it. There will be no more unless you provoke such. Two are enough."

"I am no brawler. I only ask to be let alone."

"That is sound judgment. Now, as to proper lodgings for a young man of fortune, I suggest the Kinney house on Sixth Street as being quiet, restful, and yet in the heart of the city."

"You occupy one half of that mansion," said Halwood.

"How could you know that so soon after coming to town?" quickly asked Blidgett.

"I overheard an officer at the tavern mention the fact."

"It is commonly known where I lodge. It's because I live there that I believe you could secure accommodations with Mr. Kinney."

The grotesque creature was trying to be genial. Halwood was both pleased and worried. He said he would call on Kinney directly.

"Not until after the noonday hour," advised Blidgett. "Mr. Kinney sits up late, studying the stars. He sleeps late in the morning. He may find your lucky star and cast your horoscope."

"I've always had to make my own luck. After midday, then."

They parted, and Halwood returned to the tavern in the hope of meeting Major André. He found Lydyg cleaning spilled wine from the tables. Before approaching him he paused and wrote rapidly with his finger on a moist table—

Am trying for lodgings at madman's.

He wandered up the room and from the corner of his eye saw Lydyg glide to the table and, after a glance, apply his towel briskly.

"Good morning, Mr. Halwood," greeted a familiar voice. He wheeled and faced Major André.

"I came here in the hope of meeting you, sir," said Halwood. "I've thought over your proposal. If I can be assured it will lead to something higher, or at least more congenial, I will undertake it."

"Excellent! Why, even the peerage is not beyond the man who can materially contribute to the success of our arms. That will be among General Burgoyne's rewards for winning the northern campaign. I will see you receive a bag of guineas this day. Delivered at your lodgings. You are located?"

"Your Mr. Blidgett advises me to try Mr. Kinney's house on Sixth Street."

André's lids drooped; then he was smiling and saying:

"And why not? Our death's head has the other half of the mansion, as you may know."

"So he informed me."

"Excellent. If he speaks for you, you will secure lodgings. I'll send the guineas there. And let me assure you, my dear Halwood, that only the guilty minded need fear our Ferret. Now just what are your plans? I might help with advice."

"One can obtain first hand information only by seeking it at headquarters. I plan to visit the American camp in quest of a commission."

"Damme pink! That's direct enough! But why not? You're Virginia born. Yet, you might be accepted offhand and be set to soldiering."

"In that event I should secure much valuable knowledge. It would be my task to get it through to you. There is another line. Deserters are coming in from White Marsh. I may learn much from them. Of course it's a new rôle for me, sir. I must have time to give it thought and work out some plans."

"Nor shall you be hurried into making a mistake. What we want is vital news.

Not tittle-tattle. We may be idle here for the winter, but when we move we plan to finish this business with one quick, big stroke. There are but three in our army who will know your true status: Sir William, myself, and Blidgett. You need not be concerned about the latter. He is devoted to Sir William; and, in his way, very valuable. In truth, if you need advice I know of none more crafty than he in planning."

"Good. I am getting used to his face."

OFFICERS entered and left the tavern, leaders of grenadiers, Hessians, Highlanders, light horse, infantry and the artillery. It was a continuous, blazing procession of highly decorative uniforms, and a vivid contrast to the drab, motley array known as the American army. The fact that Halwood was seen in André's company, plus the recent order forbidding duels with noncombatants, was sufficient to restrain the bellicose. However, to escape any possible misunderstanding, the Virginian elected to eat his dinner at the London Coffee House at Front and Market Streets. Then he repaired to the Kinney house in Sixth Street.

A negro of herculean proportions answered the knocker and stared truculently. Halwood gave his name and explained his business. Immediately the African's perfect teeth were displayed in a smile and he motioned for the caller to enter. Then he led the way up two flights of stairs to a high attic. This third floor had been finished off into several rooms, while from the narrow hall a ladder led to a large cupola. Through the open trapdoor Halwood observed this dome was roofed with glass. A querulous voice called out—

"Who is it, Nero?"

"Gem'man Massa Blige talk 'bout, sah."

"Oh. Blidgett's young friend. He may come up."

Halwood nimbly ascended the ladder and found himself in a round room. It was furnished with an ancient black walnut dresser, a camp bed and a chair. For studying the heavens it was equipped with high stool, a telescope mounted on a tall tripod, and what purported to be charts of the heavens. The occupant had not risen. A heavy thatch of snow-white hair, much disheveled, and a prodigious white beard, sadly in need of a comb and stained with wine, were all that was visible of the householder.

"I won't ask you to sit," said Kinney in a thin, querulous voice. "But I can state your business for you. You want lodgings here. I don't know you from Adam. But Mr. Blidgett, in the King's service, and who leases the other half of this house from me, indorses you. Queer for me to say as my sympathies are with the rebels. It's really to oblige him I'm taking you in. Guinea a week, with breakfast to be eaten in the kitchen. My colored man is an excellent cook. He will do your washings. That's included in the guinea. Mr. Blidgett says you will be away much in the daytime. That's a recommendation, as it's during the morning hours I get my sleep. When the heavens are clear I study the stars all night. If the terms suit you, you may give the African a guinea for the first week. Now go, please."

"I accept."

These were the only words Halwood uttered during the interview. He descended the ladder and gave a guinea to Nero, who was waiting.

"I shall send some clothing here this afternoon," he said. "You will place it in my room. You will be up if I come in late?"

"Nero up all de time, sah. Don't sound de knocker, sah. Nero take de chain off. Here is de key."

The key was big and awkward to carry, but it insured access at all hours without depending upon the wakefulness of the servant.

Halwood's next business was to return to the store and order his purchases sent to his new room. He dropped into the tavern and found the usual company of officers. Many quick glances were darted

at him, but no incivilities were offered. Howe's mandate protected him. He next visited the Southwark Theater, which he had heard André mention, but saw nothing of that genial officer. Workmen were cleaning the place in anticipation of a play soon to be given by the British officers. His wanderings took him next to the Indian Queen Tavern on South Fourth Street, where he was agreeably surprised by beholding Lydyg. Had any one told him two weeks back that he would rejoice at meeting the cleverest thief in Washington's army, he would have considered such a person insane.

He gave no sign of recognition, but in passing him Lydyg murmured—

"Your old lodgings."

After a few minutes of loitering Halwood leisurely returned to his cheap lodgings and found the door unlocked. He had left it secured. Entering, he found Lydyg seated back from the window, his thin, shrewd face wearing a very serious expression. Closing the door, Halwood demanded—

"What is it?"

"Heard some officers in the tavern talking about you. Been hunting for you ever since. Some believe you're spying for Washington. André and another laughed at the idea. I could only catch a few words here and there. But enough was said to show me you were to be tested. Some big piece of news will be told in your hearing. They must have a spy in our camp, as André said he would soon know if it reached that far. But he doesn't believe it will."

Halwood felt a cold chill crawl down his spine.

"I'm indebted to you, Lydyg," he murmured. "I probably would have taken the bait. Thanks. You'd better be going. It might be bad if your coming here was known."

Lydyg reached under the bed and pulled out a market basket, apparently filled with salad stuff. From under the greens he produced a leather bag and dropped it on the table. It gave off a clinking sound. Lydyg explained:

"From a lobster-back of a paymaster. He didn't oughter get drunk."

Halwood poured the contents on the table. There were two quarts of gold pieces.

"You'll be wanting to buy yourself some scrumptious clothes," said Lydyg.

"You kept some for yourself?" asked Halwood.

The master thief's indignation was very genuine. He fairly exploded, exclaiming under his breath:

"Good Lord! Can't you understand? I stole it for the American army. You're the only army here."

"You meant kindly, but I do not like it," mumbled Halwood. "And it's very dangerous. Yet, it comes from the King's paymaster. I wonder how I can get it to General Washington?"

"I'll take it," promptly offered Lydyg. "Only fourteen miles. I can go and be back between evening and sunrise. Any papers you want carried?"

Halwood shook his head, saying—

"Papers can lead to a noose." Then he lowered his voice to a whisper and said, "I trust you. I know you'll never send me to the hangman. Here is a ring. Give it to General Wayne, or Washington. Say I sent you. Explain that I am a spy for the enemy and must have something to tell them about our camp and army. Can you get that gold out of town without being caught? Get it to White Marsh?"

LYDYG smiled slowly, as if amused. He raked the loose coins into the basket and rearranged the greens. The leather bag he stuffed under his coat, saying:

"It mustn't be found here. The gold pieces can't be identified."

He wore no hat and might easily be assumed to be a provision store clerk delivering an order.

"But you can't walk it!" expostulated Halwood.

With a little smirk, Lydyg assured him: "I'll borrow a nag somewhere. I'll be back before morning."

Halwood waited an hour after his departure, fully expecting to hear a hue and cry and to behold the faithful wretch being dragged to his doom by the provost-guard. As he could discover nothing beyond the ordinary confusion in the street below, he made a package of some of his personal effects and descended to the ground floor, where he paid another week's rent in advance, secured his mare from the nearby stable, and gave her her head. He rode to Peg's Run. After this exercise he returned and proceeded to the Kinney house.

Nero emerged from a side door, bringing scouring things to use on the mud-scrapers. Halwood requested him to see the mare was not stolen, and unlocked the big door and went up to his room. He found his recent purchases neatly arranged in the big wardrobe. While examining them he noticed that the room ceiling did not extend over the deep clothes closet. Catching the edge of the partition, he drew himself up and, as he had anticipated, found he was staring through the triangular aperture formed by the roofs and the ridgepole. By bending and stepping from beam to beam it would be a simple task to pass over to the half of the house occupied by Blidgett. He had assumed that the division wall made such communication impossible. He was thrilled to realize that a few cautious steps would carry him to the Ferret's quarters. His second realization, less pleasant, had to do with the ease of a visit to his own quarters, did Blidgett take the notion. He was recalling the Ferret's sibilant announcement—"I smell rebel."

Halwood believed the man was sincere when he made that statement. Why did he become cordial overnight, and even aid in arranging for a stranger to obtain quarters in the Kinney house? Dropping lightly to the floor of the closet, he changed to his new suit of claret velvet. He put a pellet of paper inside the keyhole and left the key in the door.

Descending to the ground floor, he found Nero still busy with his scouring and polishing. He remarked—

"Not forgetting your master's supper, I hope?"

"No, sah," and there was a tremendous display of grinning white ivory. Then, confidentially, the black added, "I don' know what keeps de massa alive. Lookin' at dem stars so long must kill he 'tite."

"Kills his appetite?"

"Yas, sah. Why, ol' massa go one, two, tree days 'n' no eat."

Halwood felt his interest stirring. He carelessly remarked—

"Just tells you to take the tray away?"

"No, sah. He don', sah. When trap is down Nero jus' puts tray down 'n' goes away. Bime-by take up udder tray, put down 'n' go away. An' do laik that till trap is open 'n' ol' massa say stop."

"You hear him walking about when the trap is closed, but you don't speak?"

"Nero don' hear nuttin'. No soun' in de glass room. Still, laik dead man."

Halwood rode off, deeply puzzled. The African believed his master fasted for days at a time. Halwood was skeptical.

That evening, attired in his best, he entered the City Tavern and played the roulette wheel. He was abnormally successful, and he abandoned his run of luck only when a downward glance rested on the five digits of a skeleton's hand close by his accumulation of gold. Turning his head to meet the gaze of the deeply sunken eyes, he remarked—

"I have the luck of the devil tonight."

"I'll swear to that," grumbled the operator, who had accompanied the army from New York.

Advancing his bony visage, Blidgett whispered in the Virginian's ear:

"There's no end of the yellow metal for you, if you can bring a very interesting talk to headquarters. I am fully in Sir William's confidence."

"So I have been informed. You are one of three who knows the secret."

"One of four," gently corrected Blidgett. "You know about it. You are the center of it."

"Of course. And I have several lines out. I believe I can land a fish."

"By sitting here and playing against the wheel?"

"Playing, while waiting for a certain fish to bite."

"You should be going out of town," murmured Blidgett.

"And not be here to land my fish? Oh, no!"

"The waters are troubled," whispered Blidgett. "I fear no fish will bite when so carelessly played."

"I'll catch something within twenty-four hours. I can't say just how important it will be."

"Ten pounds that you do not."

There was a smoldering fire in the sunken orbs.

"Done and done! We're both gambling with his Majesty's gold."

"Hush, fool! Not so loud!"

Halwood smothered his inclination to resent this speech, and contented himself with saying—

"The fool is he who thinks he knows it all."

Doubtless it was impossible for the Ferret's fixed features to register any emotion. The wide grimace, disclosing the two rows of teeth, seemed never to relax. In personal appearance, or manner, Blidgett never gave any index of his feelings. Yet Halwood somehow got the impression that the weird creature was puzzled. In his hissing whisper he said—

"I sincerely hope I shall be called upon to pay."

He withdrew, and the uneasy gaze of the drinking, gambling gathering following him until he passed through the doorway. Halwood knew he was the focal point of the curious. Some were there who had witnessed his first meeting with the intelligence officer; when he had threatened to remove him bodily from the supper table.

An officer of the artillery civilly warned Halwood, speaking so none might hear:

"That man is a bad one to cross. I doubt if he is human."

This advance satisfied Halwood that he was now considered as being under the protection of those who stood high. He replied softly:

"Nature has been unkind to him. Such a face and figure to carry through life! But I am neither superstitious nor afraid. I thank you for your courtesy."

SHORTLY after he swept up his winnings and retired to his obscure lodgings to sleep uneasily, with a skull and crossbones dancing through his dreams. He was up at an early hour and soberly dressed, but did not descend to the street until the day had begun in earnest. He went through his belongings with minute care to make sure there was nothing in the room which might reward spying eyes. He carried the night's winnings to the tavern and had the landlord put them in his strong box; then he repaired to the dining hall and seated himself at a small table.

He was fair startled as a low voice said over his shoulder—

"I would advise something grilled, sir."

Then a hand was smoothing the cloth—and left a tiny cylinder of paper at the tips of the Virginian's clasped fingers. Halwood captured it and, without looking up, ordered a chop, toast and coffee, and inquired, *sotto voce*—

"What luck?"

"Coffee, sir; yes, sir," and Lydyg was gone.

Halwood glanced about. Major André was taking a chair at the end of the room, his attention absorbed by a copy of the *Evening Post*. Satisfied that the officer had not noticed him, Halwood spread out the tightly rolled paper and read:

> Army destitute of food, clothing, shoes and gunpowder. Great scarcity of the last named. Two thousand Pennsylvania men returning home, their time being up. Many others are sickly and discouraged. Few recruits coming in. Worried about the winter. One severe setback would disrupt what is left of the Army. An unknown spy says you are serving the enemy. Learn his identity if possible.

Thus was the bait which Washington hoped would decoy the enemy into attacking him at White Marsh.

Halwood rolled the narrow strip of paper into a pellet and swallowed it with a mouthful of water. As he set down the glass Blidgett passed the table, his head swinging from side to side.

"Fish still biting, my young friend?" he softly asked.

"I believe I have one hooked."

The Ferret passed on and out of the tavern. Lydyg bustled in with a tray of steaming dishes. He had brought several items Halwood had not ordered. As he fussily placed these on the table he talked rapidly from the corner of his mouth, with scarcely a movement of his lips—

"Told me to thank you for the gold."

"But that was your gift."

"I'm a deserter. I send no gifts. If you want a good hiding place, remember the empty country house where you pulled me out of trouble." Then he was off to serve another patron.

Halwood hurriedly finished his breakfast and joined André. After the exchance of greetings the Virginian said:

"Got in touch with a deserter, just in from White Marsh. He says . . ." And Halwood repeated the substance of the note, omitting only the query as to the unknown spy.

"That is excellent!" approved the major. "It checks up with information from another source. We already were informed about the two thousand Pennsylvania men going home. In truth, we know practically all your deserter reported, except the lack of powder. That is very important. But best of all you've proven you can secure information. We must plan for you to join the enemy. Then the results will be more substantial, and the rewards in proportion. I think it's timely for you to go with me and meet Sir William, before he begins the day."

Inwardly nervous, yet elated, Halwood accompanied the major. As they were leaving the tavern Blidgett met them, his staring eyes and fixed grin more repulsive than ever. He handed Halwood ten guineas and murmured—

"You won."

"How the devil did you know?" exclaimed Halwood.

"I have ways of learning things, Mr. Halwood. It is my business," Blidgett replied.

"What did he mean? And the ten pounds odd?" asked the puzzled major.

"I wagered that sum with him that I would have news for headquarters within twenty-four hours. But how did he know?"

André was much amused and suggested:

"Maybe he didn't know. Maybe it was a trick to learn if you'd accomplished anything. Blidgett is uncanny at all times. Occasionally he's—well, I'll put it this way: Wish for the devil to be on your trail rather than him. No one can bide him. Many fear him. But what he knows won't go in the wrong direction. He's a very valuable agent . . . Now to find our general and secure an audience—if he's in the mood."

They walked briskly to the High Street quarters of Sir William, and found the usual collection of young officers clustered around the door. Sir William preferred the company of youth to that of those of more mature years. André's expression betrayed disappointment as he beheld Mary Pemberton's coach and horses in readiness for some excursion. The taking over of the young woman's property was causing more ill feeling among the citizenry than many such vehicles and steeds were worth.

There was a loud acclaim as the substantial figure of Sir William appeared in the doorway, a dainty breakfast companion on either arm, with several ladies and beaux following.

André pressed forward and gained a brief audience, but had spoken only a few words before his chief was interrupting him by clapping him genially on the shoulder and saying:

"Business must wait on beauty. Later, my dear John."

And he was in the coach with his lights o' love, the rest of the party taking to horse, and the gay cavalcade was off for a riotous day in the country.

Halwood remarked:

"I would not believe he would dare. An American scout band might pick them up."

André's face paled. In a low, tremulous whisper he said:

"Damnation, man! Never make that remark again while in this town! You must pardon my heat . . . My Lord, man! But the whole staff, aside from the youngsters, has had that fear. We've sweated blood."

ANDRÉ'S next business was at the Southwark Theater, where he was painting scenery for a theatrical production. Halwood, wishing to be alone, excused himself from watching the enthusiast wield the brush and walked around to the Kinney house, where he let himself in. He met Nero on the stairs, who reported that his master had returned during the night and had gone out again. He added that breakfast was steaming hot in the kitchen, and Halwood believed it wise to eat again and pretend he was hungry. He halted as he heard the roll of drums outside. Nero threw open the door, and the two watched the long line of grenadiers sweep by, followed by a considerable body of Hessians, with Count Donop riding at their head. For a moment Halwood was in a panic. He believed an attack on Washington was under way. He was partly reassured by hearing a lounger hoot after the last column:

"Off again to Peg's Run for marching and makebelieve fighting! That won't win no war!"

Halwood forced himself to eat a second breakfast and then went to his room. The trapdoor of the cupola was closed. A breakfast tray was at the foot of the ladder. Manipulating his key gingerly, Halwood opened the door and found the tiny pellet of paper on the floor. He replaced it in the keyhole and again gently used the key. The pellet was not dislodged. He was satisfied the room had been entered during his absence. He examined his belongings, but was unable to decide whether or not thay had been touched. If an intruder had examined them he had left them exactly as he had found them.

Now he was overwhelmed by a desire to play a less negative rôle. He locked the door, removed his shoes and hoisted himself through the opening at the top of the wardrobe. Without any hesitancy he made his way across the division wall, and to the attic of Blidgett's quarters.

Instead of the flooring ending in a wardrobe, or room, it extended to the narrow hall. There was no cupola overhead, otherwise the arrangement of the rooms was practically identical with that on the opposite side of the house. From his position he could look down the stairs to the second floor.

Halwood listened intently, and then swung lightly down. He began a descent of the stairs, but came to an abrupt halt as he saw before him, clearly revealed by an accommodating sunbeam, what appeared to be a stout thread. It crossed the stairway and was bound to be encountered by one careless, or ignorant of its presence. A closer examination revealed one end of the thread, after passing through a tiny screw-eye, continued along the wall and disappeared in the hall below. It was natural to believe it was attached to a bell, or some sort of an alarm. Slipping under the thread, the Virginian carefully continued his investigation, and in the second floor hallway discovered three more such threads. Blidgett was canny, and doubtless had other traps for intruders to walk into.

Returning to the attic, Halwood found one of the three doors unlocked. Stepping to one side, he gently turned the knob, and jerked back his hand. Nothing happened. Still fearing a mantrap, he gingerly pushed the door open. Then, without entering, he surveyed the room. It would have done credit to any theater as a property room. Arranged neatly on shelves were many wigs and beards and mustaches, and even a mass of golden curls that a belle might envy. Along the walls were various disguises in the way of costumes. These ranged from a beggar's

rags to the dress uniform of a general officer. One bizarre effect impressed him strongly. It consisted of one piece and was made to fit as snugly as the tights of an acrobat. The color was black and, upon this, outlined in white, was the frame of a skeleton. In semi-darkness the illusion would be almost perfect.

Satisfied for the time being, he softly closed the door, caught the edge of the opening overhead and, in sixty seconds, was standing on the floor of his wardrobe. He put on his shoes, rubbed the dust from his hands and stepped into the hall. As he did so he heard a slight noise overhead, then the shuffling of steps. He remained motionless as the trapdoor slowly rose. The eccentric had returned to his high roost, but Halwood would swear he came not by the way of the stairs. Descending softly to the ground floor, he found the front door open, and Nero at his eternal polishing.

"I think your master has returned," said Halwood.

The negro stared, showing much white of eye, and in a low voice said:

"Witch man! He done nebber come dis way."

"He passed up while you were in the kitchen," suggested Halwood, his nerves tingling as he vaguely believed he was on the verge of an important discovery.

"No, sah. I work here all de time when you come. He fly in de air. He witch man."

"He went up the back way."

"No udder way," informed the black.

"Is it bad luck to meet him, coming in, or going out?"

Nero scratched his woolly pate, and slowly answered:

"I'se nebber see him on de stair. Witch man—*juju* on dis house!"

CHAPTER IX

CAPTAIN SHATIL

HALWOOD now knew many officers by sight, and was on speaking terms with several. Apparently the animosity aroused by the duels had died out, but he did not deceive himself into believing that he was courteously received for his own sake. He realized his status was that of a spy. Blidgett's seeming indorsement was sufficient to establish that much. André's affability might be assumed. He had been delegated by headquarters to utilize the young Virginian to the best advantage. Halwood sensed all this, and stuck to his disagreeable and dangerous task. He studied the officers.

Lord Cornwallis was short, thickset, with graying hair, pleasing in person and manner and a great favorite with the rank and file. Yet Halwood believed this officer would be ruthless in conducting a campaign, and rejoiced that he was not in command in Philadelphia. He observed that General Knyphausen, slender and straight, with sharp features and a martial bearing, put himself out to bow politely to those citizens who obviously were men of importance.

There was but one general officer who aroused Halwood's instinctive dislike: Colonel Tarleton, thickset, with unusually large legs, swarthy of complexion, and whose small, black eyes were continually darting side glances, as if searching for an enemy. A Captain De Lancey was much with André, and Halwood met him frequently. The two officers were one in promoting festivities, and were now arranging for assembly balls at the tavern. Once Halwood was asked to dinner at André's quarters in Dr. Franklin's mansion, in the court back of High Street.

What news Halwood might pick up at such meetings he viewed as possible traps. Lydyg's night flights to White Marsh and back provided a medium for forwarding much town gossip, but nothing of pivotal importance. Nor could the Virginian discover that anything was forwarded to further the King's cause. General Howe appeared to be perfectly satisfied with his giddy routine of living.

One midday Halwood happened to be dining alone in the Indian Head Tavern, in High Street, and a subaltern, somewhat the worse for drink, joined him. He introduced himself as Lieutenant Spanger

of the Light Horse. In a voice that carried far he began a sweeping criticism of the army and its leaders. Halwood endeavored to quiet him, and found the task impossible.

"What do I care who hears? Old Blidgett with his dead face? Bah! I know him and his tricky ways." Then, with the intention of being confidential, but in a voice that reached several tables, he ran on, "I can tell you something about that cove. He'll not only nose out a spy, but he'll turn executioner. That's a fact! There was an officer of the 62d, who talked rather free. Probably said things he shouldn't. He was found as neatly beheaded as if the King's executioner had done the job."

"Hush! You mustn't say such things!" whispered Halwood.

"Now I say what I please. My folks back home have influence. And I'm going back next week—on a scurvy horse transport. Think of a Spanger forced to travel like that!"

Rising and leaving his dinner unfinished, Halwood warned—

"If you're wise you'll go to your quarters and sleep."

Just outside the door he was pleased to meet Edward Marshall. The Long Walker did not seem to be surprised by the encounter and readily accepted an invitation to dine. His choice was the Crooked Billet on the wharf above Chestnut Street. Once they were in a snug corner Marshall said—

"You don't appear to be scared of that Blidgett."

"I don't know why I should be scared of any one," said Halwood.

"I am. But not of white folks," mumbled Marshall. "Only place I feel safe in is this town. No Injuns here . . . You know your friend Blidgett has a new pet?"

Halwood did not dispute the term, and waited for his companion to continue.

"It's a dog," said Marshall. "First you'd think it was a panther. Had a muzzle on when I see him, or I'd been up a tree like a cat."

Halwood made a mental note of this item, and then sought to learn Marshall's business in town. From the rather rambling explanation he deduced that the Walker was handling some of Moses Doane's interests. He also announced he was riding to Plumstead that evening. Halwood called for writing material and wrote a page to Nancy Doane, consisting of town gossip, and concluding with an expressed desire to see her, intimating he might be riding to Plumstead soon. Marshall accepted the missive and the two parted.

As the Virginian was making for the stable where he kept his mare, his attention was attracted by a crowd gathering around the front of a cheap grog shop. He would have passed on had he not observed Blidgett and his new pet. Marshall had exaggerated none in describing the malevolent appearance of the brute. It was black—a black that had a sheen, or luster. The skull did resemble the flattened head of a panther, and the eyes were blazing red lights. Had not the beast been muzzled Halwood would have retreated.

Blidgett's hollow eyes were quick to discover him, and he approached. The crowd fell back promptly, giving man and beast much room. The latter kept close to his master's heels, his head swinging from side to side. Blidgett laughed in his noiseless manner and greeted:

"Here is Satan. What do you think of him?"

"He resembles the devil the most of anything I ever saw," frankly replied Halwood, as he eyed the beast with deep aversion.

"Soft of paw as if he walked on velvet," murmured Blidgett. "Not a hair on him that isn't black. He can smell death a mile. When he halted before that rum shop I knew some one had died."

"Aye? And what's up?"

"Oh, some poor devil of an officer. He is decidedly up. Hanged himself. Ruined himself at high play, or by believing in a woman. Down, Satan!"

The beast crouched, yet tried to crawl

on his belly toward the groggery. Blidgett kicked the beast in the side, whereat it writhed and attempted to seize his foot, but the muzzle clamped his jaws. There followed a hideous exhibition of demoniac rage. The Ferret cursed in whispers and kicked the brute until Halwood turned away.

"Don't hasten," said Blidgett. "Look! Satan is repentant."

The dog was groveling at his master's feet. Halwood abhorred it all, yet tarried as he caught a glimpse of a uniform as men brought an inanimate figure from the rear of the building. A second glance, although the man's face was distorted, impelled Halwood to exclaim—

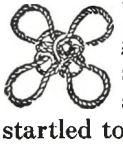
"It's young Spanger of the Light Horse!"

"So?" softly said Blidgett. "Then you knew him. Friend of yours?"

"I saw him for the first time at noon today at the Indian King, when he came to my table and drove me from my dinner by his talk. The poor devil! Said he was sailing for England in another week—and now he's done this."

"Looks like it," agreed Blidgett, and he snapped his fingers.

Satan came to heel, and the two departed, causing more than one timid pedestrian to shrink to one side and think of death and the devil.



WITH his back to the groggery, and waiting until Blidgett should change his course, or get a long lead, Halwood was startled to hear one of the group viewing the dead man loudly cry out:

"Gorrimighty! The noose's tied with a reg'lar hangman's knot! Looks like Jack Ketch hisself done this job!"

Cold with the horror of it, Halwood hurried away. He was recalling his uninvited table companion's statement about the man who was beheaded. He could not forget the cruel sight. Although he walked fast the ghastly visage kept abreast of him.

"Murdered in cold blood," he muttered.

"Buy! Buy a ring!" broke in a voice, and Halwood lifted his head and found his way barred by a man carrying a tray of cheap jewelry.

Halwood gestured for the pedler to step aside, but the fellow was tenacious. He extended a band ring, urging:

"Slip it on, sir. Feel the lucky diamond on the inside."

With his senses once more objective, Halwood took the ring, and found the diamond and two circles inside the band. He handed it back, saying—

"I prefer this style," and he displayed a similar ring.

The pedler examined it briefly, returned it, and said:

"I knew I had the right man. General Wayne says for you to announce that a sortie from White Marsh will be made tomorrow. The troop's moving up during the night. He said for me to tell you he is suspicious of a man known as Shatil, who brings cattle to the American camp. He is a godsend if he isn't a spy."

"Tell the general the man is a spy. I have met him. Tell him to make no sortie; but to announce in Shatil's hearing that one will be made within two days. I will soon know if word to that effect reaches town. I will contradict the report. Remember, no sortie must be made, unless the general wants to send me into a noose. I'll attend to Shatil. Now be off."

They separated, and Halwood went to the Kinney mansion and his room, where he slept for several hours. After supper he turned to playing roulette. His luck varied, but he had no thought for the game. He was waiting. Blidgett created some commotion by entering the room late in the evening, the black beast at his heels. Glances of disgust and aversion followed him as he passed through the room, his bony head swinging from side to side, Satan doing likewise with eyes that had hot, red lights in them.

"My God! What a man!" gasped a captain of dragoons. His companion nudged him as a warning to control his tongue.

André, who was wandering about,

pausing to exchange a few words with different groups, was summoned from the room by a waiter. Ten minutes later the officer returned, his eyes questing the shifting groups. Then he was hurrying to Halwood's side and asking him to leave his gambling. Leading the way to any empty corner, he motioned for Halwood to be seated. He appeared to be excited as he stated—

"Halwood, it would be better for us if you were in the American camp."

"Just what do you mean, Major?" The query was calmly put, but inwardly the Virginian was quivering with excitement.

"So you might keep us better informed." There was a touch of coldness in the reply.

"If anything is forward in the American camp I shall know about it," said Halwood.

"I have just received word that an attack in force will be made on the environs of the town within two days."

"Your informant is either a fool, or he is selling you out. There will be no such sortie. The enemy has no powder to waste on what, at the most, would have to be limited to a demonstration."

"Of course we can't expect our agents to be beforehand with all their information; nor to know all that's going on in the enemy's camp," said André, his voice now quite friendly. "I spoke as I did to stress the desirability of receiving first hand information."

"The American camp affords a poor hiding place for a spy. If it suits your purpose better, however, I will go there and enlist. Already I have suggested that plan. In no other way would I have an excuse for being at White Marsh. It's isolated, with no village to hide in."

"We'll wait a bit before sending you to White Marsh," said André affably, and he rose to rejoin his brother officers.

Halwood knew the period of waiting would be limited to two days. He simply said—

"Just as you say, Major."

He returned to the roulette wheel and, after a few plays, shifted to the faro table. The casual observer would have pronounced him an inveterate gambler, so absorbed did he seem to be. Contrariwise, he scarcely was conscious of placing his wagers. He wagered and lost, or mechanically drew down his winnings, and curiously enough luck waited on him because of his indifference.

His mind, however, was alarmed by several possibilities. The pedler was unknown to him. His credentials, which might have been stolen, consisted entirely of the ring. He had been instructed to trust implicity the bearer of such a ring; yet there was ever chance to be reckoned with. It might be possible a British spy had learned the secret of the ring.

Then Blidgett entered his thoughts. He feared the man. His imagination was endowing the Ferret with prescience. At times he believed him possessed of the power to read one's mind. There was poor Spanger, whose tavern vaporings had brought him to death. Suicide was the readily accepted verdict, but Halwood was convinced the poor devil was murdered. Blidgett, with his terrible knowledge of practical retribution, would have needed but a moment beneath a handy beam to noose an unsuspecting man and string him up.

Halwood timed his departure to coincide with that of André's, and once they were in the street and alone, he said:

"Some one is working against me. That means against all who would see the triumph of justice. Would you mind telling me the name of your informant, who sent word about this attack?"

"My dear fellow, you know I can not tell you that without violating the confidence of one who trusts me enough to play a perilous rôle. Surely I would not divulge anything having to do with your work."

"I apologize, sir. I must have been in some heat to make such a request."

"No apology is necessary," heartily assured André. "This man will be here tomorrow morning. He has a hiding place between here and White Marsh. I'm free to say that much. He will pass the night there and arrive early."

They parted, and Halwood, in all his finery, hurried to his cheap lodgings and secured a black cloak and his pistols, and then hastened to the stable to be welcomed by a low whinny. Quickly saddling the mare, he rode from town without any hindrance. There was no doubt in his mind as to André's informant. Shatil was the man and he was arriving in Philadelphia in the morning, having a "hiding place halfway". There was but one such that Halwood could think of; the deserted manor house, where he rescued Lydyg from the band of looters and worse. Shatil must be stopped.

The sky was overcast and a chill wind beat in his face, but his blood was hot with excitement. He knew the road well and made post-haste to the manor house, where Cumberly had been murdered. A quarter of a mile from the house he dismounted and led the mare over the rough road. At the entrance of the drive and behind a clump of larch he tied his mount and stole along under the heavy shade trees to the front of the house. Haste was his watchword, and directness was imperative.

He paused at the front door and sounded the knocker once, and as the din echoed through the empty rooms he ran, bowed low, to the rear of the building and gave a shoulder to the cellar door. It opened with a slight protest. Through the inky darkness he advanced with reckless haste, carrying in mind a picture of the way. He came to the stairs and mounted softly, and found himself in the short back hall. His heart raced with excitement, but there was a compensating exultation when he heard a familiar voice exclaim:

"Then what was it? You heard it, Syk?"

"It was the devil!" chattered a second voice.

"I'm a devil," growled the first speaker. "Cap'n Shatil ain't afraid of any man, or devil. Takes fighting guts to drive hogs 'n' cattle into the White Marsh camp. That night we was all clubbed over the head the cap'n quit cold, didn't he? Then I became leader of the band, didn't I? Ain't we done well? American gold for stolen beef. English gold for spying."

"Aye. But what hammered like perdition on that door? Couldn't be the wind."

"Then 'twas old Cumberly's ghost. He's dead. He can pound and rap all night for all I care. Strike a light."

There was a moving about and the sound of some one blowing on the embers of the fireplace in the room adjoining the cook room. There came a faint halo of light through the doorway into the hall. Shatil, who obviously had succeeded to the command of the irregulars, announced—

"Now we'll take a long drink and walk round the house on the outside."

"Not me, Shatil."

"*Cap'n* Shatil, damn you!"

"All right, Cap'n. But I don't budge out of doors."

"Then stay in here with old Cumberly's ghost."

"I can't," groaned the wretch. "Not alone."

Shatil jeered.

"Afraid of dead men, be you? Well, I ain't."

"You liar!" called out Halwood in a deep voice.

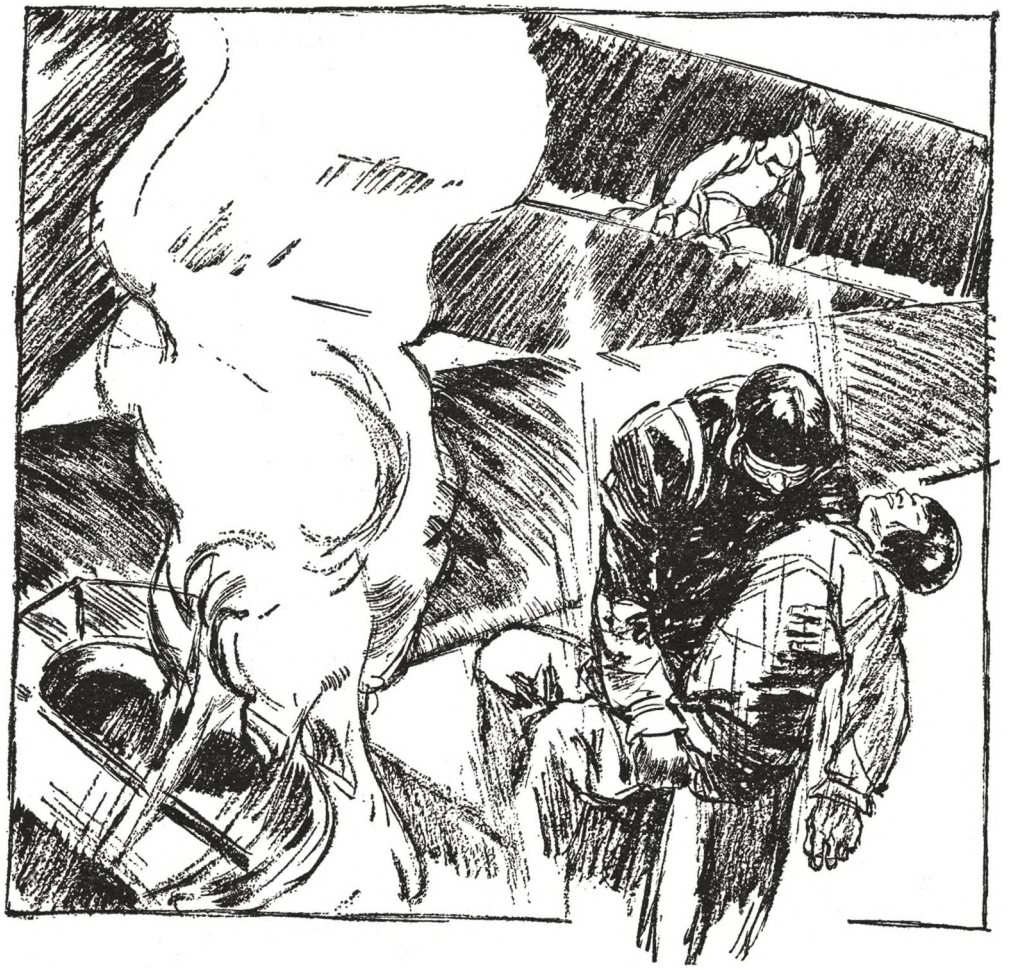
With a yell Shatil leaped through the doorway into the hall, his companion standing on the threshold, the candle held above his head.

"I see you!" yelled Shatil, snatching a long pistol from his belt. "I see you there! A black shape! Man or devil!"

He whipped up the pistol, and two weapons exploded as one. Halwood felt his cloak give a tug and saw Shatil's expression of mild surprise; then beheld him collapsing and pitching forward on his face. With a wild scream Syk came to life, dropped the candle and threw both hands over his head, waiting to be slaughtered.

TO BE CONTINUED

A Story of the Stunt Flyers



SKY DERELICT

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

LOOP MURRY, wild owner of the Loop Murry Flying Circus, and his equally as wild stuntman, Bugs Tedder, were busily engaged with the repacking of a parachute. Up till five o'clock of the day before this particular parachute had belonged to Snag Williams, a boy whose cold carcass had been shipped East only a few hours ago. The parachute had failed to open for Snag. A 'chute that fails to open is very, very bad luck; and that's the kindest thing you can say about such a spread of silk. It was a hideaway shoulder pack. That is, it was one of those tightly folded, small rolls that fit snugly between the shoulders, and hugs the spine. It is so made in order that the movie cameras will not

"get" it. The idea is to make it appear that the stuntman is without a 'chute—and Snag Williams might just as well have been.

But, on the other hand, Snag was the sort of boy who was "always asking for it". He'd make a delayed opening, any time, even in the dark with nobody watching, just to throw a fright into himself. What's more, the gang out at Clover Field—on the western edge of Los Angeles and Hollywood—would tell you that Snag didn't even pull the ring on this last jump. Said last jump had ended in a clump of trees. And the 'chute was half open, sure enough. But, and maybe it's half true, the gang swear that it was the trees that finally tore the silk out of the envelop.

At any rate, Snag Williams, after going West, was on his way East, and Bugs Tedder had a hideaway 'chute. Moreover, Bugs had always wanted just such a piece of equipment. He was all excited over it.

"Tell you what, Loop," Bugs was saying, as they repacked the flimsy yards of fine silk, "this 'chute is going to be the making of one young guy who's trying to get along in this tough old world, eh?"

"Can't prove it by me, guy," Loop said, as his deft mitts folded crease to crease, tissue between, crease to crease, and more tissue. He added, "If it don't make you it will break you. Snag was surer'n hell snagged for a fare-thee-well; and at this time yesterday that same air nut was one pretty good boy. Lightning might not strike more than once in the same place, Bugs, but, if I remember right, that doesn't go for 'chutes. You remember old Charlie Hall, don't you? Well, the 'chute that didn't open for him was the same flower that failed to bloom for Kip Ratte, down at San Diego, and—"

"Aw, hell, Loop," Bugs Tedder objected, "you don't give me any encouragement. What do you want to start dragging that old stuff into view for? We got a swell 'chute, ain't we, eh?"

"Yeah, you have," Loop was forced to agree, for the time being. "But," he attached as a quick rider, "that's another thing. How come you to inherit this 'chute in the first place? You a grave robber, Bugs?"

"Didn't Snag owe me ten bucks?" Bugs defended himself. "You know he did. Didn't you give me the ten that he borrowed while Para-Art was making 'Love's Weak Wings', right here on this field, last October?"

Last October? It was now June of an entirely different year. Loop Murry thought for a long time, and said:

"Yeah, didn't that tight hinge ever come across with that ten? Hell, Bugs, we're fifty-fifty on this 'chute. Joint ownership is what it is. We come rightly by it, I'll tell the world. Lucky for us that Snag—the moocher!—even left his 'chute when he shoved off, deserting a flock of bad bills. And if any bird comes around here trying to put a lien on this 'chute, Bugs—"

"We'll lean on said guy!" Bugs supplied, and meant it.

The repacking job ended. Without a word Loop straightened out the harness and held it extended shoulder high. Bugs Tedder, with a happy smile on his pan, backed into the straps like a contented angel being fitted for the first set of wings. Leg and breast straps were snaffled together, and Bugs bubbled.—

"She sure fits like a glove, eh, Loop?"

"Uh-uh," Loop Murry agreed. "And I always liked the way it fit Snag, too. It's sure one swell, form fitting shroud, Bugs. Trouble is, though, one never knows whether one is wearing a life-preserver or an anchor when one climbs into these straps."

"Aw, hell, Loop," Bugs Tedder wailed, "that's no way to talk."

Bugs strutted back and forth, the length of the hangar, under the fine feel of his new pack. Then, because they had nothing else to do, he turned back to where Loop had stretched out for a nap on the bench and suggested—

"Let's wind up a ship, Loop."

"What for?" the half awake Loop wanted to know. "Eh?"

"Why," Bugs continued, with a lot of hurt in his voice, "don't we want to give this 'chute a tryout? Don't we?"

"What a fine idea!" Loop Murry agreed, and went back closer to sleep.

Just so long as Loop Murry can do the world's sleeping he cares little or nothing at all about who does the world's heavy 'chute jumping. Still and all, Bugs was entitled to a little pleasure.

But at this stage of the game, from the general direction of the only telephone on Clover Field, two hangars north of where Loop and Bugs did their sleeping, a voice was yelling:

"Hey! Is Murry on the field? Loop, telephone. Come a-rompin'!"

Loop opened one eye and asked—"What do you think, Bugs?"

"I think you'd best answer it," the half logical Tedder said.

"But it might be her," Loop reminded his partner, whoever the "her" might be. There were, most of the time, lots of hers.

"And it might be a flying job, too," Bugs reminded Loop.

"Then again," Loop said, "it might be some spiritualist, doing a ghost control for Snag Williams, trying to find out who has this swell pack. That's something to consider, daredevil."

But Loop got off the nice hard bench and went toward where Clover Field's lone telephone was housed. Bugs trailed along to help handle the business at hand—whatever that business might prove to be.

"It's a long distance call, Loop," the one who had first yelled for Loop now told Murry. "From Agua Caliente."

"I'm important," Loop told his informant. "I'm a big busy business man wasting my time here at Clover Field with you small fry. Stand aside, guy, and let me converse with the outside world. And you, Bugs, borrow a pencil and paper. Get set to take notes. Just step out to the highway and see if you can borrow a big black cigar from a passing car. Somehow or other, I feel that the moment is filled with pregnant potency. This, maybe, is the turn of the tide for a couple of stranded air going sailors."

"Better answer that phone," Bugs urged. "Somebody's running into money at the other end of the wire. Don't forget that Agua Caliente is in Mexico and that costs jack."

"What's money to me!" Mr. Loop Murry, owner of that great two-ship Loop Murry Flying Circus, exclaimed. "My big business friends are just lousy with the stuff."

"Lousy," Bugs Tedder emphasized, "is right. Go ahead; just project your personality into that round black thing."

"HELLO—Mr. Murry speaking," Loop told whoever was waiting beyond the telephone. A pause, silence. Loop repeated, "Mr. Murry."

"Mr. Murry!" the new voice from Old Mexico remarked and emphasized. "Come off your high horse, greaseball. Put a foot on the ground, and get your two per cent. intellect working. This is Murillo talking."

"Oh, *bon-us noctus*, Leo," Loop Murry said, in his worst near-Spanish. And that isn't very near even to the worst of Spanish, at that. "Thanks for the early morning call, Leo." The time of day was really eleven A.M., quite early, it is true, for Loop.

"Don't mention it, Mr. Murry," Leo shot back. "But I am a wee bit surprised to find you up and about."

"About what, Leo?"

"About whatever you and that mate of yours, Tedder, might be working up," the voice from down below snapped.

"You'd be more than surprised if you knew," Loop answered.

"That gives me something to worry about," Leo Murillo told Loop. "Leaving me in suspense like this isn't at all fair, Mr. Murry."

"Lay off me, guy," Loop begged. "What's bothering you, Leo? Want some expert advice down there in Agua? Advice or money, name it."

Leo Murillo, directing for the Flit-A-

Bit Film Company, was on location at Agua Caliente, he went on to explain for Loop's benefit.

"Can you and Bugs wind up a ship and hop down here?" he wanted to know. "I need you, Loop, and I need you bad. We're all washed up on this job, all but one flying sequence. We had a ship for the bit but Harry Pool washed the wreck out last thing yesterday, and—"

"Where's Pool now?" Loop thought to ask.

"Back in San Diego in the hospital," Leo said. "He'll be O. K. Flit-A-Bit takes care of its own, you know, Loop."

"And how about the boy working with Pool?" Loop also thought to ask. Loop anticipated Leo's comeback to this.

"Gone," Leo Murillo answered. He added, "It was bad, Loop. Very bad. But how about it? Will you and Bugs be down?"

"Why, sure, I was just coming to that," Loop told Director Murillo. "Want us right away, Leo?"

"As soon as you can make it," Leo urged. "We're waiting for you now. I'm all set to send the other ships into the air."

"How many ships you working?"

"Two others. A camera plane, and a fire ship."

"Are you actually going to burn one?"

"No," Director Murillo went on to explain. "It'll be just a smoke pot fake. A long spin with fake crash."

"Who's flying the smoke ship?" Loop asked.

"Bud King," Leo answered.

"Oh!" Loop said, to Leo. To himself, he added—Well, this is no place to add what Loop added. Enough to add that Bud King, for more than a few good reasons, wasn't in very strong with the stunt bunch on the West Coast. Bud King, some said, was a little bit short on flying guts.

Leo Murillo cut in on Loop's silence with—

"When can I look for you, Loop?"

"Start watching the sky right now," Loop said, "and I'll touch my wheels on Mex soil at Agua Caliente within two hours of this exact minute. Chances are, with any luck, we'll make it in an hour and a half. Till then, Leo, keep a stiff upper lip. Also, among them there Mex mammas, keep your men together. See you later. *Adios, amigo.*"

"What's that?" Leo yelled, all the way from Old Mexico.

"I said *adios, amigo,*" Loop repeated. "*A-dios, a-migo.*"

"What does that mean?" Mexican Leo Murillo demanded.

"Aw," Loop barked, "how would you like—" But the click of a hang-up, down in Old Mexico, showed that Leo Murillo was no longer on the wire. High time, too, that he save a few cents for Flit-A-Bit.

"We cop ourselves a job, Bugs," Loop told his helper.

"Great," Bugs said. "Down in Mex country, eh?"

"Yeah," Loop answered. "And with Bud King flying the important end of the hop, Bugs. How d'you like them berries, brother?"

Then Bugs Tedder said things that can't be printed.

However, with a job in view, Bugs couldn't give much heavy thought to Bud or any other king. He asked—

"Do I get a chance to use the 'chute, Loop?"

"You've got me," Loop answered. "Leo didn't give me the lay, but he wants you along. Let's hope you get a chance to do a jump. Too bad if anything happens to hold up your pleasure. It sure must be tough to be so brave and have no place to peddle your wares."

The male two-thirds of the Loop Murry Flying Circus were busily servicing the best one of Loop's two old wrecks when the fair and third-third, Aerial Blue, arrived on the scene. Aerial Blue was the sweet young thing who caused Bugs Tedder's brave heart to do outside loops, outside spins and offside flips and flops. In other and more Hollywood language, Bugs was *that way* about the gal. And who wouldn't be? Aerial Blue isn't the

usual sort of flying field daffy. Not by a long shot! She's a nice girl, and what's meant here is that she is true blue.

But, sad to say, Aerial is a stunt woman, which means that one swell kid's earthly time is liable to run out without warning. And here's one of the goofiest things in air: Bugs Tedder spends all his spare time trying to show Aerial why she should give up the high art; while, in like manner, Aerial works overtime trying to convert Bugs from the same danger. Half the time—and Loop laughs—the two don't speak. But, to keep an eye on each other, they both carry on and work at the trade. And they turn out some great aerial stunt stuff. Loop Murry, in the long run, is the winner. After all, Loop is the top man in the Loop Murry Flying Circus. Of course, and this is tough on Loop, these family brawls sometimes cut in on the day's work.

WHEN Aerial Blue came on the field this time it was after a period of several days during which she and Bugs had been on the very best terms. Yes, sir, they had been friends for days. Not a single rift within the lute; no cross-purposes in all that time. Loop Murry couldn't quite understand the layout; so he had been knocking wood.

"What," Aerial Blue asked, "are you boys doing?"

"Getting set," Loop answered, "to hop down across the Mex Border. It's a hurry-up job for Leo Murillo, Aerial."

"Not Caliente, Loop?" Aerial cried. "Oh, say that it is!"

"Right the first guess," Loop told her. "The Promised Land."

"Can I come along, Loop?" the girl wanted to know; and there isn't a girl in Southern California who has any idea of heaven that is above a trip to Agua Caliente.

Tell you what: They've been known to leave home for that trip. They'll even pack up and leave in the middle of a free meal—and that's an exceptional thing for a hungry Southern California girl. Needless to say, Aerial was radiant. Already, even without an answer, she could see herself eating one of those very swell *patio* meals, to dreamy Spanish music, at the Casino. Then there's horse racing and dog racing and what dost thou wish in the line of entertainment. There's everything to make woman happy and man poor.

Bugs, still invested in that swell hide-away pack which he had continued to wear, came up from where he had been working, head down, in the front cockpit, and said— "Ah, there, kid, what you doing out here so early?"

"Getting ready to fly south with you two," Aerial answered.

"No such luck," Bugs told her. "This is business, Aerial, and you'll have to stay home with your knitting this time. I'll be back tonight."

"Your getting back," Aerial Blue snapped, "doesn't bother me at all. Loop said that I could ride along, and so I will!"

"Loop said no such a da—Loop said no such a thing," Bugs contradicted, which was not only very impolite but also quite crazy. But, to make things worse, Bugs Tedder dictated, "You can't go!"

"Holy smokes!" Loop Murry said to himself. "Here I was all set for a quick getaway with a job and some sure jack in view. Oh, damn the fair maidens! Hey, Bugs, you pipe down! Aerial rides along. There's plenty of room, so where's your kick?"

Bugs worked now in moody silence. Not even the thought of that swell 'chute pack buoyed his sinking spirit. Aerial Blue ducked into the hangar, where was her personal clothes locker, and presently she appeared in the habitual white of the woman stunt flyer. White riding breeches and all. Bugs, the thin skinned young sap, should have taken one look and thanked the good Lord for what he had sent to Clover Field and aviation in general. But Bugs was too sore. Still and all, when Bugs Tedder was too sore for anything else, he was very good at whatever flying business

was on hand. So, deep down in his business heart, Loop Murry sawed wood. This wasn't so bad, if it didn't get a whole lot worse. Let 'em scrap was Loop's motto—where other people were concerned. And how these two could scrap when in trim!

Loop climbed into the front pit, gave the motor a short warming run, decided that it was O. K, and Bugs pulled the blocks. Then, like perfect strangers, the latter and his girl friend swung aboard the rear pit. For two to ride in that back seat it was necessary for one to ride on the knees of the other. And if you can picture any guy carrying Aerial Blue in such a position, and still remain sore, then your wild skill at picturing the impossible surpasses anything yet shown in Hollywood.

An hour and forty minutes after quitting Clover Field Loop rolled his wheels to a stop on Agua Caliente's new airdrome. And when Leo Murillo and his gang said hello to Aerial and Bugs nobody would even guess that anything had been wrong less than two hours before. No use talking, that air cure is sure a cure for lots of things besides deafness. In Bugs' case it seemed to work wonders for outright, downright dumbness. Ho-ho—the hard guy was soft! And he was still wearing the pet pack. And he was glad to be alive. Ah—romance!

"What's that you've got on your back, Bugs?" Leo Murillo asked. "Is it a hide-away pack? Sure 'nuff. Great. Just the thing I've been praying for. And all the time I was afraid that you and Loop would show up here with your usual equipment—lots of crust, a rope ladder and two dirty shirts . . . How're y'cutting them, Loop?"

"Great, Leo," Loop said loudly. "How about me inviting this fine gang over for a round of drinks? How are you fixed for jack, Leo?"

"Big hearted Loop Murry!" Leo cheered. "Keep away from those Jesse James joints till we get this job of air work washed up. Daylight is almost on the point of sliding out, and we'll have to step on it. Taxi up to that service block, Loop, and take on your gas and oil. I'll frame the picture for you while the boys are pumping. This isn't going to take long. She isn't much of a job. Fact is, you're stealing the two hundred bucks that Flit-A-Bit will dole out for the work."

"Two hundred and fifty," Loop corrected, dickered and bargained.

"How come?" Director Murillo demanded. "Where do you get the two hundred and fifty dollar thing, Loop?"

"Three of us on the job," Loop reminded him. "Didn't you tell me to have Aerial along? Eh, how about it?"

Director Murillo, with the well known Mexican disregard for real money, remembered that he was spending Flit-A-Bit's jack. So, with that great big Mexican heart on the job, Leo said:

"That's right, Loop. Y'see, I forgot. And ladies must live, else they can't be ladies. Right?"

"Correct, Leo," Loop agreed, being big hearted too.

"Done. Two hundred and fifty dollars and expenses. We're staying over tonight and putting on a farewell party. The outfit has chartered everything south of the Border, Loop. Looks like a big night tonight."

WHILE the servicing gang was putting gas and oil to Loop's ship, Leo Murillo went into a huddle with his air service. There were, besides the three new arrivals, Bud King and his helper, No-Luck Ware, a boy who had worked himself into more flying jams than any three stuntmen on the Coast. Even on this occasion, upon meeting, Bugs Tedder had greeted No-Luck Ware with:

"Hell, guy, when I heard the word King, I should have guessed that you'd be close at hand too. Talk about trouble never coming single, you glooms travel in mobs."

"How do you get that way, Bugs?" No-Luck wanted to know. "Did y'hear about the break I got yesterday? I was booked to work with Harry Pool. There was one race over at the track that I had

my two bucks on, so I stayed to see that the nag did the right thing by me. Well, I was late and Murillo wouldn't hold up the picture for me, so this San Diego mac took my place with Pool. What a break, what a break!"

And besides King and No-Luck there was Silk Shane. Silk was handling the cabin job camera plane. Silk used to be darned good in the air, but, of late, he's been piloting these safe cabin jobs.

Ganging them closely into a flying huddle, Leo Murillo framed his picture and laid out the work ahead.

"For the benefit of the new arrivals," Leo began, "I'll say that we're doing a Border busting smuggling story. The action we're after in this last piece of flying is this and thus: King, flying double for the U. S. Secret Service man, is bringing his prisoner back across the Border, via air. The bold bad prisoner—poorly tied in the rear pit—wiggles out of his ropes. Then, being an ex-pilot, the prisoner takes a fire extinguisher, bops King on the head and begins to handle the plane from the rear pit. But King, slumping in his seat, falls forward on the joy stick. The ship goes into a dive, then a spin. It's running with full motor. A hellish vibration is set up—we'll show this later in some studio shots—and the gas lead is broken. The gas floods back over the hot motor and the burning ship spins into the ground. A studio fake, later.

"Now, the story can't kill the Secret Service pilot. So—and we'll work this out later in the studio, too—King revives just in time to go overside and use his parachute. The prisoner, having no parachute, goes down with the ship. And that's as it should be, all you good citizens will agree.

"Here's where Bugs and his new hideaway 'chute comes in. Of course, King isn't going to leave his ship and jump. And Ware, here, will be too busy with his smoke pots—and also too busy holding on to King's spinning ship—to make a jump. But Loop, flying in behind the smoke screen that King's burning spin sends out, will get in line to drop Bugs overside and through that smoke into focus . . . Try to keep your ship out of the cameras, Loop. Now let's decide on elevations. Best that we get as high as possible. The sun's losing out down low, and I want to get these shots sharp. Silk, how about eight thousand feet for the camera ship—can you make it quick and without trouble?"

"Easy for me," Silk agreed, "but these camera crankers are going to find their teeth chattering like castanets, Leo."

"And about your crate, Bud," Leo said to King. "Can you get two thousand higher than eight?"

"I can," Bud King stated, "but that's lots of ceiling, Leo."

"Now, Loop, how good is this wreck of yours—can you get up there with King?" Leo wanted to know.

"Leo," Loop Murry told the director, and the rest of the world, "I'll top King any place, and at anything, any time."

"How t'hell do you mean that, Murry?" Bud King barked.

"You heard me, guy!" Loop barked back; and Leo Murillo, not caring to have open warfare on the job, said:

"Pipe down, warriors! This is my parade, not your private brawl. Save it till this piece of work is off our hands. Remember we're partying tonight, and what a swell time to renew old hostilities."

Loop and Bud King each said a few more things, then simmered.

"So, Loop," Leo continued, "you'll be up there topping Bud, and—"

"Topping me be damned!" Bud King, forgetting, started to argue, just as though that hadn't been settled. "Murry can't—"

"And," Leo Murillo carried on, "after Bud, with the smoke pots pouring out the black stuff, has done about a thousand feet of his spin—which should bring him into good distance for the cameras—you'll dive in and give Bugs a chance to fall through the smudge, and into the cameras. Get it? Everything clear all round, what?"

"It couldn't be clearer," Loop Murry approved, speaking for the gang, "if I'd

have explained the thing myself, Leo. You're jake."

All the others agreed. Then, with the whole mob listening, No-Luck Ware turned to Bugs Tedder, began to examine the swell pack, and asked—

"Where've I seen that hideaway before, Bugs?"

Bugs began to get red behind the ears, and grow touchy.

"What's it to you, Ware?" he snarled. "Pipe down."

"Yep," No-Luck decided, "I thought I knew that outfit. Those patched shoulder straps—Snag's, eh? For the love o' Mike, Bugs, don't use that jinx outfit. Y'can't beat it, guy. It's haywire."

"S-a-y, Ware," Bugs drawled, still somewhat red behind the ears. "I'm all of twenty-one, and this is my own funeral, see?"

"Your own funeral is right!" No-Luck crescendoed. "Know where Snag got this 'chute, Bugs? I'll tell you—it's the same umbrella that dropped Jinx Jarvis at Fresno. And Jinx bought the thing from Hap Hall's widow for fifty bucks. The damned canopy and Hap came down through close to fourteen thousand feet of space back in St. Paul two years ago. Listen to me, Bugs, you can't hope to—"

"Come on, Loop," Bugs urged, "let's get started. This damned gloom'll get me mad in a minute."

"But say, Bugs," Leo Murillo advised, "maybe you'd best make a change. Here, how about borrowing Bud's parachute?"

But King was standing there with his seat pack strapped on. Bud said:

"Nothing doing, Leo. Nobody borrows my old white ally."

"Why not?" Loop put in. "You've only got one 'chute with you, King. No-Luck hasn't any, so how the hell can you wear one?"

"How t'hell can I wear one?" Bud King repeated. "And why not?"

"Well, I'll be damned!" Loop Murry growled. And old Silk Shane said that he'd be damned too.

"D'y'mean to say, King," Silk added, "that you'd wear a 'chute when your back seat boy is naked? Do we get you right?"

What had been a free-and-easy gathering of airmen and movie followers now had grown tense. But, to avoid a tie-up at this time, Leo Murillo bridged the gap with:

"It's up to Bugs, after all. Guess he knows enough about his equipment to know what he wants to wear. If he says the hideaway pack is jake, jake she is."

IT'S a wonder that either Loop Murry or Silk Shane didn't take Bud King apart, right then and there. Of all the lowdown stunts that selfish man might become guilty, none could possibly be as low as this thing that King was perpetuating now—this thing of a pilot wearing a parachute while his passenger had no such piece of safety equipment. To the lasting glory of aviation let it be here recorded that such a default is seldom, almost never, witnessed in the calling. The idea of an airman thinking of such a thing, to say nothing of parading the action! The business certainly spoiled the beautiful Mexican day for all hands present. Still and all, Bud King stuck to his point tenaciously. Well, perhaps that valuable life of his was worth more than honor. Who knows? And, for that matter, who cared?

"Will there be room for me, Loop?" Aerial asked, as the three hurried toward their waiting craft. "I'd like to see the work close up, if I won't be in the way."

"Now, Aerial," Bugs Tedder started to argue, "don't you—"

"Let's not have that song and dance again," Loop snapped. "Save that line of patter till you two get married. Hop in, Aerial. You're good luck. Wind this motor up for me, Bugs, and let's get going . . . Switch off—on! . . . Yank those blocks and get aboard."

No-Luck Ware was climbing aboard Bud King's ship, about a hundred feet to the south, at the same time Bugs boarded Loop's. Both ships taxied downfield together and, swinging around to come up into the wind, Loop Murry forced Bud over into the high weeds. Loop, noticing

that King gave way so easy, turned around to shout at Bugs and say all that could be said with Aerial along. They both laughed. Aerial too, and all hands felt better. Into the light west wind, now, Loop eased power to his craft; and after a short run, a few bounces on the new but rough field, they were on the wing. Taking their dust, but shagging right along, Bud King followed. A few minutes later, with three cameras set up at the left side windows of the cabin ship, Silk Shane and Leo Murillo took the air on a conservative getaway. All three planes, weaving back and forth above Agua Caliente, went out to win altitude. And at the end of fifteen or twenty minutes those buzzing birds, glittering in the lowering sun, were pretty high.

The watching group on the ground was quite a gathering. The troupe that Leo had along—actors, extras and mechanics —was no small mob in itself. Then, in that this was during the racing season, there was a goodly clustering of tourists. People who had crossed the Border to see horses run, also to get their whistles wet. And it would take a whole lot of discussion, and no little argument, to decide which is the greater urge—the desire for racing or staggering.

At any rate, she was one gala event. There's no fun making movies unless you have a good size audience. And here was a festive grandstand—people out to see, to see what was to be seen—and they were sure ripe for adventure and thrill. Well, these good Border busters could not guess what was in store for them. And, chances are, when things began to happen, they really thought that it was all in the story. But Leo Murillo, and his flying unit, knew different. They also knew a few tight minutes—minutes during which men came to par.

At eight thousand feet altitude Bud King had ended his climb. His ship was loafing back and forth, circling in wide turns, awaiting the arrival of the camera plane. Eight thousand is no small bit of sky—it's a long way down from eight thousand, too.

But Loop Murry, even with his load of three, had topped Bud's ceiling by fully a thousand feet before he stopped to load and loop a few. Also, with his motor sending a hellish howl to earth, Loop undertook to show the hundreds of watchers a few fast rolls. Leave it to Murry! Altitude and a ship meant only one thing to him—a chance to stunt. And when it comes to kicking a plane around, you'll find none better than Loop. Some minutes later, when Silk and his heavy party arrived in the neighborhood of seven thousand feet, Loop was just throwing a scare into Bud King by coming down directly at him in a tight, fast power spin. And Bud King, never one to trust Loop, was sure hauling himself away from there.

When Loop pulled his ship out of that spin he did so in such a way as to zoom up and over King's craft with only a very few yards to spare. Leo Murillo and the camera party, as much as they liked Loop, later said that this bit of business was pretty rough. But, in view of what happened later, nothing was ever said to Loop in an official report. Oh, well, Loop Murry isn't the sort that anybody—even traffic cops—puts on the carpet for an official panning.

At the top of that zoom Loop continued his climb and regained altitude till his ship again topped Bud King by all of a thousand feet. There, *veraging* steeply, and cutting "eights", he waited and watched the action directly below. Bugs and Aerial hung from the rear pit and gave their attention—some of it, at least —to that action, too.

But King and the camera ship were now cruising side by side.

In Bud's rear pit, doing his stuff now for the three busy cameras that were working from the side windows of Silk's craft, No-Luck Ware was doubling for the actor who, in the story, was the ex-pilot prisoner being brought back via air. Bud King, of course, was the Secret Service man, on duty bent and giving little attention to the man who was supposedly tied up, and tied to stay.

Several times, to make sure that the cameras would get a few good shots of the action, No-Luck and Bud flew and reflew that bit of business. And from the ground, to those many open mouthed watchers, it looked like just so much waste motion. Blah, or worse. But that is part of picture making. Take, take and retake. It all takes time, but it must be done. Leo Murillo will spend hours trying to get something that can be shown on a screen within a minute or so.

After enough of that monotony, Leo flagged Bud to get set for the big fire-spin scene. Then, hanging from a control bay window, Leo looked high overhead and gave Loop Murry the office, too. Loop waved back. Then he came out of his tight *verage* and swung his ship through the sky in a wider, more watchful circle. Bugs reluctantly relinquished the pleasant job of holding Aerial, and came to a stand in the pit. Aerial, collecting a goodby kiss from the brave owner of a questionable pack 'chute, took the seat that Bugs had just quit. And Loop was losing a little altitude now, kind of working down toward the elevation where, before long, Bugs must step off and out. She's a big, brave business, brothers—this thing of stepping out and off.

They could see No-Luck working deep in his cockpit. He was igniting some very crude smoke pots. These pots were nothing more than some old highway cannon balls that King had secured from a construction company that he found putting in a new stretch of roadway near Agua Caliente. These smudges burned crude oil. An ordinary rag wick was used, and most of the oil seemed to be on the outside of the pot.

TO MAKE sure that the cloud of smoke would be dense enough to blacken the spinning ship's falling wake, Bud King had provided at least half a dozen of these smoky burners. Two or three of the wicks took fire with little or no trouble; and Loop, Bugs and Aerial looked down and saw No-Luck place these smudging burners back in the perforated zinc box which Bud had taken care to provide. You'd think that No-Luck Ware was handling rattlesnakes, too, to see the way he stowed those fire pots away.

Back and forth, while this was going on, Bud and the camera ship cruised. The eyes of the open mouthed world still stared skyward. And the three high flyers from Clover Field gazed on from their greater altitude.

No-Luck lighted his forth wick, after a little trouble with the gummed-up fibers. Then, as he sat there lighting a fifth, with the sixth between his knees—and the boy was pretty busy—the two cruising ships reached a point, quite a way south of Agua Caliente, and Silk Shane decided that it was about time to do a turnabout.

Silk rocked his ship. Bud King didn't seem to get the motion. Loop saw Silk rock again, and point. Still Bud King failed to catch the old familiar signal for a turn. Loop looked back at Bugs and Aerial. His mouth framed certain snappy words that should not have been framed with a girl along. But things like this—a pilot off guard—always got to Loop. By gravy, a movie flying guy has to be on the job!

Three times Silk had tried to tip off Bud; and Leo Murillo was standing at Silk's side waving his fool head off, too.

"Go in close, Silk," Leo ordered, "and zoom past Bud. Wake him up. Good Lord, we'll be in Mexico City before he comes to!"

Silk Shane slapped full gun to his cruising motor. Then he dropped the ship's nose, just a bit, gathered speed, and shot up and past Bud King's boat.

We'll be kind and say that Bud King was off guard. That being the case, he could not be blamed, entirely, for what followed. Still and all, a pilot should be able to judge the aerial doings going on around him better than did Bud King on this occasion. Bud caught a fleeting glimpse of that other ship fairly close to his right side. So seeing, Bud King stepped hard on his left rudder and threw his stick hard over to the same side. His

left hand, at the same moment, opened the craft's throttle wide. And, quicker than you could say a Greek name, that plane was flat on its back in a wingover turn. Bud had sure kicked the job out of danger. He had saved Bud's fine neck.

But at the exact second that Silk shot past, No-Luck Ware was placing that fifth burning pot into captivity. The cover of the zinc box was open, and the sixth smudge was still clasped tightly between his knees. In other and fewer words, No-Luck had both hands and legs pretty well occupied. He was in no position to appreciate an upside-down flight. And the smoke, by then, was plenty heavy, also.

Loop and Aerial and Bugs Tedder saw what happened then, and it was eye-filling, heartstopping and quite sickening.

Before the turnover took No-Luck out of view, just in that flash of time, No-Luck reached for a handhold, for he was not even wearing his safety belt. And as No-Luck reached, to prevent himself from falling clear of the pit, those flaming smoke pots rolled out of the box. But, worst of all, one must have had a loose wick—a wick that was easily knocked out of the pot's short neck—for the flaming oil filled that rear pit. Then, oozing out of his turn, Bud King redressed his flight and brought the ship up and back in a zoom. By this time No-Luck wasn't trying to hang on to any ship—he was fighting fire. And that rear end was burning from cockpit to rudder post. This was just a large slice of hell—hell on wings, if ever there was such!

This ship of Bud King's was one of those rebuilt-and-oft-rebuilt jobs that have always been a curse in air. Having been rebuilt and rebuilt, more times than a few, its wood veneer fuselage was of several thicknesses. All that patched and repatched wood veneer was badly oil soaked—and gasoline soaked, too. It was a prepared torch just asking to be touched off, lighted up. And now that thing had happened.

No-Luck Ware was fighting. With bare mitts, he was stripping that rotten, blazing three-ply veneer from the inside sheathing of his pit. Overside, like a mad man, he was tossing those flaming bits. And—Loop, Bugs and Aerial are here to tell—there was never a second of quit, or a flash of yellow, in No-Luck's actions. A fire fighting job had been shoved into the boy's lap, and he was handling the red detail like a man. Too bad—yes, too darn bad—that No-Luck was so much alone. You'll see . . .

Bud King had taken one quick look rearward. The three high watchers saw Bud brush his goggles from his face as though he figured that the lenses had become clouded with something beyond his feeble understanding. Then Bud did what is supposed to be the panacea for all visits in red—he shoved the stick ahead and put that old ship of his into an almost straight dive. That quick dive came darned near to putting poor No-Luck out of business for keeps. It caught him off guard again—half threw him to the floor, and backward; back on to the burning cushions of the pit, and face down. For awhile, hidden under flames and smoke, the out-of-luck No-Luck was taken from the view of those in the ship above. He fought to his feet, burned, half blind.

Loop was diving with Bud King. Silk Shane was alongside, too.

At five thousand feet, or thereabouts, King pulled out of his dive. He had only helped the flames. Still, his tail service was damaged but little. He still had control on elevators and rudder. In other words, Bud King was still captain of his craft.

But five thousand feet! It's a long way down from five thousand. And when this falling torch had finished the five thousand fall—well, there'd be no control on any surface. There'd be no such thing as a surface left. No question about this; and Bud King knew it.

All watchers, in both ships, saw Bud take one quick glance back—when he'd pulled out of that dive—then a second look down. How far that good old earth must have seemed to poor King! How far? Miles and miles. The distance between life and eternity—whatever that

really is. At any rate, only the bravest of the brave could have taken that view and still retained their sane balance. But—and you know it—the game is full of such men. King, however, wasn't built that way. Too bad for King—and tough, very tough, on No-Luck Ware.

Yes, Bud King had taken another look at the flames that would not be dived into extinction; also that other peek at a world that wasn't going to come up soon enough; then Bud made his big decision.

BUD KING throttled his motor lower. Then Bud eased that ship over into a right bank. Now, with the ship riding that way, Bud came out of his safety belt. Next, nicely timed and with no lost motion, Bud put a foot on the high left gunwale of his cockpit and went into space headfirst. He cleared the ship's passing tail in fine style. In fact, Bud King took a long fall, very long—all of five hundred feet—before he pulled the ring. His 'chute made a quick opening then—and Bud King had saved that valuable neck of his. But Bud King had lost everything else.

No-Luck Ware was now captain and crew of that sky derelict. Poor, half blind, badly burned No-Luck, as has been pointed out, had no parachute. But No-Luck, the hard hit roustabout of air, had the first and only requisite of wings: He was over-stocked with fight. And that fighting stuff, even though it must have been sapped to the limit, never deserted Ware for a single second. The kid wasn't a pilot. That is, he wasn't a certified, accredited pilot—like Bud King, for example. Of course, as is the case with so many hangers-on at the hangars, he knew something of the handling end. Maybe, all in all, he had held a stick for an hour or so. That's not enough for anything like the job that desperation forced him into now. The fire ship had no controls in No-Luck's rear cockpit. And to go over the top, and dive ahead to the seat deserted by King, was no small job for a man in the full possession of bodily control. But for a boy, half dead on his feet, the stunt was—

Before either of the watching ships had had time to do any grieving, or thinking, No-Luck had gone from one pit to the other. It was bound to be a labor lost, though. The red stuff was eating its way through the center section of the upper wing—which put No-Luck right back in the fire again. Also, and this was the thing that hurt, fire was waving from the elevators and rudder. Another minute or so now and No-Luck's unskilled hands and feet on the controls would be of no earthly —or airy—use. As soon as those tail surfaces—especially the stabilizer—should lose their supporting power, it would mean a quick spin and the end. What an end after such a try!

But Leo Murillo, Silk Shane and the cameramen told the rest of the story. They still tell how they were sitting there, bug eyed, with that tightness under the ears, with that lost-and-sunk feeling that is born of utter despair. Then this camera ship crew saw something through and beyond the smoke and flame of that lost ship that was hesitating at the brink of its last, long dive. They saw Loop Murry flying his right wings up through the red stuff and shoving what was on that right wing's tip squarely into the cockpit where No-Luck half stood, half swooned. The thing on the wing's tip was Bugs Tedder. And on the other lower wing's end—out on the left panel—was Aerial Blue. These two were never slow when an emergency demanded quick action. On this occasion, as Loop Murry will tell you, the rear seat pair were out of that cockpit and going forward over his shoulders before he, the quick thinking Loop, had time even to make a guess. Added to this Silk Shane, Leo Murillo and the rest of the camera plane's group will swear that there was no word or sign passed between any of the fast acting three. There was teamwork for you! They were all air size—big in the biggest way.

So Bugs was on the tip of that right wing. And Loop Murry, with no thought for self or his plane, was pushing that

right lower wing tip right up along the burning fuselage of the fire ship. When we say "right up along the burning fuselage" we mean that, nothing less. Nothing less would do. This job had seconds allotted for its wild completion; and if those seconds found anybody lacking—well, No-Luck Ware was a dead man.

Bugs and that wing tip grated and crashed, humped and bumped, with the tossing of that ship. No-Luck Ware, seeing what was coming, made his last big try. He took everything he had of remaining conscious control and reached back toward Bugs for a pick-off. But there wasn't much coordination left in No-Luck. He didn't even shove his arms in the right direction. Bugs was at the ship's left side, while No-Luck's wild reach seemed more to the right, and rear. Loop Murry, with full gun on his ship, pushed that right wing in harder. For a snatch of time, then, those two ships flew interlocked. Bugs stepped over. For another brief snatch of the same fleeting thing called Time, Bugs Tedder stood on what was left of the fire ship's turtleback, above and between the two cockpits, and reached down for No-Luck.

He had Ware in his arms now. He gave Loop Murry one last glance, and a nod, and Loop dropped his left wing, with Aerial still hanging on, and fell away from the doomed plane.

THERE was a skyful of action for a minute, during that minute when Bugs stepped off and over, and when Loop Murry fell away. The men in the camera ship will tell you that it was too crowding for them to get it all. This action was three-way stuff. Bugs had his hands full; those hands and arms were filled with the dead weight of the nearly limp No-Luck. Loop Murry had his hands full; these hands were overfilled with more than one drawback: His right wings, especially the overhang of the upper panel, were badly shattered—even burning a bit; and Aerial Blue, fighting her way in on the left lower, was an added off-center load that Loop was finding hard to carry. What with the lift of those right wings already so much impaired, Loop's was a tough spot, and don't you think that it wasn't. But he quickly leveled off, out of that fall-away, and at the same time retained a good fast glide. The girl came in. She crossed over the fuselage, between the center section struts, and made her dangerous journey out on the right lower—and this without a word or nod from Loop. Great airgirl, that Aerial Blue.

Then, at about that exact second when Loop regained full control, he took a look behind and saw Bugs, and his bundle, fall for a long drop. Loop went into a harder dive. He half turned, almost did a wing-over, to get a better line on the falling Bugs. Loop got the big idea: Bugs, always the showman, was taking a long fall —even with the weight of No-Luck—just to get way down there so's he'd, perhaps, throw a scare into Bud King. King's 'chute could be seen, still floating directly under the fall of Bugs and Ware. King was swinging, working his shroud lines, and watching what must have looked like possible death coming right at him. But poor King didn't know the half of it; for Leo Murillo and Silk Shane might tell you that they cut in on Loop Murry just as that guy went hog wild and decided to chop Bud King off his life preserver.

Silk Shane must have anticipated this—no doubt he had the same idea at the same time. But, being a bit older, and having too many witnesses, Silk Shane denied himself any such pleasure. On the other hand, with Leo Murillo yelling: "Head Loop off, Silk! He's going to get that yellow King!" Silk had to head Loop Murry off.

No two ways about it, Silk Shane saved Bud King's no-good life. And, so doing, Silk Shane put everything on the ball and almost washed out the two ships—and their crews—in that try. Man, what a price that King guy almost cost! What price King, you'd ask, and him not worth the sweat off Loop's or Silk's brow!

However, Silk shoved that cabin job of

his down through a hard dive. Then, abreast of Loop, Silk began to ease over, and because Aerial was on the wing nearest Silk's ship, Loop gave way. And, knowing Loop, Silk and Leo knew that this was the only reason that the wild bird did give ground. The two ships, still crowding each other, went far downwind—turned into that wind, and set down.

To the east of Agua Caliente, way out in the rough country, two parachutes passed from sight very close together. Even with his arms full of No-Luck, Bugs Tedder had managed to "fly" his 'chute right along with Bud King's.

Five minutes or so after the two 'chutes passed from view, automobile parties located the three caterpillars. No-Luck Ware was sitting there in the drywash of a Mex river bed. He was just sitting, a sad looking sight. Badly burned, hardly alive, but still in control of his senses.

Bud King, he who had saved his own valuable neck, looked almost as hard as poor No-Luck. For a fact, Bud looked like a man who had run afoul a gang of wildcats in a narrow pass—and failed to pass.

Bugs Tedder, somewhat tired looking, seemed very well satisfied—as though he had perhaps done a good job; and we don't mean his good job of 'chute jumping, either.

They brought Bugs Tedder and No-Luck back to Agua Caliente in one car. Wisely, perhaps to prevent another ambush of wildcats, they took care that Bud King rode into Agua in a second auto.

When No-Luck reached the flying field once more, and was lifted out of that car, Silk Shane's cabin job was all set to hop over the Line for San Diego and the hospital. The cameramen and several other movie mechanics were all but sitting on Loop Murry, so anxious was the wild one to polish off a job that Bugs Tedder had already done quite completely. Loop, you'll agree, had a case. Nobody could blame him for wanting to start something. However, open murder is very—oh, very, very—unpopular when pulled at a gay resort.

When No-Luck Ware had been placed aboard and the ship was all set to take off for the city, Leo Murillo suggested that Bud King ride along. Not only did he suggest, but he insisted.

"I'll send your check to you, King," the director promised. "And I'll be damned glad if you'll send me an address that will call for several dollars' worth of postage stamps . . . All set, Silk—take it away! Best of luck, Ware. And you, King—" But the director's last remarks were smothered in the roar of the ship's motor.

Right now, were you to comb aviation from pole to pole, and back again, east and west, you wouldn't find a bird called Bud King anywhere in the game. She's a broad minded game, too, but there are a few mistakes that can't be made more than once.

ALLIES *by* L. PATRICK GREENE

When the World War came to Africa

JOHN CURTIS cursed the blazing glare of the African sun; he cursed the desert and the fine, needle sharp sand which sifted through the holes in his *veld schoen*. He cursed the war; he cursed himself . . .

But, because speech was an effort—his lips were cracked and bleeding; his tongue was swollen and his body so parched that he could create no saliva to oil the mechanism of his throat—his speeches were silent.

Curtis' feet were bleeding, torn by the glassy lava rocks which had sliced through the soles of his shoes. His khaki shorts were tattered. His gray shirt was black with sweat—yet he could no longer sweat. Days of scorching heat had sapped all moisture from him. Tufts of black hair protruded through holes in his battered helmet. In his right hand he carried a rifle. Around his waist was an empty cartridge belt to which was

tied a smoke blackened billy-can.

The sand was a drab brown. The black rocks which belted it seemed to have absorbed the heat of countless centuries and the heat waves which rose from them produced a strange, grotesque illusion, that seemed to melt, merge and flow over the desert like some monster of prehistoric days. The stunted thorn trees, which here and there broke the monotonous contour of the desert, looked like thirsty skeletons stretching out their arms in supplication for the rain which was forever denied them. Overhead hovered black dots—like spots of astigmatism against the blue cloth of the sky.

Only yesterday, it seemed—a few brief months before, in fact—the whole of South Africa had been his playground: from the Cape to Broken Hill; from Walfisch Bay to Mozambique. And all men had been his friends—white men and black. Race hatreds had not existed then. Language had been the only barrier, and that is a barrier easily scaled by men who desire to know each other. Curtis had claimed his friends among all the white races which had taken upon themselves the task of civilizing black Africa. But war had destroyed all that good comradeship; it had created barriers which only death could surmount. Whereas Curtis had been able to wander wherever his fancy dictated, now his movements were circumscribed. Death rewarded aimless wandering now. He cursed the war again.

He halted and took note of his bearings. As he did so, the black spots which soared so high above the desert dropped to lower levels with the speed of falling thunderbolts. Curtis shook his fist at them. He had a contempt, tinged slightly with an unreasoning fear, of vultures. Then for a moment his eyes focused on a rock crowned rise of land directly ahead of him.

"I'll be there by sundown, easy," he told himself.

He trekked on at a faster gait, breaking into a jog trot which set the billy-can banging against his hip.

But after a little while he resumed his former slouching walk.

Left—right . . .

"Damn me for a fool!" he cursed.

The love of adventure had been bred into the blood of Curtis. His forebears had both possessed it. It had led them to the American West in those early days when the peril of Indians and evil white men was always present. It had brought Curtis to South Africa—more years ago than he cared to remember—when he was still in his teens. And Africa had captured him, as she captures so many men. He boasted that he had adopted Africa. Actually, Africa had adopted him.

He had been in British territory at the time hostilities commenced, a guest at a military outpost. He had enlisted, hoping it would be the biggest adventure of all. And when his English hosts had sighed for accurate information regarding the distribution of the enemy forces, it had seemed natural for Curtis to volunteer to get it. He got it, and was rewarded with a commission in his Majesty's intelligence department, attached to the forces operating in East Africa against the clever and gallant Von Letlow.

That first lone scouting expedition was the beginning of many, made necessary by the clever stratagems of the German commander, who, greatly outnumbered, nevertheless kept up a war of aggression. Again and again he slipped out of the traps set for him. Again and again, after a series of record breaking forced marches, he led his men in raids on British territory. He was the ghost of the East African campaign. But even he, master of guerrilla warfare though he was proving himself, had to have a base somewhere. Once that was located . . .

And to Curtis was given the task of locating it. That he had succeeded, searching in a district swarming with natives hostile to him, was splendid proof of his courage and scoutcraft.

But not until he had given the British commander the information that was stored away in his brain would he permit

himself the luxury of exultation. There was yet another day's trek over this barren tract; and even after that, during the short trek which would then be before him—before he reached the appointed rendezvous—there was always the danger that he might run into a German raiding party.

HE LOOKED up again. The rock crowned rise which marked the end of his day's trek was very near. Three hundred yards at most. And on the other side of the rise, down in a hollow, there were deep wells dug by Africa's black children. His impulse was to run and shout and leap; but his better judgment—the judgment of a veld wise man, a hunter—kept him to his sober pace. He had known too many cases of men failing within reach of their goal.

With startling suddenness the sun dropped below the horizon. In the east a streak of black appeared which widened steadily—a black curtain which would soon be drawn up over the whole sky and bring night with the suddenness which is Africa.

A lifting breeze fluttered the rags of the man's clothing. It was charged with the heat of the desert over which it had passed. It seared Curtis' lungs, making him gasp for breath. He staggered. Then, pulling himself together, shoulders squared, head erect, he went forward, singing hoarsely. He felt that he needed the sound of his voice and the rhythm of the song to keep him on his feet.

From somewhere out of the immensity of silence a sharp report sounded.

Curtis stopped abruptly. He looked around him, a wondering expression on his face. The thing had been so unexpected that his senses were unprepared. Seeing nothing, hearing nothing, he went forward again, ready to believe that his nerves had betrayed him.

That rock crowned rise of land was only a hundred yards away now. He tried to whistle, cursing the pain the effort brought to his parched lips.

There was another report—a rifle shot. No question about it this time. He saw a thin curl of smoke drifting up above the cluster of rocks. There was no doubt for whom the shot was intended. A bullet had thudded into the ground at his feet.

Grim faced, Curtis dropped to the ground and wormed his way to shelter behind a big lava rock. A quick succession of shots sent up little spurts of sand ahead, behind, and all around him.

"As shots," he told himself, "they're no great shakes." He grinned derisively. Had *he* been offered such a target, at such a range, there would have been no need for more than one shot. "But I oughtn't to complain," he continued. "If they'd been better shots, I'd be a dead man now." And then a surge of rage swept over him. "The damned fools! Wonder what in hell they think they're doing? Having a little game with me, I suppose. Queer sense of humor the limey's have. I'll give 'em hell."

He was about to rise to his feet and assert the authority of his rank, his overpowering thirst outweighing his natural caution, when another report sounded and a bullet ricocheted from the top of the rock behind which he crouched.

"Lord!" he muttered, licking his lips. "Maybe they think I'm a German. I might be anything in this getup. Or—" and his second thought was even more disturbing—"maybe they're Germans."

Until now his knowledge of the country and the natives, his keen, hunter's intuition, had enabled him to avoid coming in actual contact with scouting parties of Germans. And now—maybe the desert heat had sapped his efficiency—perhaps he had walked into a trap. He realized how close to total exhaustion he was. For his mission to succeed he must live: to live he must have water. The thought of it, sparkling at the bottom of the well beyond the rocks, created in him a frenzy of desire.

He thought:

"If they are Germans, my mission's a failure. They'll make me a prisoner and keep so close a guard over me that

there won't be one chance in a thousand of my breaking away. I know too much —and they'll know it. Maybe they won't bother to take me prisoner. Probably shoot me. But, at least, they'll let me have a drink of water first. No sense beating about the bush. I'm going to find out who they are and have done with it."

Putting his hands to his mouth, he shouted:

"Hey, you damn fools! What's the idea of keeping a man from a drink? Who are you?"

The answer came back to him in English, and that encouraged him. True, it was a somewhat guttural voice. But the Boers spoke that way . . .

Curtis shouted:

"I'm Captain Curtis of the Intelligence Department. And if that doesn't mean anything to your dull wits, I'm English. At least," he amended, "I am for the duration of the war. So stop firing. I'm damned thirsty."

The sound of a chuckle came back to him and the same voice replied—

"You won't need a drink if you show your head above that rock, 'Mr. Englishman-for-the-duration-of-the-war.' "

And then a deep voice boomed something in German, which Curtis did not understand. Another one squeaked in a high falsetto:

"You are truly funny, Von Webber. Yes, indeed."

Curtis groaned. So there were three of them—and they were Germans!

The falsetto voice spoke again—

"The water is very sweet and cool, Mr. Englishman."

Curtis cursed—then yelled:

"My God! Have you Dutchies got women fighting for you?"

The first voice replied:

"No. That is only little Fritz. But he is not really little. He is a very big and strong man. You must not be deceived by his voice. And it is true what he says about the water."

Curtis licked his lips. He called—

"How about making a truce, Dutchies?"

"Do you mean that you want to surrender?" the voice challenged.

Curtis hesitated before he decided on his bluff:

"No. Not so you'd notice it. Let me get a drink, then I'll come back here and we'll carry on with the war—damn you!"

He began to rise to his feet, but as his helmet appeared above the top of the rock a rifle report sounded.

He dropped back again under cover.

"You're lousy swine," he called.

A voice answered:

"We are sorry. This is a time of war and what we are doing, we have to do. If you're ready to surrender, hold your hands above your head as you rise to your feet, turn round and back toward us."

"I'm not surrendering," Curtis answered.

"Then that's that," the voice said definitely.

Again Curtis licked his dry lips.

"Damn it! This *is* luck! Wonder what they're after, anyway? Reckon I can stick it out until tomorrow. It won't be so bad after sundown. There'll be a bit of dew, like as not. Anyway, it won't be so blamed hot. And, in the dark, all sorts of things can happen."

HE SAT with his back against the rock. From his pocket he took something which looked like a twist of tobacco. He shaved off a thin slice, put it in his mouth and chewed it thoughtfully. It was *biltong*—raw meat which had been salted and cured in the sun over a smoky fire. He knew that it would increase his thirst, but its present effect was to induce a flow of saliva which gave him a temporary relief.

The sun set. Presently it was dark.

The muttering of voices behind the rocks which guarded the well ceased. The sky glowed phosphorescently with the light of a myriad stars. The desert sand, too, seemed to glow, reflecting the light of the stars. Individual rocks stood out clearly—utter darkness ceased to be.

Curtis' thirst increased. It spurred him to action.

"Not a bit of good," he told himself, "waiting here for something to turn up. Wonder what the chances are of taking them by surprise?"

He picked up his helmet, put it on the end of his rifle and raised it slightly above the rock behind which he sat. Nothing happened. He raised it higher; he waggled it about. And then a bullet whirred over his head. Curtis let the helmet drop and groaned loudly, trying to give the impression that he had been badly hit. He hoped that one of the Germans would come to him.

"Guess they're too wise," he told himself after a long interval of waiting, "to be taken in so easy. And they're keeping a sharp lookout. That makes it unanimous that I ain't going to try to rush 'em. I reckon a bit of Indian work is called for."

He unraveled the heavy wool of his socks, making a ball of it. Cutting his clothes into thin strips, he tied those strips together, and added to them his shoe laces. He had, when he had completed his task, two fair sized balls of string.

He then carefully wedged his rifle between two rocks so that it was aimed in the general direction of the rise. He loaded it with his last cartridge and cocked it. There was a stump of a thorn tree close by. He fastened his belt to that and passed one end of his stoutest string through one of the rings of the belt. He tied that end to the trigger.

"Thank God," he muttered, "I got my trigger spring filed down. She'll go off at a touch."

He next passed one end of his ball of wool through another ring of his belt and tied it to the billy-can, arranging it so that if he pulled on the wool ever so gently the can banged against the rock.

Then, utterly naked, holding the two balls of string in his hand, he backed slowly away from the rock behind which he had taken cover—away from the rock crowned knoll which guarded the well, paying out his balls of string as he went.

When he had gone about fifty paces, and was nearing the end of his lines, he changed his course, swinging round in a semicircle. After a considerable time—his movements were very slow—he reached a point that was almost at right angles, and about fifty paces to the left, to the rock behind which he had been hiding. And at that moment a voice at the wells shouted—

"Don't you try any games like that, Englishman, unless you want a bullet in your skull."

Curtis flattened himself out on the ground and groaned. He thought his ruse had been detected, when the German fired. Then he sighed with relief, glad that he had not acted too precipitately, for that shot—as far as he could judge from the whine of the ricocheting bullet—was aimed toward his original hiding place. It was, he reasoned, a haphazard shot, fired by the German to serve notice that a sharp lookout was being kept by the men at the wells.

He pulled cautiously at his line of worsted and the billy-can jangled noisily against the rock. More shots echoed in the night.

Curtis went forward again, confident that they were watching for him at the other place, but he took no chances. He moved as cautiously as though he were tracking down big game through dense bush, where the snapping of a twig under an incautiously placed foot would startle the game into a headlong flight. Every once in awhile he pulled on the wool, causing the billy-can to rattle. And when presently it snapped, he was well content. It had served its purpose.

A few paces farther and the other line tightened in his hand. He pulled at it steadily. His rifle went off. It was answered by two shots from the well.

"That'll give 'em something to think about." He grinned.

He crawled forward on hands and knees, moving swiftly, taking a course which would bring him round the left end of the rocks which guarded the well; far to the left of the direct line between the place where he had first hidden and the enemy.

When he finally reached his goal the cool, damp smell of the well filled his nostrils, accentuating the frightful thirst he was experiencing. He wanted to jump to his feet and rush forward. For the moment his desire for water threatened to ruin his well conceived and splendidly executed maneuver. With an effort of will power he controlled his impulse and waited, weak and trembling, behind one of the rocks.

Waited and listened. Gradually he regained full control of himself. Once again he became the cool hunter of big game.

Something puzzled him. He had expected to hear men's voices. Instead he heard only one voice. It sounded like a man talking to himself in a low, rumbling monotone.

"Almost sounds like," Curtis thought, "as if he'd got fever delirium. Wish I knew German. Then I could get the drift of what he's saying. I suppose he's been told off to keep watch while the others snatch a sleep, and he's grumbling to himself."

Presently the rumbling voice ceased and was replaced by the sound of deep, labored breathing

Slowly, ever so slowly, Curtis raised his head above the rock. Then he grinned confidently. He saw two forms asprawl on the ground not far from him. They were fast asleep, he thought. A third man was seated with his back against the rock. Evidently this was the one who was supposed to be keeping guard. But his watch had relaxed. He slept at his post. His rifle rested across his lap, his right hand on the stock.

Cautiously Curtis reached over. The fingers of his left hand closed on the barrel of the German's rifle. His right hand, grasping a round stone as big as his fist, was poised above the man's head, ready to bash in his skull at the first signs of movement he made.

Curtis pulled gently at the rifle. There was no check; it came away easily.

He smiled grimly. The game was his.

In a loud voice he shouted—

"Hands up!"

The sleeping German, who should have been keeping watch, groaned and rose awkwardly to his feet. He swung round and tried to grapple with Curtis. But Curtis was prepared for him. He struck out with all his force at the man's chin, catching him on the point with his fist, which still grasped the stone. The German went down without a sound.

Curtis covered the two sleeping men with the captured rifle. He wondered why they had not wakened.

"Hands up!" he shouted again. They did not move.

Puzzled, he walked slowly toward them. He prodded one of them with the muzzle of the rifle. But there was no sound, no movement. He prodded the other man. With his foot, he turned them both over on to their backs. Their eyes remained closed. He stooped over and put his hand on the German's face and started at the cold touch. He was dead. Curtis turned to the other one. He was dead, too. There was a bullet hole in the center of his forehead.

He heard a groan behind him. The man he had knocked out was beginning to return to his senses. His limbs stirred; he tried to sit up.

Curtis went to him. He saw that the man wore cloth puttees. He swiftly removed them and used them to bind the man's hands and feet together. That done, he sighed with relief. Once again he remembered his thirst.

He went to the well. It was very deep; the sides were steep. The water at the bottom mockingly mirrored the star strewn sky.

Curtis discovered a small gourd fastened to a long rope. He lowered it into the depths of the well. As he drew it up again he thought he had never heard music so sweet as the cool splash of the water which dripped from the brimming gourd.

A few moments later he was drinking slowly—a few meager sips. He splashed the rest of the water the gourd contained on to his naked body. Again he lowered the gourd and, when it came to the sur-

face this time, he drank deeply. Then he stretched himself out at full length and knew the contentment which comes from utter relaxation and pride in a job well done.

After awhile he rose and went to his prisoner to make sure that the man could not loosen his bonds. He spoke to him and was answered with a muttered sentence in German.

Curtis returned to the well, drank again, then rolled over on his back and surrendered to the weariness which possessed him. A few minutes later he was fast asleep.

ALMOST immediately, it seemed, the sun rose. Instantly Curtis awoke and, rolling over on his back, stared up at the white fleecy clouds which were rapidly retreating to the west, leaving behind them a sky of dazzling blue.

He stretched himself, frowning thoughtfully as he remembered the events of the night.

For a few moments he remained motionless, thinking of the long trek still ahead of him, wondering what to do with his prisoner. Finally he rose to his feet and looked about him.

There against the rocks, his eyes closed, and breathing heavily, was the man he had knocked out. The other two men were sprawled in grotesque attitudes nearby. He scowled as he looked at them. There was something he did not understand. He had been too tired last night to give thought to the mystery those silent bodies suggested.

He went over and again examined them closely. Yes, they were both dead.

One was a slim, fair haired youngster.

"That," Curtis muttered, "must be Fritz."

He looked at the other man—a big, bull necked fellow; the owner, Curtis concluded, of the deep bass voice he had heard. Then he cursed in bewilderment. They were dead. How then could he have heard their voices?

He pivoted swiftly, half fearing that he had been trapped; that other men had surrounded him. But there was no one in sight save the man he had bound. And he still slept.

Curtis scratched his head and turned back to the two dead bodies. Both the men had revolvers strapped about their waists. Curtis examined them. They were loaded in all six chambers. Each man carried additional ammunition in his belt. Across their shoulders they wore bandoleers containing about forty rounds of rifle ammunition. There were two rifles nearby.

Curtis hauled water up from the well and indulged in the luxury of a bath. Actually he could do no more than pour water over himself from the small gourd. But that was sufficient. His pores seemed to drink in the water; the stiffness vanished from his tired joints.

The rising sun swiftly dried him. It made him painfully conscious of his naked body.

He returned to the dead and with a muttered "Sorry, old lad, but I need these more than you do," he stripped the big German and, first removing the insignia of the German military force, dressed himself in the clothes.

"Robbing the dead, eh, Mr. Englishman-for-the-duration-of-the-war?"

Curtis turned with a start at the voice and saw that his prisoner was awake and regarding him with cold blue eyes.

Curtis shrugged.

"He is dead," he said. "I guess he won't mind. I tore my clothes to rags last night and I've got a long way to go. And I'm damned if I know what I'm to do with you."

The other smiled faintly.

"You don't have to bother about me," he said. "But before you go, you might put a bullet in me. Vultures don't always wait until a man's dead."

Curtis stared at him.

"What the hell are you talking about dying for?" he asked.

The German's eyes closed.

"My knee's smashed," he said. "I couldn't walk a yard."

Instantly Curtis forgot the war, forgot that he was dealing with an enemy, forgot everything except the fact that here, before him, was a fellowman in bad straits.

He cut away the German's trousers and discovered that the man's kneecap and shin bone had been shattered by a bullet. He bathed the wound and strapped it up as best he could with bandages torn from the little dead German's shirt.

"It's not much of a job," he said when he had finished. "But it's the best I can do. I'm afraid I hurt you like hell."

"Just about," the German said wryly. "But please believe that I'm very grateful."

"Who did it?" Curtis asked as he freed the German's hands.

"Von Webber—the big man. He went mad—raving mad. The desert was too much for him. The desert and the awful thirst. He tried to kill me. He—I had to shoot him."

Curtis nodded understandingly.

"And now we're in a mess," the German continued. His English bore but the faintest trace of an accent. "At least, you are. You have a decision to make, a duty to do. Evidently you can't take me with you when you leave here. I am under no delusions. I do not expect you to endanger your life and mission for one of the enemy."

Curtis went for his rifle, helmet and billy-can. Returning, he collected some wood and presently had a fire going. He filled his billy with water and into it cut shreds of *biltong*.

"It'll make soup of a kind," he said.

Then, with a start, he saw that the German had a revolver in a holster hanging from his belt. He got it quickly.

The German laughed.

"Do you know," he said, "I hadn't thought of that. I might have held you up."

Curtis sat down and stared over the desert, whistling softly.

"You were clever last night," the German continued after an interval of silence. "But I don't think your ruse would have succeeded had my leg been sound. The pain seemed to affect my shooting and then, later, I think I must have fainted—or perhaps I fell asleep."

Curtis smiled grimly and said nothing.

"I'm glad I didn't kill you, though," the German continued. "You see I was in frightful pain. And yet I am too much of a coward to kill myself. And—and the vultures were beginning to drop."

Curtis said thoughtfully:

"I heard three voices last night. I expected a bit of trouble. But I was thirsty. Damn thirsty. So I made the attempt and found it easier than I had expected. Who were the other two I heard talking?"

The German laughed.

"Me. I am a very good mimic," he said. "But I did not think I would deceive Captain Curtis of the British Intelligence. Yes, I have heard of you. My people have put a price on your head. You are a very dangerous man, Captain Curtis. And so I deceived you with my child's play! That is a—what do you say?—a feather in my cap. I hoped that you would see the folly of fighting three of us. I hoped that the thirst would make you surrender before you discovered you were opposed by only one wounded man. I meant then to make you—" he hesitated slightly, then continued—"I hoped to make you carry me to our base. But you were too clever for me."

"What about the others?" Curtis demanded.

"Fever killed little Fritz. Von Webber—I have told you about him. Little Fritz died yesterday at sunrise. Then Von Webber went mad."

CURTIS nodded again. Rising to his feet, he wandered thoughtfully about the place. Beside the well there were several other holes that at one time had contained water. They were dry now. Into one of them he dropped the dead bodies and scooped sand over them.

"It'll keep 'em safe from the vultures," he explained.

The German nodded his thanks.

Curtis climbed down into one of the other holes. The rocks which jutted out from its sides made descent easy. It widened considerably at the bottom. There was room for a man to lie there, his presence masked by an overhanging ledge of rock. He returned thoughtfully to the surface.

"Well?" the German questioned curiously.

Curtis told him of his discovery, concluding:

"You know, I'm half a mind to put you down there with a supply of water. I could send a rescue party— But hell! It may be three or four days before I meet with any of our crowd or friendly natives. You're a damned nuisance."

He took the billy-can off the fire and the two men in turn sipped the weak broth it contained.

"Yes," Curtis exclaimed again. "You're a damned nuisance. I don't know what to do with you. Who are you? What are you doing here?"

The German laughed.

"Why should I tell you?" he countered.

"There are other ways of finding out," Curtis answered, and went through the German's pockets.

Most of the odds and ends he discovered he returned to the owner. But he retained a small notebook and a large folding map of the district.

"I'm keeping these," Curtis said.

"As you like," the German replied casually. "The notebook is only a diary —a personal diary—of no military consequence, I assure you. You will see that for yourself if you glance through it."

"I don't read German," Curtis said roughly, "so I'm keeping it."

"As you will."

"And the map?" Curtis asked. "I suppose that is a purely personal thing, too? I'd like to know where you got it. It's a British military survey map—but you know that."

"Of course." The German chuckled. "And there is no harm in telling you how we gained possession of it. One of our agents borrowed the original for a little while—long enough to make an exact copy. That's the copy."

Curtis nodded.

"I take it," he said, examining the map closely, "that you found this very useful?"

"Very," the German replied airily. "At least we would have if bad luck hadn't hit us. By its help we were going to blow up a few bridges and so forth. But, somehow, we got off our course and we were lost. Luck led us to this place—"

"Are you sure it was luck?" Curtis interrupted. "Supposing you could have lived to do it, you might have wandered back and forth over the desert for days and not stumbled on this place. A strange stroke of luck to bring you to the only water hole in a couple days' trek!"

"A very strange stroke of luck, indeed," the German agreed. "It would almost seem that the hand of Providence led us to this place. Which proves, don't you think, that our cause is just!" He sighed. "We came here yesterday morning. And the little Fritz—I had been carrying him on my back all through the heat of the day before—he died and Von Webber—but I have told you all that before."

There was a long silence, then Curtis said:

"I expect that our men will be glad to get your personal diary and the map. Why are you Germans so damned orderly and efficient? Now me, I carry notes and maps in my head. If I'm captured, nothing is discovered."

"Aren't you afraid," the German asked, "that your memory might get fogged?"

"I have a very good memory," Curtis replied simply.

"A bullet through the brain—" the German's tone was casual—"could hardly be called an aid to memory."

"That is why I take good care not to offer myself as a target. But what am I going to do with you? I can't go and leave you here."

"You can't take me with you," the German said.

Curtis stared morosely over the desert, making and rejecting plans. He knew

that his military duty demanded that he leave the German to his fate. But Curtis was conscious of a far greater duty than that. Out here in the desert the war seemed something remote and alien. He felt that it did not touch the lives of the German and himself. He admitted to himself, the duty that he owed to the disabled German. Yet—what could he do?

And then, suddenly, his face lighted and he sprang to his feet. Shading his eyes with his hands, he looked eagerly in the direction of a cloud of dust which rose above the desert to the north. As he watched the cloud materialized into the forms of men who were trekking toward the well.

"I reckon I can leave you in their hands," he said in a relieved voice.

The German raised himself up on one elbow and looked in the direction indicated by Curtis' pointing finger.

"Who are they?" he asked. "My people—or yours?"

CURTIS did not answer. His eyes were riveted on the newcomers. They were advancing swiftly. There were, Curtis estimated, over one hundred of them. They were natives. The broad blades of their long spears reflected the sun's rays. Occasionally the sound of shots came to the ears of the two white men at the well. The natives, from sheer exuberance of spirits, were firing their guns into the air.

"Who are they?" the German asked again, weakly. He had sunk back to his former posture. His face expressed great disappointment. It seemed that the effort of sitting up had exhausted him. "Who are they—my people, or yours?"

"I don't know," Curtis replied grimly. "But I warn you, I am holding you as a hostage for my safety."

"And if they're yours?"

"Then the problem ceases to be. I will see that you are carried in a litter to our nearest base."

The two men were silent for a little while. Curtis, his eyes on the advancing natives, frowned thoughtfully.

"They wear no uniform," he observed. "There are no white officers with them; they have no military formation; not all carry rifles—all of which worries me."

"Why?"

"They may be neither your people nor mine."

"You mean they may be neutrals? Then what could be better? They will not hinder your departure. They will take care of me. They represent the compromise for which we have both been seeking. Long live the neutrals, say I."

"I have learned to beware of neutrals carrying arms," Curtis said tersely. And then, after a swift, hissing intake of breath, he exclaimed, "They're Shenzies!"

The German laughed contemptuously.

"So you see, my friend, your fears are groundless. Shenzies—*pouf!* The wild men—the slaves of other natives. Talk to them, raising your voice ever so little, and they will comport themselves like new born lambs. Shenzies!"

"I'm not so sure," Curtis said. "Over five score of them armed with white men's guns—plundered, no doubt, from your dead and my dead. They've been uncontrolled, by white or black, ever since this blasted war started. They've seen white fight against white. They've seen hundreds of their black overlords wiped out. And they know we're alone here—or will know soon . . ."

"We can handle them," the German said, but there was less confidence in his voice now. "If not—well and good. It will mean that your brain will cease to function and that my notes and map will be destroyed. We can then call this affair a draw."

"I don't like draws," Curtis said. "We're in a good position here. Supposing them to be hostile—we can hold them off for awhile. Maybe long enough for luck to send a rescue party this way."

"It would be hard," said the German, "for one man to keep watch in all directions. They would surround you and—"

"I said," Curtis repeated stolidly, "that *we* could hold the place. I figure that we

are going to be allies for a bit. Are you game?"

Without a word, the German held out his hand. Curtis took it. For a few moments the two men regarded each other silently; then both looked away, somewhat sheepishly.

The natives were now near enough for the white men to make out their shouts.

"That doesn't sound very friendly," Curtis remarked grimly after a particularly bloody threat. "Look, they've stopped for a pow-wow! That gives me a chance to make a few preparations. Ought to have done it before."

With some boulders he quickly built a crude rampart on the highest point of the rise. Into this he carried the German, the rifles and the ammunition.

There was a hollow in one of the rocks. He filled it with water. He filled the gourd and the billy-can.

"That's all we can do," he said. "If they're hostile, I reckon we can hold them off—if they're not too thirsty—until dark. After that it won't be too easy. Wonder what brought them this way? Reckon they heard the firing last night and came along to investigate."

"Talk to them," the German said. "You'll be able to handle them." Curtis laughed shortly.

"I'm going to try. Before the war there would have been no difficulty. But this war—hell! This war's been their harvest."

He looked toward the natives. They were coming on again, slowly.

Curtis rose to his feet and, holding up his hand, shouted to the natives. He gave them his native name—and one time it would have been greeted with shouts of respectful admiration—asking if they came as friend or foe. And when they halted silently, he continued to exhort them.

Before he had reached his conclusion he knew that it was hopeless. He sensed the bloodlust which emanated from them. The war had marked them. But no sign of despair was in his voice. Indeed, he spoke with a calm assurance, giving all he knew of the natives and their psychology.

Jeering shouts, threats and a ragged volley answered him.

"Let me try," the German begged. Curtis helped him to his feet and stood supporting him, an arm about his waist.

The German made of the vernacular a harsh, forbidding language. He did not plead; he did not appeal to the natives' better instincts; he did not cite instances of white man's just rule in black man's Africa. He stormed at them; he called them dogs; he ordered them to lay down their arms, threatening them with fearful reprisals should they disobey.

And he too failed. As he finished, there were more wild shots, more shouts of bloody threats.

The two white men dropped down behind their shelter.

"Now the war begins," Curtis said.

HE MADE the German as comfortable as possible, then loaded the three German rifles —he had no ammunition for his own—and revolvers.

"They'll surround us, of course," he said. "Well—we'd better get busy. If we get in some work early in the game we may discourage them."

As he spoke his rifle came up to his shoulder. He squeezed the trigger and a native dropped with a yell of pain.

Curtis grunted.

"She throws high," he said.

The German fired. Another native dropped—silently.

"I know this gun," the German said.

Then each man fired four shots in quick succession—and at that range they could not miss.

Yells of rage greeted their marksmanship. Bullets whistled over their heads. Curtis grinned.

"I've never yet found a nigger who didn't believe that the higher he set the sights of a rifle, the farther the bullet'd go. Well, thank God for that!"

He and the German fired methodically.

The first rush of the natives was

halted. They were down on their bellies now, crawling slowly toward their objective. Curtis raised his head a little to get a better sight on a native who had won to a position ahead of the others . . .

He felt a hot, searing pain across his temple—and then darkness blotted everything from his sight.

When he opened his eyes again he saw the German, his face distorted with pain, crouched behind the rock, firing steadily. Curtis' head ached. He put his hand to his temple and found that a water soaked bandage had been bound about his head.

"What happened?" he asked weakly.

The German did not look round.

"A bullet ricocheted. I thought you were done for, but the wound's nothing. Knocked you out—that's all."

"You oughtn't to have wasted water on me," Curtis replied. "And what happened while you were bandaging me?"

"Look and see," the German said grimly. "*Gott*, my rifle's hot!"

Curtis retrieved his rifle and crawled to a place where he could look through a crack between the rocks.

Here and there sprawled the silent forms of the natives who had fallen victims to the accurate rifle fire of the two white men. But that was all. There was no sign of life or movement.

He almost leaped to his feet with an exultant shout of victory, believing the Shenzies had retreated, leaving their dead.

Fortunately the last mists of unconsciousness cleared from his brain in time to save him from that folly. He realized, suddenly, that the air was filled with sound. Bullets whined continuously over the rise or thudded into the sand before it; he heard the bloodthirsty yells of savage fighters; he saw puffs of smoke rising into the clear air. They were like little spurts of steam rising from the desert's molten surface.

He traced those coils of smoke to their source and saw then that the natives had given up their massed formation. They had scattered and, now taking advantage of every scrap of cover, were converging slowly on the rise.

"It looks like the end," he muttered.

He looked across at the German. The bandage Curtis had put on his knee was scarlet with blood. Curtis guessed the effort the German had made crawling to his side had aggravated the wound.

"You're a good scout," he said. "But you should have let me lay."

"*Ach!*" the German replied gruffly. "How could I? I needed your help to keep these devils off. Besides—" he added with a grim smile—"we are allies for the duration of—this war."

"It'll be over soon," Curtis said. "And I'd rather go this way than the way I might have gone last night."

The German grunted.

"You talk too much, Mister Englishman-for-the—" Then he stopped abruptly. "*Ach*, no," he continued. "At a time like this there are no nationalities. We are brother white men—and we must live."

"You bet," Curtis agreed. "Though God knows *why* we should. Watch out on your left!"

"I see him," said the German. He dropped a native who had got to his feet and started dashing for a boulder not fifty feet from the well. At the same time Curtis fired at the foot of a man which projected from behind a mass of rock. A howl of pain told him he had not missed.

He crept to the other side of the barricade and scrutinized the desert beyond. There seemed to be nothing moving. He wondered at that—wondered that the natives had not completely encircled the rise of land.

Then he thought he detected a flash of light—sun rays reflected by the broad blade of an *assegai*.

Presently he saw another flash—then another and another.

The Shenzies were massing in a deep depression which ran east and west across the desert, leaving only a mere handful to make a fake attack on the other side. The depression, which was their rendezvous, was barely a hundred yards from the rise.

He told of his discovery to the German.

"They've got sick of playing the waiting game. That's what contact with civilization has done for them. Ten years ago they'd either have rushed us at the start, or waited until dark, well out of rifle range. We'll have fireworks pretty soon. I'm going to discourage them."

The German started to protest, thought better of it.

"Take care of yourself," he said.

CURTIS strapped two revolvers to his belt, pushed aside a big boulder and crawled swiftly down toward the gully. He had little fear of being observed. The Shenzies were too much concerned in keeping themselves out of sight of the white men to be on the lookout for him. Besides, it would never occur to them that one would dare to leave the shelter of the improvised fort.

Curtis carefully peered over the edge of the gully. There were a number of natives there. They were bunched together, completely at ease. Some were sitting, some sprawling on their backs. Their weapons—rifles and *assegais*—were in a disordered pile.

Curtis listened for a little while to their talk. They were boasting of the settlers they had killed; of straggling soldiers they had ambushed; of looting and mutilation.

He drew his revolvers and emptied them into the thick of the natives. Then he rose to his feet and raced back to the barricade, leaving behind him death and utter consternation.

His surprise attack was so successful that he was back behind the shelter of the rocks before the surviving natives in the gully made up their mind to attack. And that attack was only half hearted. But five of them charged out of the gully. And when one dropped, a bullet from the German's gun catching him, the others scattered swiftly, seeking cover.

There was silence then for a long time. The sun rose higher. The heat grew unbearable. The water Curtis had poured in the hollow of the rock steamed.

"It's a sickening business," said the German.

Curtis nodded.

"They'll make a try for us after sundown. Your leg must hurt like hell," he added irrelevantly.

The rocks, the metal of their rifles, were burning hot to the touch.

Not for one instant dared they shift their gaze from the desert which surrounded them. Their eyes grew bloodshot. The ground seemed to heave beneath them. Vultures hovered low overhead, and set the nerves of the two men to jangling.

The German began to mutter incoherently—phrases in his mother tongue. Curtis found it difficult to keep himself to the present realities. He rode through soft valleys where the lush grass brushed against his horse's belly. He bathed in clear, cool mountain streams. The desert faded away—was no more to his consciousness than a dimly remembered nightmare.

He looked at the German—just a glance. And, somehow, that man became in turn all the friends he had ever known from earliest childhood days. He shook himself; his vision cleared. He looked across at the German again. Their eyes met. Moved by a compelling impulse, Curtis crawled over to him. Their hands met in a firm grip.

"I'd give a lot for a smoke," Curtis said then.

"You haven't a lot to give," the German replied with a grin.

"That's true," Curtis agreed. "What did you do before the war?"

The German laughed sadly.

"I was a manufacturer. I made tin soldiers. Warriors of all nations. Even African warriors with *assegais*. Funny, isn't it?"

"And when it's all over—what'll you do then?"

"I haven't thought of that. I can't think so far ahead. Not now. But tin soldiers? No—no more tin soldiers."

Silence enveloped them once again. They peered over their parapet, simulating a soldierly alertness to hide the flood of sentiments which had softened them.

The sky was a brazen blare; it seemed to merge with the floor of the desert. Curtis had to fight against a feeling of giddiness which seized him. He could no longer differentiate between desert and sky. The whole universe revolved about him at a dizzy speed.

"Steady!"

The German's strained voice restored things to their proper order.

Curtis licked his lips and crawled back to his post. The sun was directly overhead. There was no escape from its torturing heat. Nothing moved.

Then, suddenly, rifle fire blazed out on three sides of the rise. The natives who had sprawled lifelessly about, killed by the white men's shots, rose to their feet and advanced clumsily.

The German muttered a startled oath.

Curtis rubbed his eyes. Then he understood. At a time when his and the German's watch had faltered, living natives had crawled behind their dead comrades and now, holding the dead before them as shields, were coming forward boldly.

The explanation came to the German at the same time and both white men opened fire. The result—a dead body was no barrier to high-powered rifle bullets at such a range—threw consternation into the ranks of the natives. Some ran for cover. But others dropped their human shields and came on at a rush, yelling savagely.

"Now we're in for it!" Curtis shouted hoarsely.

A revolver in each hand, he rose to his feet and fired coolly.

An *assegai* just missed his helmet; another tore through his trousers, grazing his thigh. The natives had discarded the weapons of the white men and had reverted to their own. That made the end all the surer and quicker, Curtis thought.

THEIR first mad rush had brought the Shenzies to the base of the rise. They encircled it and there they paused—they seemed to be hesitating doubtfully as to the best course to pursue. Curtis felt then that he was experiencing the same emotions as a man facing a firing squad. This halt of the natives was comparable, he thought, to the few precious seconds of grace given to a condemned man—those few fleeting seconds which elapse between the penultimate command to the executioners and the last curt order to fire.

He heard the German cursing with pain and, looking over his shoulder, saw that he was trying to rise to his feet.

"What is it?" Curtis asked, stooping over him.

"Help me to my feet, I want to die on my feet," the German said.

Curtis raised him gently and stood supporting him, an arm round his waist.

The German gasped:

"Back to back, *Kamarad!* We can not give in yet. It is our duty to fight until we die. Maybe we can teach them a lesson—teach them that it is dangerous to molest white men."

"I think they've already learned that," Curtis said grimly. "We've put up a good fight."

Then he twisted around so that his back was against the German's. He stooped forward a little so that the other could, by leaning backward, rest some of his weight on Curtis.

A staccato rhythm had crept into the shouts of the natives; they accentuated the beat by stamping with their feet. Their bodies rocked to and fro. They brandished their *assegais* and *knobkerries* over their heads.

"Watch out!" Curtis warned.

The chant ended in a piercing yell.

"Here they come," the German grunted, and the natives raced up the slope of the rise, contending for the honor of being the first to wash an *assegai* in the blood of the white men.

They surged about Curtis and the

German like an incoming tide about the base of a rock. Their very frenzy hindered them. They were massed so close together that they could not use their spears effectively. Adding to their confusion those in the front rank, failing to dodge the blows of the white men—the German was using his rifle as a club; Curtis was striking out right and left with the barrels of his revolvers—tried to back out of range. They fought and screamed at those in the rear ranks who swept them irresistibly within range of the white men's blows.

Curtis knew that he and the German could not hold out much longer. And he wanted to be killed quickly—not captured alive and tortured.

Shrill, warning cries—and the next moment the natives were fleeing in panic stricken terror from the place.

Curtis turned just as the German toppled to the ground with a hoarse cry.

Anxiously Curtis bent over him.

"Hell, they're running away! Are you all right?"

"I'm all right," the German gasped. "In the excitement I put all my weight on my bad leg—that's all. For a moment I thought I was going to faint with the pain—but what's it all about?

Curtis sank down on a rock beside him.

"I don't—" he began.

"Say—listen! Look!"

They heard the brazen notes of a bugle. Looking in the direction indicated by the German's pointing finger, Curtis saw a line of troops advancing at the double. The sun glittered on their bayonets.

They heard crash after crash of rifle fire and the crackle of a machine gun. They saw a movement started which would envelop the fleeing Shenzies . . . Then Curtis turned to the German again and looked with a start of surprise at the revolver the man leveled at him.

"What the hell!" he exclaimed.

"Our little war is over," the German replied—there was sadness in his voice. "We are allies no longer. For us, the other war begins again. Once again, we are enemies."

Curtis shrugged his shoulders.

"So that's the way it is, eh?" he said ironically. "Well, what do I do—stick my hands over my head?"

"No." The German's tone was crisp. "My map, please, and the note book."

Silently Curtis handed them over.

The German laughed ruefully.

"This morning you were in a predicament. You didn't know what to do with me. And now I don't know what to do with you."

Curtis bit his lip.

"I do not think my people could take any prisoner along with them," continued the German. "I am sure they would not make a prisoner of Captain Curtis. They would shoot him." The German seemed to be thinking aloud.

Curtis interrupted him:

"Look here, aren't you counting your chickens before they're hatched? What makes you so sure they're your men? They may be some of my crowd."

"They are my people," the German said positively.

Curtis looked in the direction of the soldiers. They were closing in on the surviving Shenzies.

"You must have good eyesight to be so damned sure," he commented.

The German laughed.

"I *know* they're my people," he said, and there was a little note of triumph in his voice, "because this is the day and the place appointed for my joining with them."

Curtis stared at him.

"Then the story you told me of getting lost and all that—that was all a lie?"

"About being lost, yes. That was a lie. But what of it? We were at war. I couldn't tell you that I expected a detachment of my troops along—expected them to appear at almost any moment. You are a very dangerous man, you know. I wanted to keep you with me long enough to insure your capture."

"Looks as if you were successful," Curtis observed dryly. "You lied very convincingly."

"It was not all a lie—that's what

stopped you from cross-examining me too closely. There was so much truth in it. We—little Fritz, Von Webber and I—had been on a special recruiting mission. Our transport is primitive at times. We need more carriers. That's why we set off on this lone expedition, arranging to meet that raiding party here at the well, today, with our recruits. Our mission failed. We got no recruits. That information may prove useful to your people—if you live to pass it on to them. But you agree I had to act as I acted?"

"Sure. I'd have done the same."

Curtis stared fixedly before him. He began to whistle.

"But for you," the German continued thoughtfully, "I should now be dead." He sounded as if he were trying to justify a predetermined course. "You might have taken my map and note book and been away from this place before the natives came. But you stayed. And—and we have faced death together.

"Listen: Get down that dry well you told me about. Hide there until we have gone. Quick!"

"Your men may have seen me," Curtis protested.

"It is a chance we must take," the German said. "Hurry!"

The noise of firing had ceased. The soldiers were reforming ranks. They wheeled and marched toward the rise, leaving behind them a litter of dead blacks.

"Go," said the German. "Except for those poor devils who are now dead, all is as if we had never met. It is a draw between us. But we shall have memories."

The revolver dropped from his hand. He raised his hand to the salute and smiled wanly.

"So long," Curtis said. "You're not a bad guy."

He glanced at the approaching German force, then slipped over the other side of the rise.

When Curtis climbed up to the top of the well again, an hour later, the German force was no more than a dust cloud on the horizon. He rubbed his cramped limbs. Then, feverish with thirst, he went wearily up the rise in search of the gourd.

He found it on top of a tin box containing food, a flask of brandy, cigarets, bandages and a small bottle of iodine—and a note, hurriedly scrawled, which read:

> Comrade: The doctor is a friend of mine, so I can leave you this. Good luck.

And from that Curtis evolved a philosophy and a moral . . .

The Tiger's Eye

MR. ANTHONY PELLATT, whose portly figure was familiar enough in Ely Place and Amsterdam—in a word, wherever fine jewels were a matter of interest or commerce—leaned on the steamer's rail with his daughter Evelyn and watched the sea's incredible phosphorescence and the low lying shore of Java a mile away silhouetted against the luminous tropic dark.

About Mr. Pellatt's comfortable and cummerbundy equator was a belt of soft leather, and in that belt reposed a surprising lump of green stone. It was the size and something like the shape of a baby's fist, and cut into half a hundred cunning little surfaces, each capable of reflecting daylight in a manner to make ordinary folks gasp.

Twenty feet away, his great bulk plunged in a shadowy deck chair, and noticeable only for the equal waxing and waning of the cheroot deep in the forest of his black beard, Salamon Falk bided his time.

If it is your intention to travel in the East—and more particularly, perhaps, in the Dutch East Indies—with a couple of ounces more or less of emerald girt about your person, you should by all means consider the manner of your traveling. Clearly, silence is indicated. Say no word of your burden; cultivate the unimaginative nonchalance of the globe trotter. Above all, don't go to the police for protection or advice. It was the third of these precautions that Anthony Pellatt failed to observe—and

A Novelette of the Java Seas

By

R. V. GERY

consequently let Salamon Falk in on him, with quite disastrous results.

There was a sort of fatality about the whole business for Anthony. To begin with, the terrific piece of personalty he bore with him was the fine flower and reward of something like a quarter of a century's collecting. Folk will tell you that it is not possible to get India's ruling families to part with such things; that family pride and this, that or the other consideration rule against their being disposed of; and so on. They forget one or two little matters: The high cost of living, which has hit many a rajah square in the purse; a certain unrest and liveliness overtaking the immemorial East and making thrones and thronelets a trifle insecure; the increasing attractions of Paris, New York, Monte Carlo and other delightful but expensive haunts—all these considerations make it a great deal more possible nowadays for people like Anthony Pellatt, with address, perseverance, persuasion and long bank balances, to do their work upon the aforesaid family pride.

Nevertheless, it had taken Pellatt four years to lay hands on the Tiger's Eye. Where it came from no one knew. It had no written history, nor had it been, like other spectacular bits of *bijouterie*, a temple jewel; it had adorned no god. But time whereof the memory of man ran not to the contrary—which is a long time, even in Upper Burma—it had been part, and the greatest part, of the royal regalia of the little rajah from whom

Pellatt, after interminable haggling and dickering, had at long last acquired it.

Consider now the workings of Providence. Pellatt went triumphantly but cautiously down to Rangoon with his spoils. There, in the club, he ran across a brother collector, and for a long evening, behind drawn blinds, the two of them gloated over the stone. Marks, the other man, mentioned in course of conversation the name of one Pieter Brandt, who resided in Surabaya, and was the high light and court of last appeal in all matters of Oriental jewelry.

And Pellatt, at one in the morning, smiting his fat thigh, said in answer to his colleague's most delicately hinted doubts about this Tiger's Eye:

"Very well. If that's what you think about it, I'm going down to Surabaya tomorrow."

He went. Rangoon forwarded him to Singapore, Singapore to Tanjong Priok and Batavia; and in this last pleasant city, up at Weltevreden, he spilled his milk.

Some one introduced him to De Groot, the commandant of police there, and Pellatt went to see him in his office. In an evil hour he inquired about Piet Brandt the dealer, and so doing lifted an incautious edge of the curtain which should have shrouded his dealings with that worthy.

Which would, in turn, have been all very well if De Groot had had a better modulated voice and a less exalted idea of the safety and general law abidingness of his own bailiwick. Also if De Groot's personal stenographer hadn't been a devious young Eurasian gentleman, with long ears and a subterranean acquaintance with some very undesirable characters about town. Also if Salamon Falk, the individual presently in the deck chair, had not arrived in Batavia three days previously.

De Groot protested in tones of thunder that his own section of the Java seas was as safe as a nursery. Pellatt—which undid him—gave De Groot a flash of the stone. And the slim young Eurasian went unsmilingly out to tiffin with information under his hat that promised, properly handled, many good Dutch florins.

Salamon Falk, who was in Batavia strictly for his health—having recently made Noumea and the entire French administration down there far too hot to hold him—paid the stenographer a pocketful of florins for the tip, and hastily dropped a most promising little matter of blackmail he was then promoting. The stenographer went for a night's amusement to Tante Truda's place, and—so careful a gentleman was Salamon—was found next morning with six inches of a knife in him, to the immense wonderment of that honest, if noisy, official, Mynheer Commandant De Groot. And Salamon went down to Tanjong and booked passage on the good ship *Opdam*, that pride of the K. P. M., plying between Batavia and Surabaya. He came aboard ten minutes after Anthony Pellatt, Evelyn and the Tiger's Eye had gone up the gangway.

Now, a day out from Tanjong, he sat and bided his time. Pellatt and the girl talked in low voices, leaning on the rail; and all that Salamon was waiting for was for Evelyn to go below. Meanwhile, a short mile distant over the gently heaving sea, the inky coast of Java slid by in slow time. Salamon puffed at his cheroot with placid patience.

He was very lightly clad, even for the tropics, for he had dressed his part with care. In a belt he carried a short knife and a pudgy little automatic, and he had shed everything but a coat, a shirt, shoes and thin cotton trousers. His great torso stretched the coat nearly to bursting and his bull neck bulged over the open collar. You would have thought twice, and rightly, before you tackled Salamon Falk.

There were people, even in the district of the estimable De Groot, who could have told you things about him. Tales of Melanesia, of piracy and blackbirding, of loot and plunder and burnings, of murder on lonely atolls. Tales of cunning and deceit, of treachery as black as even

the treacherous islands had known; down there the man had a reputation that cried to heaven. Even now, did he know it—and he did not—there was in the police office in Surabaya a blue eyed and phlegmatic little Dutchman being jolted out of his usual taciturnity by a code wire from Noumea, entirely concerned with Salamon Falk and his doings; which wire, relayed to De Groot in Batavia, brought that hearty old gentleman perilously near the edge of apoplexy. Meanwhile Inspector Cornelius Van Tromp, the little man in the Surabaya office, fortified by certain information flashed him from the dockside police at Tanjong, set to work instantly to apprehend his man, quite characteristically by means of a fast launch along the coast to intercept the *Opdam*. He was, as it happened, about six hours too late.

Salamon watched and waited, until what he had anticipated came to pass. The fair haired Evelyn turned from the rail, said a word or two of good night to her father, and went below. Pellatt lighted a final cigar and stood looking down at the dark water, the Tiger's Eye snug about his middle, his mind on Surabaya and Piet Brandt tomorrow. Salamon's hour was come.

It was not until the big man was at his elbow that Pellatt observed his presence. The ship was silent, except for the stumble of the engines; her decks were deserted at this hour, save for a lascar on lookout far forward, and the watch keeping officer straight overhead on the bridge, conveniently hidden by the bridge rail. There was a patch of deep shadow about the two men.

For a moment they faced each other. Then Falk, in an undertone, asked for a match. Pellatt fumbled in a pocket and produced one; its spurt lighted for an instant Salamon's face, swarthily aureoled in blue-black hair. Pellatt turned once more to the rail, with an amicable word about the night, and Falk struck, once and silently.

He whipped out the knife and drove it home into Pellatt's back. Pellatt coughed and began to slide toward the deck. Falk gripped the writhing body by the waist and leaped with it into the sea. The whole business had not taken sixty seconds from the time he had left his chair.

The *Opdam* stamped solemnly on her way, minus two of her passengers. Bells rang half-hourly, watches were changed, her wake made a steady line of brilliant silver on the black and heaving sea. Below in her cabin, Evelyn slept, unconscious of what was being left farther and farther behind with every revolution of the screw. It was not till dawn had broken in somber magnificence over the water, and Cornelius Van Tromp roared alongside in his power launch, with six stolid and revolvered Dutchmen in attendance, that catastrophe overtook events on the steamship's decks.

Falk, hours before, had wrestled with his burden in the water for five hasty minutes. Then, with a grunt of satisfaction, he kicked himself free from what was left of a distinguished connoisseur of jewels, heaved round short and struck out for the shore. Over his shoulder he could see the *Opdam's* lights fading steadily into the distance; and as he spat the salt from his mouth he grinned savagely into his beard. Here was the first stage over. At any rate he had a start.

II

MYNHEER Inspector Cornelius Van Tromp, the not unworthy descendant of square sterned Dutch admirals, frowned heavily over the wires on his desk, and a great access of zeal suddenly overtook the clerkly Dutch constables in the outer office. They knew that frown. Their little chief was normally a person of much good humor, with a wit of his own, a conveniently blind eye to minor and harmless diversions among his subordinates, and an engaging flair for the blushing *mevrouws* of Surabaya.

But get him started, with the official wrinkle between his blue and medita-

tive eyes, and Cornelius was a terror—a stickler for discipline, a fault-finder, a hustler, which is a fearful portent in a Dutchman. He was also in all probability the most efficient piece of police mechanism in the Dutch Indies, and his district was no haven of rest for any one with a guilty conscience.

Which explained the frown. Before him lay three hundred red hot words from Noumea, with a swift *precis* of the evil doings of one Salamon Falk; a wire from Batavia, with the news that a person answering Salamon's description had taken passage on the *Opdam;* another wire announcing the lamented decease of the commandant's stenographer; and yet another, in strictly private code, from De Groot himself, warning Cornelius of possibilities in connection with Pellatt. The Batavia commandant, for all his exuberance, was capable of some rapid thinking.

So was Cornelius; and he was just now engaged in putting two and two together.

There came a tap at the outer door, interrupting his meditations. A smiling, clean shaven young fellow in immaculate whites and a topee came in and hesitated a moment at the defenses of the inspector's sanctum. Cornelius looked up, and the newcomer waved a hand.

"So-ho, my hearty!" he called cheerfully. "Time to quit guarding our public peace. The club calls, Cornelius—the club and probably one or two drinks. What, mynheer?"

Van Tromp was a man of odd friendships, and this lively youth was one of them. His name was Martin Standish, and he was in Java ostensibly to become familiar with certain aspects of the rubber situation, but practically, as Surabaya was discovering, to amuse himself and others. The worthy burghers of the island are not normally impressed with the *uitlander*, particularly when he is likely to intrude on their jealously preserved trade monopolies; but Standish, who was Yale and some other things beside, had a manner with him, and he was very fast becoming something of a local institution. Cornelius and he had struck up an acquaintanceship on one or another of the little Dutchman's expeditions of gallantry, and the acquaintanceship had quickly ripened.

He stood in the doorway now, regarding the inspector with a twinkle in his eye.

"What's in the wind?" he asked. "I observe you surrounded by official and interesting looking correspondence and positively steeped in dignity. Another malefactor in the toils, eh?"

Van Tromp relaxed into a smile.

"*Ja*," he said impressively. "I am busy. There is a—how do you say?—lowlifer that causes me trouble. There will be no club for Van Tromp this evening."

He sighed gustily and pressed the bell on his desk. A sergeant came in.

"Schultz," he said in Dutch, "the launch in two hours. Also six constables armed. Rations for two days. You will take charge here."

The sergeant saluted and withdrew, and Cornelius turned once again to Standish.

"And now, my dear fellow," he said, "I will take maybe a little supper with you, and one drink—and then you must run off and play; making my excuses, please, to the ladies."

Standish sat down astraddle a chair.

"Never, Cornelius, never. I am with you to the black and bitter end!"

He lighted a cigaret and gazed benignly at the inspector. Van Tromp shuffled uncomfortably.

"Not this time, my friend," he said, scratching his head. "It is official—and dangerous as well, *ja*."

Standish opened his brown eyes wide.

"The hell you say!" he remarked ungracefully. "Then another fit and free man will be an improvement to that little party I heard you ordering just now. Invoking, Cornelius, our friendship, in the name of whoever was your last fancy among the ladies, threatening, if you will, to blow the gaff on your little infidelities, my Cornelius."

The inspector got up, a rich shade of purple rising from his thick neck toward his ears.

"Come," he said, "let us eat, and make an end of talking. I am in a hurry—and maybe it can be arranged."

TEN MILES offshore the power launch slashed her way through the low swell. It was getting on toward three in the morning, and Van Tromp stood with Standish under her cowl, with an occasional glance ahead into the darkness. Behind them in the east there was a faint light in the sky, presage of the dawn. A couple of constables stood guard, while the remainder slept, huddled in the swaying cockpit. The hard driven engines bellowed vociferously, and a great wave stood out steadily from under the bows.

Cornelius pointed ahead suddenly. Against the murk of night, now being thrust westward by advancing day, a steamer's lights were faintly visible. The man at the wheel twisted his spokes a trifle, the launch's engines dropped from their full throated roar to a level stutter, and in a long curve she approached the *Opdam*, a powerful little searchlight winking from her bow.

Cornelius spoke to Standish.

"You had perhaps better stay here," he advised.

Standish laughed outright.

"There's no keeping me out of it now, Cornelius," he said. "I'm signed on as one of your merry men for the duration—" He tapped the automatic in his belt and grinned happily. "Lead on, Macduff; *schellum* or no *schellum*, I'm ready."

Ten minutes later Captain Schwarz of the *Opdam* faced Cornelius in his chart room. He was in pajamas, tousled, exceedingly angry, and a good deal more than puzzled.

"I do not understand it," he said to the inspector. "Such a thing has not come to me in forty years at sea."

"In forty years, Captain, you may not have carried a fellow like this Falk," said Cornelius grimly. "Nor, from what I hear, anything like the stone the other man had with him."

Schwarz threw up his hands.

"Well, what will you have me do?" he asked. "Turn round and hunt for the pair of them back to Tanjong?"

"Scarcely, mynheer," Cornelius replied. "I do not think you would find much. You will be good enough to continue your course and, in the meantime—you have a stewardess on board?"

The captain nodded.

"Send her to me, if you please. And then with your permission I shall require this chart room for an hour."

The captain went out, and in a moment returned, followed by a large and motherly Dutchwoman, clearly very excited and compassionate.

"You have seen this lady, Miss Pellatt?" Cornelius inquired.

"*Ja, mynheer,*"

"She is upset, no doubt?"

"*Ja, mynheer,* but these English women have great restraint. She asks to see you."

"If she will be kind enough to step this way—"

Cornelius put his hand on Martin Standish's shoulder.

"My good friend," he said, "here is a task ready made for you. I am likely to be busy over this matter, and it will be your job to escort this poor lady to Surabaya. There is no one else, you agree, eh?"

"What's your idea, Cornelius? Murder?"

Van Tromp shrugged.

"Probably. But first let us see what the girl can tell us."

Evelyn Pellatt entered, pale, fair and composed, and at the inspector's invitation took the big desk chair. She was young, possibly twenty-three, with bright gray eyes and a firmly rounded little chin. Standish found himself wondering whether, after all, he had not fallen upon a better assignment than Van Tromp.

But there was little of the crushed and distressful maiden about Evelyn Pellatt as she answered Van Tromp's questions

about her father's movements and the recent history of the great stone he carried with him. Yes, she had seen him last about eleven the night before. Yes, there had been a big man in a deck chair not far from them. No, she had never heard her father express any fears of the man. She had not been with Pellatt when he interviewed the commandant at Weltevreden.

Cornelius was serious, and sympathetically thorough. Finally he got up, with the smile that had made him, in Standish's own words, "infamous" in Surabaya, and laid a hand on the girl's arm.

"And now," he said, "we must find this father of yours. It will be necessary for me to run back up the coast—he is without doubt ashore somewhere—and in the meantime you will permit me to make you known to my young friend here, who is so fortunately with me. You will please allow him to take you to Surabaya, where I have a sister. It will be a couple of days at the most and we shall then have news for you."

Evelyn rose. Standish admired a faint flush on her pale cheeks, and observed that the round little chin was a shade rounder and firmer than usual. She shook her head determinedly.

"No," she said. "I don't want to go to Surabaya. I'm coming with you, Inspector. My place is with those who are looking for my father—not crying on some one's shoulder over it. I may come, mayn't I?"

"Attaboy!" remarked Mr. Standish under his breath.

It has been said that Cornelius Van Tromp had a soft side to his official nature, and that damsels, whether distressed or not, were in no way repugnant to him. But he shook his head most decidedly at Evelyn's desire.

"Too dangerous," he pronounced. "I have enough to do without looking after beautiful ladies just now. Mr. Standish will see you safe to Surabaya, and all will be well, not?"

Evelyn turned to the admiring Martin.

"You know him," she said with a smile. "Can't you persuade him? I'm not a fool in a boat, Mr. Standish, and I've lived upcountry in Burma and Assam long enough not to be afraid of things. Make him let me come."

Standish took a long and satisfying look at her. Then he conducted her gently to the door.

"You go straight below," he ordered. "Tell them down there we want breakfast for three in twenty minutes. Put on your oldest clothes, grab a coat, and parade as soon as possible. Got that? I am now going to blackmail Cornelius—seriously."

"MY YOUNG friend," the inspector began, "you are, if I may tell you so, inclined to lack discipline."

"Bunk!" observed Martin crisply. "You listen to me for about three minutes, and I'll develop that thesis. I'll give you anything up to a hundred cogent and lucid reasons why Miss Pellatt is not only an ornament to this expedition, but a necessity to it. I'll swamp you with persuasion, Cornelius, and when I start being persuasive I'm a devil at it. I'll mention the very obvious fact that this isn't any ordinary young woman, and also that she'll be an asset aboard your lugger. And I'll conclude by informing you that any hide bound Dutch inspector of police who would have the native gall to send a little sportsman like that to die of suspense in Surabaya for forty-eight hours deserves all he gets, and then some. And I'll add, to top off, that she's coming with us, and that you know it as well as I do, you old ruffian!"

Cornelius sighed once again.

"You Americans!" he breathed, none too piously. "Very well. Let her come. But one matter is settled. You are to look after her."

Standish elevated his eyebrows almost to the roots of his close cropped red hair.

"My dear Cornelius!" was all he found himself capable of saying.

The sun was cutting the water's edge, and driving before it the mists over the

land, when the launch shot out once more from under the *Opdam's* flank. Van Tromp had been busy with the wireless he had let remain silent so far, and there was by this time furious activity in several offices up and down the long Java coast. Now he sat plunged in thought and sucking at a dry cheroot, his eyes on the coast flying by; a constable stared ahead at each side of the coaming, searching the gently heaving swell for traces of the missing men.

In the stern Evelyn sat wrapped in a coat, with Standish in close attendance. The girl had lost something of her fine nerve. She was downcast, even a little tearful, and Martin devoted himself to administering the necessary consolation —no very easy task, however congenial, since Evelyn was not the type one lies to with any facility. Finally, and when the girl broke down in an access of sudden hysteria, he fell back on the approved methods under such circumstances— sympathy without sentimentality; and in an hour she was asleep, her head on his shoulder.

Van Tromp looked round once, and the flicker of a grin appeared on his face and hovered about his heavy, sensitive mouth. Then he resumed his staring ahead, and once more the frown manifested itself between his level brows.

III

SALAMON FALK stumbled along the edge of the beach, tripping over tree roots and in and out of land crabs' holes, and addressing the world at large in fluent and practised German. He had, in fact, a great deal to curse over; for he had swum rather better than a mile in infinite danger of being snapped up by marauding sharks, and then had been for hours tramping barefoot in the dark, in a search for some habitation in which to rest and hide. In the belt about his waist was the Tiger's Eye, and ten miles back Anthony Pellatt's body was bobbing shoreward, a matter of curiosity for fish and questing birds.

The sun rose out of the sea, and the heat began to strike at him at once. He stopped, rubbing the sweat out of his eyes, and looked about him. Ahead the low, wooded coast stretched interminably, winding in and out of small bays, and with the light surf lapping on the beach. There was, as far as he could see, no sign of human life, and he was in desperate need of shelter and food. Afterward—he shrugged his great shoulders—there came the question of getting out of this, of finding means to transport himself sufficiently far away from the track of the *Opdam* and Batavia to make it possible for him to realize on his catch. Saigon, possibly, or even Macao would do it—he knew of "agents" there crooked enough to tackle even a job the size of the Tiger's Eye. But the matter of getting to one or other of these havens was quite a different thing.

He rested awhile, sitting on a fallen log just inside the tree line. Of Pellatt he did not think at all. A casual killing did not mean a very great deal to Salamon Falk, and beyond the probability that there would be something more than the usual hue and cry he found nothing to worry himself about in the connoisseur's sudden ending. Sufficient to him was the present—his thirst, his hunger and his need to find an escape from that coast. The rest could go hang.

The sun glared down at him savagely through the thinning mists. Birds squawked and fluttered, and the big blue crabs came out of their holes to look at him and wave their solemn claws. Painfully he got to his feet and began to stagger on.

Then he checked suddenly and stood listening, an expression of curiosity on his great face. Faint and very far away, almost a whisper over the splash of the waves, there came the beat of an engine; it increased to a steady murmur, and Falk slipped quickly behind a tree.

In five minutes or so the murmur had grown to a roar, and the watcher saw a white launch flying east, a couple of miles to seaward. She was full of men,

as he could see even at this distance, and Salamon swore to himself once again. It was not the first time he had seen a government launch; and the obvious haste of this one, tearing back on the *Opdam's* course, told him a tale not by any means comforting. In fact, in his turn putting two and two together, Salamon pieced into completeness something very close to the truth.

He gave the launch ten minutes to pass from sight, and then hurried on. Somewhere, somehow, he must get shelter.

For an hour he walked, increasingly hammered by the heat, increasingly hungry, and his feet in ribbons from the ground he was traversing. The trees monotonously approached the beach, throwing out slippery roots over which he fell every now and then, and giving a lurking place to myriads of insects that sallied out in clouds to torment him. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and mirages seemed to dance occasionally before his bloodshot eyes.

Then he came upon a little promontory, jutting out seaward, and raised a few feet above the miasmatic sea level. It was crowned by trees a trifle higher than ordinary and seemed less impeded by underbrush than the rest of the coast. Falk turned gratefully uphill into the shade and, with something approaching a cry of joy, struck a path.

It was the merest track, winding in and out of the tree trunks; but it was clearly in use, and to Salamon it signified one thing—the presence of men. Quickening his pace, he pushed along it, until it opened on a tiny clearing, not twenty feet square. The clearing was deserted; but Falk, after one look at it, stood as if transfixed, his eyes goggling.

In a neat row, and carefully tended, were three of those peculiar long mounds of earth that all over the world mean only one thing. That in itself was nothing to perturb Salamon; he had seen graves a-plenty in his checkered career. But at the head of each of these was a stake, with a square wooden label, and on the label an inscription scrawled in English.

Falk approached cautiously, pistol in hand, and studied this thing. The names were unknown to him, all apparently men, and all accurately dated, at varying times within the past few years. The latest date was quite recent, within a couple of months or so. And every one of the men—said the inscription—had "Died Suddinly."

Salamon stood thunderstruck for a long minute. There was something wrong here, something fishy, and to be handled with circumspection; not with the whine of the shipwrecked mariner or down-and-out beachcomber he had anticipated using, but with the crooked foresight of his more familiar incarnation, the quick-on-the-draw watchfulness of his days about the islands. He hefted the wicked little automatic in his enormous hand, glancing about him under shaggy brows, experiencing almost a sense of relief. This was ground with which he was familiar.

Then his eye fell on a house, a ramshackled godown of palm thatch and crazy timbering, half hidden in the trees a hundred yards distant. He began to advance toward it, step by slow step, his body poised for a spring, shooting quick, suspicious glances about him among the trees.

It was apparently deserted, this odd dwelling place. And yet it had an air of habitation; there was about it the aura of man. No dog barked at him from the rickety veranda, no fowls pecked about the clearing in which it stood. The splintered shutters were drawn over the open windows, and no smoke appeared from the chimney. Yet Falk, moving forward carefully, was uneasy. He stood at the step of the littered veranda, puzzled and hesitating . . .

THEN a sharp voice rang out suddenly, and Salamon's nerves jerked like a hooked fish.

" 'Ands up, there!" said the voice. "An' drop that damn gun o' yours, slippy!"

Falk rolled his eyes about him, and was aware of the muzzle of a Winchester covering him from a crack in the shutter. As he discovered it, it spat flame, and a bullet whizzed past his ear.

"Drop it, will yer!" came the voice again, and Falk's automatic slipped to the ground. He stood there, looking exceedingly foolish.

The shutter parted and a man came out on to the veranda. He looked Falk up and down disparagingly.

"And 'oo in 'ell may you be?" he asked. "Comin' to a man's 'ouse an' wavin' pistols all about the country. No," he added abruptly, as Salamon glanced down at the automatic, "over your 'ead, if you please. An' then you'll oblige me by tellin' me 'oo you are an' where you come from, an' bein' mighty quick about it."

He flung the Winchester from across his arm and leveled it at Falk. A bowed, skinny fellow, with a pock marked face, and the sagging paunch that tells of too much liquor in the tropics, he had a venomous glitter in his eye that instilled caution into the already discomfited Salamon.

"Come on, now," he commanded again. "Out with it!"

Salamon's wits were returning. "Klingbeuttel," he said, borrowing for the nonce the style and entitlements of a gentleman he had himself sent to an untimely end in the Solomons some time previously. "A poor prospector—"

The cockney kept him covered.

"Well, Mr. Clingbottle," he observed sourly, "prospectin's a mighty queer game for a man to get mixed up with in these parts, particularly if it's done your fashion, with a gun. Where've you jumped from? An' don't lie any more'n you can help, for I've been watchin' you comin' along the shore for three mile an' better."

But Falk had now finally recovered his bearings and with them his self-possession.

"Put down the gun, misder," he said gutturally. "Prospector is a good enough name for me. I come as a friend, and as for the gun, would you blame me, after seeing your so charming burying ground up yonder?"

The other lowered his rifle and disclosed a row of broken and discolored teeth in a crooked smile.

"You saw it, eh? Well, that's a kind of an 'obby of mine, that place is, Mr. Clingbottle; an' you know where you'll go if there's any tricks. Now, what d'you want 'ere?"

"Food," said Salamon. "Food first and drink—and then, maybe, a talk with you."

The cockney eyed him again, this time with a trifle more tolerance.

"Well," he said, "I ain't the one to deny a man a bite an' a dram, but you'll 'ave to excuse me first. Kindly oblige my by elevatin' your 'ands once more, Mr. Clingbottle; my name's Griggs, if that's anythink to you, an' me situation 'ere is such that I 'ave to be a little careful. So I'll just give you a run-over, an' I'm sure you'll pardon me."

Falk hesitated; a search was about the last thing he desired. Griggs observed the hesitation, and the hard light crept back into his eye.

"Come on, stick 'em up!" he said shortly. "An' no damn nonsense about it!"

He cocked the rifle menacingly, and Falk's hairy paws went into the air. Griggs shifted the gun to his left hand, cautiously kicked Falk's automatic farther out of reach, and proceeded to explore the big man's anatomy.

"Shirt," he said, as if ticking things off on his fingers. "Been in the water, I see, Mr. Clingbottle. Prospectin', eh? Trousis, all very correck, an' nothin' in the pockets. Belt, with holster for that nice little toy of yours; seems to me that's about all—'ere, what's this?"

Strapped about Falk, under his thin clothing, was the soft leather girdle that had once graced the waist of Anthony Pellatt, and in it, snug in its special pocket, was the Tiger's Eye. The cockney's groping hands struck on it,

and at the same instant Falk acted.

Without moving a muscle, and with his hands still above his head—much in the manner of a man throwing himself overboard—he fell upon Griggs, all in one piece. It was a trick he had seen played more than once in wild days about the islands, the sudden application of a big man's crushing weight; and here again it succeeded. Caught not more than half on his guard, Griggs staggered and went down underneath, with Falk's hands groping for his throat. The rifle exploded, tearing a neat hole in the top of Falk's shoulder, which affected him no more than a flea bite. He proceeded to throttle Griggs scientifically and without reserve.

In his enormous grip the cockney was helpless as a child; he was out of training anyhow, from too much idle living and a too close acquaintance with the bottle, and his eyes were soon starting from his head. He writhed pluckily enough, but the affair was only a question of minutes. Falk ground his teeth with fury, compressing his enemy's throat tighter and tighter; murder glared from his visage, pounded in his great heart.

And then blinding lights suddenly shot across his sight, the earth whirled and heaved, a crash that outrivaled thunder split his head, and he sank downward into oblivion.

Griggs rolled from under his weight, panting and gagging, his face purple. A stocky yellow woman stood over Falk, the Winchester gripped in both hands and raised to strike once more.

" 'Ere, stop that!" croaked Griggs. "Leave 'im alone, Om-dong, you little pennorth o' pop."

The girl dropped the gun and faced him.

"You hurt bad?" she asked anxiously. "He very bad fellow. I like kill him!" Griggs rubbed his throat tenderly.

"Ho, yer would, would yer?" He chuckled. "Well, I b'lieve you pretty near did. Let's 'ave a *dekko*."

He hauled the great carcass over on its face and felt the heart.

"No," he went on, "'e's alive all right—but it wasn't any fault o' yours, me dear."

He tapped the woman on the cheek with the semblance of affection, and she showed her white teeth in a wide smile of pleasure. She was a *mestiza* of some kind, with more than a hint of China at her eyebrow corners; straight and strong, and by no means unpleasing to look on. She rubbed herself against Griggs like a big cat.

"You good man," she said in her monosyllabic English.

A child of three or four, with a skin of the palest gold, ran out from behind the house, and Om-dong reached for it. Griggs looked down at the couple, smiling queerly.

"You ain't a bad old lady, Om-dong," he said awkwardly enough. "That ain't the first time you've 'auled me out of an 'ole. I'll not forget it."

Then he turned to the prostrate Falk.

"Swelp me if I 'adn't forgot!" he ejaculated, and ripped the belt from Salamon's waist. He fumbled with the fastenings, and tipped the Tiger's Eye, a blazing fragment of green light, into the palm of his hand.

"Cripes!" he said, staring.

IV

"GAWD!" breathed Griggs. "If this ain't a knockout!"

He looked at Salamon, limply sprawled at his feet.

"Prospectin', eh, Mr. Clingbottle?" he mused. "Damme, I thought there was somethin' funny about yer. Well, it's easy seen why you weren't so ruddy anxious to be searched."

He rolled the shimmering green light in his hand.

"Cripes!" he ejaculated again. "But you're a beauty!"

The girl Om-dong had come to his elbow and was looking down at the stone with him.

"Plitty," she said, with the indefinable Chinese slurring of the *r*. The fat yellow baby, now accompanied by another, clung

to her *sarong*, and she put a hand down to fondle them.

Griggs was still gaping at the stone as if mesmerized.

"Yus," he said, half to himself. "Plitty it is, old girl. Mighty plitty. Worth a blinkin' sight more'n tuppence, too, if I ain't mistook."

He gazed abstractedly round the untidy clearing, at the littered veranda, and the tumbledown house in which it was his lot to dwell. An odd expression came over his narrow, hard bitten features.

"Yus," he said again, softly. "Mighty plitty, old woman. A way out for 'Enery Griggs. Why, in Singapore now, or even Saigon—"

He fell into a reverie, his eyes distant, while the gorgeous insects hummed about the glade and the two children tumbled puppylike at his feet. Om-dong watched him, a shadow of anxiety on her flat face. This mood was a new one for her lord and master.

"What you do with him?" she asked. "You sell him—get money?"

Griggs came to himself with a start. He met Om-dong's eye almost guiltily.

"Don't know yet, old girl," he said. "Let's think awhile."

Om-dong raked her brood inside the crook of her arm defensively.

"I no like him," she said passionately. "Him bad. Throw him away!"

She went sulkily into the house with the children.

Salamon on the ground stirred; it took more than Om-dong's strong arm to make much impression on his cranium. Griggs bent over him.

"Ho," he said. "You're back again, eh? Well, maybe you're lucky, maybe no. We'll see."

He drew a bucket of water from a barrel by the house.

"Wonder what Mr. Clingbottle'll have to say for himself now. P'raps the little birdies'll have told him a different tale by this time."

He doused Falk's head with the cool liquid, and the big man opened his eyes. Griggs picked up the Winchester once more.

"Careful!" he warned. "No tricks, now!"

The warning went unheeded. Falk sat up, fumbled at his waist, gaped round him dizzily and lurched to his feet with the roar of a wounded lion. Griggs took a quick step closer and thrust the rifle into his face.

"Quit that!" he snapped. "If you're lookin' for the pretty-pretty you was prospectin' over—must say I likes your taste, 'ooever you are—I've got it, an' you ain't goin' to come no more games with me, I'm tellin' you straight. So you can either cool off, soon's you like—or I've plenty o' room for another in me little collection over yonder!"

The rifle muzzle, held steadily at his eyes, seemed to have a sedative effect on Falk, for he fell sullenly silent and regarded Griggs for an interminable minute. They made an ill assorted pair, Salamon towering over the wizened cockney, and excelling him as much in robust health as in size. But there was that about Griggs that made the big man pause—a kind of hectic glow, for all his unhealthy pallor, that obviously covered a swift flare of violence. Salamon was preeminently not a fool in his judgment of his kind, and altered his tactics immediately.

He put his hand to his head.

"I—I am very sick," he said weakly. "Put the gun down, or keep it if you will, but I must rest."

He walked totteringly across to the veranda and sank heavily into a rough chair. Griggs followed him with the rifle, but Falk's head sank on his breast, seemingly in a half swoon, and Griggs lowered the muzzle. Om-dong appeared at the door and looked at Falk with great disfavor.

"He die, I think," she said.

Griggs snorted.

"Not likely," he returned. "You don't kill his sort that way. You 'op inside an' let's 'ave a drop o' rum, an' we'll soon make 'im sit up."

THE TWO men sat opposite each other on the veranda, Griggs with the rifle still across his knees, and Falk slumped in his chair. Between them was the rum bottle, and every now and then Griggs replenished his glass; Falk was watching him steadily, hoping to see effects of the spirit. But Griggs had a toper's head born of long practise. Falk drank little himself, for which the condition of his head and the wound in his shoulder gave him an excellent excuse. He was thinking, thinking hard.

Griggs was considering as well, although warily enough. In his pocket was the Tiger's Eye—he had a shrewd notion of its value from the manner of Falk's struggle to retain it—and in the back of his mind a developing idea, born at sight of the stone. An idea—and difficulties.

Six years back the little cockney had been thrown on these shores, the survivor of a typhoon-obliterated vessel. Before that, for long enough, he had wandered up and down the East, deckhand or trimmer on increasingly decrepit tramp steamers, his routine being discharge, a week's drunk at one or other of the ports, a three months' trick at sea once more, and repeat. But behind that again was London River and the fogs round Limehouse—Jamaica Road with its lights and clanging tramcars, the bar parlors of dockside pubs; his origins were forgotten almost, in the beachcomber's manner, and yet present subliminally always.

Now, with wealth under his hand, the memories grew bright and brighter. Not Singapore or Shanghai for him, but the Thames once again, the beer and the girls and the lights, the cockney seaman's paradise. That kind of heaven hovers just out of reach of plenty of Griggs in the world.

His eye on Salamon, he calculated. This lump of a stone, now—convertible into cash somehow or other, no doubt; but how? Griggs' own idea of converting goods into ready money was a pawnshop or a waterside dealer in junk, neither of which seemed adequate as a channel for the disposition of the Tiger's Eye. He foresaw inquiries—very awkward inquiries. And Falk—Falk would be certain to give him away, anyhow . . .

Very well then, dispose of Falk. Easily enough managed; a twitch on the trigger, and an hour with a spade up in the trees. It had been done before, although not precisely in cold blood like this, but explanations to Inspector Van Tromp might be arranged, as they had been on past occasions of the sort.

He reached out a hand and took another gulp of his rum. Falk was silent, asleep by the look of it. Griggs considered the whole problem once more. No, he thought. No sense in that last—the killing business. This big devil must have some notion of how to get rid of the stone, or he would not have gone to the trouble of acquiring it. Use him, therefore—that was it.

But then, the police? It was as sure as might be that they would be on the trail even now—stones of the size of this one did not vanish without creating a flutter in the dovecotes of Cornelius Van Tromp, and he had a hearty respect for that little officer and his organization; and while he was perfectly ready to take the risk of flight alone, with this big fellow, a wanted man, with him, there would be inevitable trouble—just of the type Griggs disliked most.

Well, there was only one thing for it, then. Keep him here until the hubbub had died down; extract what information he could as to possible channels for the stone's liquidation—if necessary by offering him a share in the proceeds; and then . . . His eye flickered up the silent glade to where his graves lay three in a row. But first he must lull this creature into some sense of security.

Behind half closed eyes Salamon Falk was also calculating. His head was clearer now, and the thoughts that ran in it were not unlike Griggs' own. By some means or other the Tiger's Eye must return to his possession, and quickly; he remembered that launch. Yet escape was out of the question just now, with the police

hard on his trail, as they obviously were. Hide, then; he must find a hiding place; and this little fellow could do that for him if . . . He began to ponder ways and means of ingratiating himself with Griggs.

Of course, he admitted, sooner or later —probably sooner, when the police should have given up the hunt—Griggs would have to go too, the same road as Pellatt. There was no doubt at all on that point. The only question was where and when. Meantime he must play up to the little cockney, sing small, act contrite. He slumped farther down in his chair and assumed a more lugubrious expression than ever, watching Griggs under lowered eyelids.

At length Griggs spoke.

"See 'ere, Mr. Clingbottle," he said, "you an' me's got to 'ave a little talk."

He took the Tiger's Eye from his pocket and surveyed it affectionately.

"This 'ere," he went on, "looks to me like a mighty waluable piece o' goods; but 'ow to realize on it I'm not quite clear."

Falk grunted noncommittally, although his mind leaped at the change in Griggs' tone. The rum, he decided. Well, so much the better.

Griggs went on.

"I was just thinkin'," he said, "that maybe—I don't know, mark you, an' I ain't doin' more'n making' the suggestion —maybe you might 'ave ideas on the subjeck. If you 'ave—" he took the plunge— "why, I ain't sayin' but what we might get together some'ow. O' course, this 'ere stone's mine—that's only natural. But suppose now you 'ad your notions of where it might be got rid of—without too much fuss, I mean—why, I might be prepared to come across very 'andsome for the tip."

Falk said nothing, and the two men's eyes met in a silent struggle. Then Griggs spoke again.

"O' course," he said off hand, "I might do you in, sittin' there. There ain't any one round 'ere who'd be liable to find what was left. But I don't mind tellin' you, confidential-like, that you'd be a deal more use to me alive just now, keepin' in your place, that is, if you've any notions you might like to sell."

He paused to let this sink in.

"Any remarks you'd like to pass?" he continued.

"Halves." Falk's heavy voice gave no hint of the elation he was feeling. Griggs laughed.

"You ain't got an appetite, 'ave yer?" he asked. "Now, you just look 'ere. First off, an' presumin' you 'ave some notions of the sort I've been 'intin' at—presumin' as well that this 'ere bit o' stuff ain't been come by too honest—you'll be mighty glad to find an 'ide-up for awhile, I reckon? Ain't that so?"

Falk showed his teeth in a grin.

"Maybe," he admitted.

"Very well then," went on Griggs. "I don't know as I blame you. These 'ere Java jails ain't none too pleasant, lemme tell you, in case you don't know, an' the police'll 'ang a man as soon as look at him." He took another pull at the rum and went on easily. "Now, 'ow about puttin' it this way? I'll find an 'ide-up for you until the thing's blown over. You'll show me 'ow to turn this 'ere into cash; an' I'll think up a way of gettin' out o' this damned 'ole—leave that to me—and I'll go quarter shares with you. 'Ow's that?"

Falk sighed in apparent reluctance.

"Very well," he said. "Maybe it is the best I can do. I am in your power." He filled his glass. "Let us drink," he said.

Crouched behind the window shade, not a dozen feet from Griggs, the yellow woman caught her breath. She had heard her man—the father of her children, the man whose life she had saved, not once only—plot the unimaginable thing. He would leave her. This bright green stone would take him away from her. She crept away, her face a frozen mask.

THE HEAT was blistering. The sun, swinging straight overhead, made every tree a pool of shadow, and the veranda where the two men sat an oasis of grateful coolness. Griggs watched Om-

dong go down the path, a kettle in her hand, for water from the spring that trickled among the undergrowth overlooking the sea. He continued imparting his plans to Falk.

"We'll 'ave to get out of 'ere, of course," he said. "I dunno just 'ow for the moment, but trust me to think up a way. Macassar's our line, I guess—this 'ere Java's goin' to be too 'ot for us—an' then we'll see."

He sat up suddenly. The yellow woman was returning along the path, and she was in a hurry.

"Wot's all this?" Griggs said sharply.

Om-dong approached, with a scarcely veiled glance of dislike at Falk.

"P'lice boat come," she announced.

"What!" Griggs jumped to his feet. "'Ere," he said hastily to Falk. "We'll 'ave to get you under cover. You come along with me."

He led the way to the back of the house, where there was a crazy leanto, dark and insect haunted.

"You'll 'ave to get in there for a bit," he said. "It ain't Buckin'am Palace, but it's the best there is. An' you lie mighty doggo until I can get rid o' these fellers."

He closed the door on Falk, and bolted it. Then he went back to the front of the house, where Om-dong was standing, moodily drawing patterns in the dust with her toe.

"See 'ere," he said, "the big *tuan's* hidin' from the p'lice. I've got to go down an' meet 'em. You take this, and watch 'im careful." He handed her Falk's automatic. "An' if 'e tries to get away, you shoot him—bang! Savvy?"

Om-dong took the pistol, and her face lighted up.

"Me like shoot him," she announced.

Griggs scowled.

"You do what you're damn well told, old girl," he said, "or you'll get stick."

He threw the rifle over his arm, and was turning away to the beach when a thought seemed to strike him. He pulled the Tiger's Eye out of his pocket.

"You look after this for a bit," he said. "Some'ow I'd sooner not 'ave it on me—not with Mr. Van Tromp in the neighborhood."

The girl took the emerald gingerly, as if afraid it would burn her fingers. She slipped it into her bosom with a grimace.

"Me keep him," she said with emphasis.

Griggs strode off down the path, to where the sound of the launch's engines was already growing clearer.

V

TEN MILES up the coast, with the sun high in the heavens, and after a morning's fruitless patrolling of the empty waters, Cornelius Van Tromp gave up. He snapped an order over his shoulder and the launch's engines dwindled to a murmur; then he came moodily aft.

The girl still slept, wrapped in a cloak, her lashes faintly penciled against pale cheeks. Martin Standish sat by her, and looked up at Cornelius with a lifted eyebrow.

"Well?" he inquired.

The Dutchman shrugged. "A bad business," he said under his breath.

Standish looked overside to where the shore glimmered through the heat mirage.

"I suppose," he said, "there's a faint chance of his—their—being ashore."

Cornelius followed his gaze.

"*Ja*," he nodded. "A bare chance, one or other of them. Scarcely both."

"You'll try it—then?" asked Martin.

Cornelius nodded once more.

"There is nothing else," he said.

The lookout forward leaned over the coaming, his glasses focused ahead. He called another policeman to him, and the pair searched an area of sea with sudden intentness. Then the first man came stumbling aft.

"You will look at this, *Mynheer Inspektor*?" he inquired hastily. "There is something."

There was. Close inshore a cloud of gulls swooped and hovered over a matter that seemed to interest them. Cornelius stared long at it and put down his binoculars. He went back to Standish, with a

word to the engineer on his way, and his face was smitten suddenly grave.

"Martin," he said, "there is going to be a task for you or me—to tell this little lady. And there are things she must not see, you comprehend. I do not know; maybe I should tell her myself, but somehow—you will undertake this, Martin?"

The little Dutchman turned back to the bow again as Standish nodded, and the launch nosed slowly toward the beach and what the fish and birds had left of Anthony Pellatt.

"And now," said Cornelius to himself, "there remains—"

A couple of constables stood guard on the beach over a tragic remnant. The launch, pushed off fifty feet, rode gently among the light waves. In the stern Standish did his tactful best to comfort Evelyn; the sympathetic Hollanders found matters to engage their attention shoreward, and the two were in a kind of enclave of privacy, until Martin rose to his feet, leaving a dry eyed, stunned Evelyn huddled in the cloak.

"Well?" he asked once more, his boyish grin gone, his mouth hard.

Cornelius answered him with that gesture of encouragement and consolation that has made him many friends.

"Listen," he said. "Now it is my duty to find this murdering *schellum* Falk. Ashore he is, somewhere. Where I do not know; but find him I must. And now, what of the little lady? I can not spare the launch to take her to Surabaya."

Standish considerd.

"And the launch is no place for her, anyhow," he observed. "Isn't there a house somewhere handy?"

Van Tromp allowed a smile to appear for a moment.

"This is Java," he said. "Houses do not grow hereabouts as in your New York." He scratched his chin, pondering. Then, "I have it," he announced. "There is a fellow along here—a tough egg—with a wife, or what he calls a wife. He is, among other things, a murderer, as I know well enough; but in other matters he is harmless, and he is a friend of mine—unofficial, you comprehend—and his woman is a good girl. Maybe it would be well to land this poor lady there, and if you would consent to remain with her while I complete this business—"

Martin Standish grasped Cornelius firmly by the hand.

"I am beginning to think," he said solemnly, "that the Dutch have a very remarkable police force."

THERE was a vociferous air driven siren on the launch, and it woke the echoes of the wooded promontory. Cornelius and Standish stood together, making final arrangements.

"He is a—how do you say?—queer fish, this Griggs," he said. "Three times he has killed a man, and three times he comes to me and says, 'I have done you a service, *Mynheer Inspektor!*' and I have looked into it, and Almighty! Every time he speaks the truth. I do not tell this to the world, least of all to old De Groot in Batavia—he would not understand; but this Griggs is not without his uses. At any rate I know where to find him when I want him; and the devils he has killed were the sort it takes me months to clean up—worse than this Falk, if possible."

The siren screamed again, and Griggs strolled down the beach, elaborately unconcerned, Winchester on arm; the sunlight streamed down on his tattered and unprepossessing figure. Cornelius turned to Evelyn.

"You will trust yourself for a few hours to Martin, is it not?" he asked with a twinkle. "He is moderately reliable, I assure you."

The girl smiled sadly up at the American.

"Somehow I think I'd trust Mr. Standish quite far," she said gravely.

"You could do no better," Cornelius assured her with much conviction, and turned away to talk to Griggs as the boat's nose touched the beach, leaving a couple on which restraint had suddenly fallen.

Griggs welcomed Cornelius easily, and with just the proper confidential leer.

"Why, cert'nly," he said, as Van Tromp exposed the situation. "Ask the lydy to step ashore. Om-dong'll look after 'er, or I'll skelp 'er yellow hide off her."

Standish assisted the girl over the side, while Griggs eyed Cornelius carelessly.

"Quite a party you've got, Inspector," he observed. "On the trail of any one?"

"*Ja*," said Cornelius. "There is a murder done, and by a great fellow with a black beard. Robbery, too. We look for him up and down hereabouts. If you should see him, Griggs, remember what that rifle of yours is for. He is dangerous, and maybe you can find room for him up yonder." He nodded uphill at the little graveyard on the bluff.

Griggs looked at him without any expression whatever.

"I ain't seen him," he lied brazenly.

VI

STANDISH helped Evelyn up the steep track from the sea, with the cockney swaggering along in front of them, a ragged figure of disreputability. Van Tromp had hinted that the little fellow was a curiosity, and Martin felt mild amusement at the consequential swagger with which he led the way into his domain. The launch backed out into deep water again, turned west, and sped back up the coast; Cornelius waved a hand in farewell as she went.

At the edge of the clearing Griggs stopped.

"If you'll excuse me," he said, "I'll just slip round the back an' get me wife. She ain't much to look at, but she'll do what you tell 'er. If you an' the lydy'll take a seat on me veranda, I'll be with you in 'alf a jiffy."

He vanished round the corner of the house, and Evelyn sank into the rickety chair. Standish looked down at her.

"You'll be all right here," he said. "The launch'll be back tonight, and we'll be able to get you into civilization again. It's been a dreadful day for you."

"Please, I don't want to talk about it—just yet," Evelyn answered. "I can't realize—"

Standish touched her hand.

"There," he said, as one soothes a child. "You'll sleep now, and we'll talk about it all later. It doesn't look to be much of a place—but I'm here, if that's anything."

The girl colored faintly, and something missed a beat inside Standish.

"Indeed it's a lot," she said very quietly.

Griggs hurried round the house, followed by Om-dong, now relieved of the automatic.

" 'Ere you are, miss," he said hospitably. "You go inside an' lie down, an' if there's anythink you want, why, you just ask for it. 'Ad a rough time, you 'ave, to be sure."

Evelyn rose gratefully, and with a smile at Standish—which made that gentleman's head spin—went into the house. Om-dong followed her, and Griggs turned to the American.

"Sit down," he said, "make yerself at 'ome, mister. There's the rum; sorry it don't run to Scotch an' soda, but you're welcome to what there is of it. I dessay after last night you'll need it."

Standish took a stiff nip of the fiery stuff, and Griggs followed suit.

"I reckon the lydy'll be well enough to travel by tonight," he said, stretching himself out in his chair. "We ain't got much accommodation for the likes of 'er 'ere."

Standish nodded.

"I'm hoping the inspector will be through in a few hours," he said.

" 'E seems put out," Griggs said carelessly. "A murder, eh? An' 'oo was the unlucky gent?"

Something clicked in Standish's brain; this little man was fishing for news. However, he must know, sooner or later; Cornelius would tell him on his return, no doubt. He gave Griggs a brief *précis* of the events of the last thirty hours.

The cockney whistled.

"Whew!" he said. "The damn swine!

An' what did you say 'is name was again —Falk, was it? A big chap with a beard, the inspector told me. Cripes, I must keep a lookout for 'im."

The tone was natural and unaffected. Griggs had served in a school where histrionics properly applied were a frequent necessity if a man would live, and his surprise and indignation were admirably simulated.

"An' this 'ere Tiger's Eye," he went on. "Worth a pot o' money, no doubt?"

Standish smiled at him.

"There'll be a comfortable reward when it's found," he asserted. "But I fancy Van Tromp will have his hands full before that. This man Falk is a bit of a problem, by all accounts."

"Must be," said Griggs, his mind on the leanto fifty feet away, hidden by the house. "Wouldn't care to meet him on a dark night, now, would yer?"

Standish laughed.

"From what Van Tromp told me, Mr. Griggs," he said, "I don't imagine you're much frightened of any one, dark night or no. You've quite a reputation with the inspector, you know."

"Ho!" Griggs grinned. "So 'e's been tellin' you about me, 'as 'e? Well, there ain't much to tell; but a man's got to be pretty fly to live 'ereabouts. I ain't scared o' very much, an' that's a fact."

"Well, let's hope you run across this Falk," Standish said. "You seem to be just the man for him."

"If I do 'appen across 'im," observed Griggs piously, "Gawd 'elp 'im!"

He rose to his feet, stretching lazily.

"Now, if you'll forgive me, mister," he said, "I've a few odd things to attend to round about the place. Me butler's on an 'oliday, I'm sorry to say, an' me first footman give me notice t'other day. So I 'ave to look out for meself. You sit there awhile an' smoke; an' remember what the rum's for, won't yer?"

He swaggered off nonchalantly, rifle on arm. Standish looked after him. Van Tromp was right, he thought—a tough egg . . .

SALAMON FALK sat behind the closed door in silence and darkness. He had overheard the arrival of Standish and Evelyn and the murmur of voices; suspicion flooded over him, and did not in any way improve his state of mind. Exactly what the arrival meant he was in no position to conjecture, but he connected it instantly with the murder, and the thought was not a pleasant one. In any event he would have to remain where he was some time longer, and meantime Griggs—he ground his teeth with fury at the situation.

The hut in which he was perforce confined was close and stuffy; his head throbbed and the bullet wound in his shoulder, slight though it was, began to make itself annoying. Thirst commenced to worry him as well, and he was considering the possibilities of trying to attract the yellow woman's attention when there was a step outside and Griggs appeared at the door.

He came in, shut it and sat down cautiously.

"Well, Mr. Salamon Bloomin' Falk," he said acridly, "so it's murder, eh?"

The big man laughed uneasily.

"And if it is?" he said.

"Oh, a murder ain't nothin', o' course," Griggs replied with elaborate sarcasm. "We don't trouble our 'eads about a little thing like that—not we! But there's some one else'll be troublin' 'is head all right, an' that's Mr. Van Tromp, an' if 'e gets yer, you say yer prayers, for you'll need 'em."

"I must stay here," Falk muttered. "They will go away—and you would not give me up."

"No?" inquired Griggs. "That's as it may be. Depends on 'ow you be'ave yerself. Don't you fergit we've a little bargain between us."

"I am not likely to forget," Falk said slowly. "I am trapped. Who are they outside?"

"One's the girl," said Griggs. "She's restin' up now; it don't look as if you done her any good, murderin' her old man.

'Tother's a young feller, an' a likely young chap at that. 'E's armed, too, Mr. Falk, an' what's more 'e don't love you not one bit. So don't you try no monkey tricks about runnin' away, or 'e'll drill yer, or if 'e don't, I will."

He thrust his face forward, chin protruding viciously.

"So you'll do what you're told, now on," he said. "I've got yer, trapped if you like, an' by cripes I'll give you up if there's any funny business!"

Falk glowered at him.

"Without me you can do nothing," he growled.

Griggs fingered his rifle suggestively.

"Ho, can't I?" he sneered. "Can't I? If you're not damn careful, me murderin' johnny, it's without you altogether I'll be in about two seconds—an' no loss neither!"

Falk cringed immediately. This attitude did not suit his book.

"You mistake," he said. "I did not mean to annoy. My head is bad."

"You an' your 'ead!" Griggs mocked. "I've a blinkin' good mind to knock it off for you. Take a pull on yerself, you fool, an' think what's to be done now."

"The police will be here."

"Course they will, y'fool. Van Tromp won't leave much without a search." He stopped, thinking. "Now you listen 'ere, Falk," he said. "I ain't got no cause to love you, Gawd knows, but you'll 'ave yer uses, as I've said before. An' I'll get you out o' this. There's a couple o' *praus* on the beach below 'ere—they ain't much, but better'n nothin' at all—an' once we c'n get the police out o' the way, it'll be all right. There's a bird called Serif—an' 'ot lot 'e is, but 'e'll do our business for us—runs a kind of a bumboat up an' down outside 'ere. 'E's really smugglin' most of 'is time, but 'e looks innocent enough; an' 'e should be passin' along, maybe five miles out, early in the mornin'.

"Now, we'll paddle out to 'im in a *prau*, an' make 'im give us a cast downcoast to Bali—that's a good spot to lie doggo in for awhile. An' then we'll see. Understand?"

Falk grunted, and Griggs went out abruptly, closing the door after him. Across in the kitchen Om-dong was working over a cookpot, her face expressionless. Griggs walked over to her.

FROM his chair in the veranda Standish could see the whole of the glade, bright with flowers and checkered with the sunlight through the leaves. Nature was unbelievably beautiful that afternoon; but the young man found little in nature to distract him from his thoughts.

"There's something queer about this business," he was saying to himself. "This little guy knows a lot more than he seems to. He's a whole deal too good to be true, somehow or other. And yet he's more or less in cahoots with Van Tromp, and Cornelius is nobody's fool."

He knocked his pipe out and put it in his pocket.

"Wonder how Evelyn is," he mused, and rose to his feet. "Let's go and find out, anyhow."

There was no sound from the house behind him. The place was small and cramped—three rooms at the most, he decided—and somewhere within the girl was asleep by now, probably. Better leave her alone for awhile; sometime that evening Cornelius and the launch were due, and then was time enough to disturb her. He stood at the corner of the house, idly watching one of Om-dong's children grubbing in the dust.

Then he pricked up his ears as voices came to him. There were two of them—both men's. Whence they emanated he could not see, but they rose and fell steadily as he listened; the words were indistinguishable.

Two men? Then who was the second? Griggs was one; he could catch the cockney's high pitched intonation; but the other was a deeper bass, a word thrown in here and there, as if in interrogation.

Standish slipped back to his chair, pulled out his pipe and began to smoke furiously.

OM-DONG looked up at Griggs as he came in, and a peculiar expression flitted across her face.

"You want something?" she asked sullenly.

Griggs took no notice of her mood; his mind was elsewhere.

"You 'urry up an' take in some food to the big *tuan*," he ordered, "an' some rum. An' you mind there ain't no one sees you doin' it. 'E's hidin' from the p'lice, as I told yer—an' if the police *tuan* comes round 'ere, you don't know nothin' about it, see?"

The girl took the Tiger's Eye out of her *sarong*.

"You want him?" she asked. Griggs handled the great stone lovingly.

"No," he said. "You keep it. It ain't anyways safe for me to 'ave it about, not just yet. I'll take it again when the p'lice has gone."

Om-dong suddenly faced him, level eyed, as Griggs had never seen her before.

"You leave me?" she asked directly. "I think so. Take him—" she pointed to the emerald—"sell him for plenty money, leave Om-dong, leave babies. Let 'um starve. Go away. Forget Om-dong, forget babies. You good man once—bad man now."

Griggs regarded her open mouthed. This was something altogether outside his calculations. Compunction was not a characteristic virtue of his, but—hell, there was something in what the woman was saying.

Across his vision floated once more the lights and happy turmoil of the Jamaica Road; the little public he would rent, the racing chatter, the football games to watch on a Saturday, the yarn spinning in his bar parlor after closing hours with a select bunch of cronies. Om-dong in her *sarong*, greasy, untidy, unsavory, looked at him wide eyed, her babies clinging about her feet on the slovenly kitchen floor of bare earth; and Griggs lied, to the one person outside Cornelius Van Tromp on whom his lies were ineffective.

"Woddyer talkin' about, silly?" he asked, slipping an arm round her. "Been out in the sun, ain't yer? I ain't goin' to leave yer—not me! Why, I'm too damn fond of yer, old lydy."

He began to make clumsy love to her, but Om-dong retreated from him doubtfully; she had heard him—her man—plotting to do just this thing he denied. Her world was in fragments, and there was no picking them up.

VII

EVELYN PELLATT woke when the sun was streaming level through the tree tops, and looked about her dizzily. She was lying on a ramshackle cot, in a room with walls of palm thatch, on which frightful looking insects crawled. The heat was stifling, and she was very thirsty; her head ached splittingly, and as she gradually regained consciousness the events of the night before rushed back at her in a flood. Murder—murder deliberate and cold blooded: her father gone from her; herself alone in this place with only strangers to comfort her. For awhile she gave way to quiet tears; then Standish came to her mind, and she found herself smiling at thought of his honest red hair and lanky frame; there was a sense of security with him close to her.

The door opened and Om-dong came in with a pitcher of water. She grinned cheerfully at Evelyn as she set it down by the bed.

"You some better now?" she asked. "Drink water, and I bring you food, eh?"

Evelyn drank and made shift to swallow a few mouthfuls of the coarse food the yellow woman brought her. She sat up and patted her hair. Then a thought struck her, and she turned to Om-dong.

"Mr. Standish—where is he?" she asked.

Om-dong stared at her uncomprehendingly.

"No understand," she said.

"The gentleman, the man that came with me," said Evelyn slowly.

A light broke on Om-dong.

"Your man?" she asked. "He outside, talk to my man."

A spasm of emotion flitted across her snub features. There was the low murmur of voices to be heard through the open window, much as Standish had heard the voices of Griggs and Falk an hour before. Om-dong pursued the subject.

"Your man he good man?" she asked naively.

Evelyn laughed in sheer amusement.

"Mr. Standish isn't my man," she said. "I don't know."

Om-dong stared at her round eyed.

"He not your man?" she asked in astonishment. "Then what you do with him?"

Evelyn laughed again.

"That would take a good deal of explaining," she said.

But Om-dong was started on a mystery now, and did not intend to give it up.

"Who your man?" she asked pertinaciously. "He not here?"

"No," confessed Evelyn. "He not here, nor anywhere," she added.

Om-dong shook her head doubtfully at the thought.

"You no got man?"

"I'm afraid not," Evelyn said.

"I got man," went on Om-dong. "He good man once. Now gone bad man. He go 'way from me."

Evelyn murmured sympathetically, and Om-dong, sensing a kindred mind, developed her grievance.

"He get money," she said. "Big man with black beard come here; tell my man he go away with him. So he leave me, I think, and Om-dong and babies starve."

One of the children had run in to its mother, and Evelyn put her hands to her temples and strove to clear her brain.

"Big man with black beard."

Surely, surely there couldn't be two men answering to that graphic description in this tiny nook of the Java seas? Coincidence wouldn't go that far. And the yellow woman's man, and the money he was to get?

Swiftly the suspicion took shape, and with its growth came the desire to find Standish. There was danger here, danger for both of them. Cautiously she probed a little further.

"Where is the man?" she asked. "The man with the black beard?"

Om-dong answered at once.

"He here," she said, pointing over her shoulder. "I kill him, I think."

Evelyn rose to her feet.

"Take me to Mr. Standish," she said quickly. "I—I must speak to him."

Griggs was dilating to Standish on the drawbacks of life on the Java beach, and the general desirability of a return to the joys of Western civilization. Jamaica Road had even entered his discourse, and the American was watching him keenly, trying to analyze what lay behind his talk. First, there was the unanswered query raised by the second man's voice he had heard; then, on top of that, came Griggs' obvious desire to be away from this atmosphere of squalor. To connect the two was the task he set himself, while the cockney, sprawled in his chair, expanded himself in self-commiseration.

"It's an 'ell of a life," he was saying, "an' you'd be sick of it if you was me. Six years—six bloomin' years hangin' round 'ere, without a shirt to me back, livin' on bananas as often as not, an' not a ruddy soul to talk to, excep' Om-dong 'ere. I'm fed up with it all, but b'lieve me, 'twon't be long now. I'm off."

He checked himself suddenly as Evelyn came out on to the veranda. Standish jumped to his feet and handed her to his chair, while Griggs rose and stood awkwardly, the inevitable rifle in hand.

"An' 'ow d'you feel now, miss?" he asked.

Evelyn reassured him, and sat silent in the chair, while Martin Standish fussed about her with the air of one occupied with magnificent affairs. In a moment she caught his eye, and the shadow of a frown contracted her brow. Standish looked at her fixedly for a moment, said nothing, and went on with his fussing.

Griggs rose.

"'Ere," he said, egregiously tactful, "if you'll forgive me, I'll leave you for awhile. I've a little matter to attend

to, an' I've no manner of doubt," he added archly, "that you'll be good comp'ny out 'ere!"

He vanished into the house, chuckling, and Martin turned to Evelyn with a smile.

"He's smart enough, at that," he said lightly. "Good company is right."

At sight of Evelyn's face he fell grave once more; she sat up straight in the chair and spoke in a hurried whisper.

"Listen," she said, "do you know whom he's got here?"

Standish looked at her hard for a moment and then nodded solemnly.

"So you think so, too?" he said.

"I'm sure of it," Evelyn replied. "The woman told me so just now."

"Whew!" said Martin. "So that's the little game, eh? That's why he's talking so big about going home."

"She says he's leaving her," corroborated Evelyn. "And Salamon Falk is here somewhere or other; so is the Tiger's Eye, I think."

Martin looked about him in the rapidly fading light, and consulted his watch.

"Wonder how long it'll be before friend Cornelius turns up," he said, half to himself. "Something's got to be done, and done pretty quick, or we'll have the pair of them scoot out of this on us."

He put a hand behind him, reaching for the automatic in his pocket. Evelyn leaned forward and caught his arm.

"Don't be silly," she said earnestly. "What chance have you against the two of them? They're both armed, and unless we're very lucky one or the other of them is watching us at this minute."

Standish got up.

"Heavens," he said, this time in undisguised idolatry. "You improve every minute. But anyhow, whatever you think about my having a try at them, I'm not going to leave you here within range of Falk or this fellow Griggs. Follow me —and pretend you've never heard of either of them. We'll go down to the beach, innocent-like, and hold a lodge of prayer for the return of the estimable Cornelius."

GRIGGS walked restlessly up and down. He had reassured Falk with his talk of escape, but the strain was beginning to tell even on his own reckless composure. There was Cornelius to be bluffed yet, he thought uneasily, and that was no job to be joyful about.

From the window Om-dong watched him. Her simple mind could travel no further than that her man was going to leave her, that the green stone she was still carrying was the means that would rob her of him, and that the black bearded *tuan* inside was mostly responsible. She knew, too, the influences that were calling Griggs; they were very strong, these strands that bound the white *tuans* to their own; not easily broken. And the white woman she had just seen—it was she and her likes that were in reality dragging at her man. She frowned.

Turning, she looked at the two children, asleep on their rough cot. Then she thrust a hand into her bosom and drew out the Tiger's Eye. This was the key to things; without this her man would not be tempted, not plan to desert her. And the big *tuan* had brought it, a disturber of the peace. Let the big *tuan* take it away again. The idea hit her suddenly, and she smiled in the dark room.

Griggs would beat her, of course, "cut the liver out of her," as he phrased it. The worst beating of her life, she could look forward to. But better that and keep her man, than have him go back to the West, to the great towns people told of, and to the white women there.

She stood in the gloom, making up her mind. Then she opened the door softly and slipped across to where Salamon Falk lurked so impatiently.

A hundred yards away, under the tall trees on the promontory overlooking the sea, Martin Standish and Evelyn strained anxious ears for the engines of Van Tromp's launch. A big moon was dropping low over the island behind them, and in an hour it would be velvety dark. There was no sound, except the chirrup of night insects in the undergrowth, and the

splash of the waves beneath them—now and again a great moth hovered with beating wings about their heads and flickered off into the shadow.

They said little; there was little to say. Danger had brought them together, and for once danger was welcome.

VIII

TO SALAMON FALK, cooped in the stuffy leanto, came a sudden solution of his riddle.

Since Griggs had held him up in the afternoon and lifted the Tiger's Eye from his unwilling clutches, he had been torturing his crooked mind for a way out. He had sung small, eaten humble pie at the hands of the little cockney with the ready ability of the seasoned ruffian that he was. But still, beyond an arrangement in whose stability he put no trust whatever, nothing had come of it; nothing that would get him out of this, with the Tiger's Eye in his company. His mouth watered as he thought of the great stone; vultures of the type of Falk are not readily driven from their prey. And he pondered ceaselessly on what was certainly the only chance of getting clear, the man, Serif, Griggs had spoken of, and his craft to be offshore that night. But there was no benefit in that knowledge; the Tiger's Eye was with Griggs, and first he must lay hands on it. Escape without it was a mockery.

And yet, to Salamon, mere life meant hope, and he had been in worse fixes before. So he sat huddled in the gloom, savagely chewing over one scheme after another, his mind set on the prize for which he had killed once and was perfectly ready to kill again.

And then the door opened quietly and swiftly, and closed again in the same manner.

Falk rose—in a hurry. In his manner of existence one is not caught off one's feet, as an axiom. Whatever surprises fortune may have lying in wait for you must find you erect, ready to deal with them. Otherwise you don't last long. And, unarmed or no, Salamon was not allowing any one near him in that sticky darkness without being on his toes.

"*Wie da?*" he whispered hoarsely, dropping into his native German.

Om-dong caught his wrist.

"*Tuan*, it is me," she said in equally low tones.

"You?" Falk's voice betrayed his surprise. "What do you want here?"

Instinctively he kept his distance from her, but she thrust herself close to him.

"Listen, *tuan*," she said hurriedly. "You like go away from here?"

Falk caught his breath in surprise, but remained silent, and Om-dong went on—

"I open door; you take plitty stone—go away—not come back."

In her sketchy, spasmodic manner she murmured the words to Salamon, and thrust the Tiger's Eye into his great hand.

Falk hesitated, nonplused by the sudden turn of events. Then suspicion flooded in on him once more, and he caught Om-dong in his great grip.

"What do you want?" he asked roughly. "There is some treachery here. Where is your man Griggs?"

"He outside," said Om-dong coolly. "No know, no want him know. He stay here with me. You go!"

A light broke on Salamon.

"Ah," he said. "So that is it? You want to keep him?"

Om-dong assented passionately.

"He no leave me," she said. "You go, or maybe I kill you!" The muzzle of an automatic—Falk's own—pressed against his breast for a moment in the dark, and Salamon recoiled a little. From very bitter experience he knew all about firearms in women's hands.

"Little she-cat!" he muttered, considering. Then temptation overcame caution and, with the picture of Serif in his smuggling craft before his eyes he spoke again.

"Good," he said. "Let me out and I will go. But first I must have the pistol . . ."

"Outside, I give you," said Om-dong. "Come!"

She opened the door the merest crack,

disclosing the moonlit clearing. Griggs was nowhere in sight, and Falk's way seemed clear.

"Come," she said again, and he slipped out after her.

"Now you go," she said hotly. "You run like hell. And you never come back here any more!"

She thrust the pistol into his hand and was gone.

AN HOUR earlier, with the very last of the light, Cornelius Van Tromp stooped over tracks in the sand of the beach. They—his policemen and he—had endured a weary and so far profitless hunt in the intolerable sun, insect bitten, sweating profusely and tortured by thirst. Methodically Van Tromp had started where Pellatt's body lay on the sand, and with the intuition that was part of his police make-up, had trailed back eastward toward Griggs' home—followed in fact Salamon Falk's own flight of the morning. On a quest like this the dapper little inspector spared neither himself nor his underlings, and larded the lean earth with the best of them, giving his grinning constables a demonstration of the profane possibilities of the Dutch language most of the time, but pursuing the hunt, as his manner was, with indefatigable persistence.

Now he stood looking at the footprints, much in the manner of a fat and official Crusoe.

"A-ha," he remarked. "So! We grow warm."

He turned to one of his constables.

"Meintjes," he said, "what do you make of it?"

The man, a lantern jawed fellow noted for his ability as a woodsman, knelt and inspected the footprints thoroughly.

"This spoor, *Mynheer Inspektor*," he pronounced, "was made by a big man, walking in light shoes. He was tired, but in a great hurry. He was not a Malay, but a white man. He was—"

"Enough," Cornelius stopped him. "Are the tracks fresh?"

"Within a few hours, *Mynheer Inspektor*."

Von Tromp pulled a whistle out of his pocket and sounded it. The launch, which had been idling along offshore, swung in toward them, the party piled on board, and Cornelius had the craft worked up to full speed, running eastward again for the promontory. He sat in the stern, once more deep in thought.

After awhile he shook his head.

"Almighty!" he exclaimed softly. "I wonder!"

The constables in the cockpit looked at one another knowingly, as their chief exploded softly into a series of recondite and ornamental Dutch oaths. They knew him well enough to be sure that trouble would be forthcoming for some one.

In fact, the object of Cornelius' fulminations was one Griggs. He was an expert at putting two and two together.

And meanwhile Griggs continued his nervous meditations for ten minutes or so, their subject matter being entirely the precise lie he was to tell Van Tromp on that officer's expected arrival. It was a matter, thought the cockney, of getting the inspector sufficiently, and only sufficiently, interested in Evelyn's state of health to start with her back to headquarters. Given even three hours clear of the lot of them he and Falk could make a bolt for it in the *prau*, and trust to luck and the darkness to enable them to get clear of land before dawn.

He never for a moment suspected that even as he puzzled for ways and means, his own woman was in whispered converse with Salamon within twenty yards of him, and that down on the promontory Standish and Evelyn were similarly engaged—in the intervals of other conversation not to be here recorded—in plotting his undoing. Matters were developing awkwardly for the little man, but nothing told him of their trend.

Finally, as if an idea had struck him, he strolled off among the trees, took a steep track that pitched abruptly to the shore, and stood looking down at the highly unseaworthy old *prau* that lay at the

water's edge. In his deckhand days, years before, he had learned the handling of a boat, and he could trust himself in this frail thing a certain distance; but ten miles offshore, as like as not, and in a seaway with this crazy thing—and with the big Salamon as cargo—that was another matter altogether.

He stood scratching his head doubtfully; then he turned up the path again.

And down at the tip of the promontory, Standish suddenly pricked up his ears.

"Listen!" he whispered.

Very faint and far off, the merest breath over the murmur of the sea, the sound of the launch's engines came to them.

The American got to his feet.

"Now," he said, "this is orders, please. I don't want you in this mixup. There's liable to be trouble up yonder, when I've spilled an earful or two to Cornelius. He'll wade in and arrest the lot, I fancy, and Salamon at any rate's going to show fight. So there'll be nasty little bits of lead flying about, and so on, and you're not in on that business. You stay here like a good girl—hide if you like—until the show's over, and then I'll come and fetch you."

"And what about you?" asked Evelyn indignantly. "You're going up with them, I suppose."

"Of course," said Standish. "I signed on with old Cornelius for this job, and I must see it through with him."

Evelyn's voice was almost inaudible.

"I—I wish you wouldn't," she said. "Let the police do it; it's their business." She broke off in a sob.

Martin suddenly took her by the shoulders in the dark.

"See here," he demanded. "What do you mean by that?"

The girl was silent—and Standish did what any man would have done under the conditions. The launch raced nearer.

Five minutes later, with the searchlight glittering from the little vessel's bow, Standish put Evelyn from him gently.

"Stay here," he said. "I'll come back."

He ran down the path to meet Van Tromp.

IX

SALAMON FALK stood for a moment irresolute outside the leanto. Then he slipped quickly into the shadows of the trees and halted to prospect.

There was neither sound nor sign of human beings. Om-dong had vanished into the house, and Griggs was not in sight. As for the other two, Falk had no indications of their whereabouts. Step by step, moving with the caution of a hunter, and with the pistol in his hand, he moved away from the house. The moon was down by now, and among the tree trunks the darkness was patchy and deceptive; little clearings were almost gray in the starlight, and he was compelled to walk very warily in order to keep in the shadow. He had, he knew, to move downhill; and then, once at the sea's edge, it would be merely a matter of keeping along the shoreline until he hit on the *prau*.

Twenty yards—forty—fifty he went; and then his breath caught in his throat and he checked, glaring wildly about him. As it had come to Standish and Evelyn, so the murmur came to him—the murmur of the white police launch, with its armed men, its vengeance and the end of adventures for Salamon Falk. For an instant he stood still; then, in a frenzy of haste, and with precautions thrown to the winds, he turned and crashed downhill.

A figure suddenly rose before him—Griggs. The cockney, staggered by the impact and by surprise, cursed once and fumbled with his rifle. Salamon, his great mouth agape, his breath coming furiously, a picture of mad dog desperation, flung up the automatic and fired at him point blank. Griggs threw up his arms, spun round and collapsed; and Falk, leaping across his body, raced on for the sea.

The shot, echoing through the quiet aisles of the tree trunks, shattered the tension of the night. Down at the shore, Standish, with the launch not a quarter of a mile out, forgot Van Tromp and all his works, and fled back up the rocky path

again. In the house, Om-dong—crouching in a corner awaiting the beating that was to be hers—put her hand to her heart, scrambled to her feet and fled out into the glade. And Evelyn, huddled under her tree, warmly expectant of her lover's return, sprang up, and stood, hand to mouth, blood drained from her face—straight in the path of the rushing Falk.

Salamon barely checked in his stride. His brain was clearing now with danger and excitement, and the idea flashed across it with the speed of light. A witness to remove! A pawn to bargain with! He swept his great arms round Evelyn, throttled her cry with one hand, and plunged down the rocky side of the promontory, leaving the launch and Standish behind him.

The tiny headland, at the base of which Griggs' house had been built, thrust itself into the sea for maybe a hundred yards. At each side of its root was a tiny bay, into one of which Van Tromp was furiously heading in the launch; it was part of Salamon's luck that in the other lay the decrepit *prau* over which Griggs had so recently pondered. Salamon, Evelyn in his arms, staggered out into the open, for the moment hidden from the sight of any one; a rapid glance about him discovered the *prau*, dimly visible against the pale beach sand; and he made for it at full speed.

As he did so Evelyn fought free for an instant and gave a gasping cry. Falk halted long enough to tap her scientifically on the head with his pistol—he found this no time for gallantries—and laid her in the bottom of the *prau*, limp and unconscious. Then he thrust the rocking vessel fifty feet from shore and settled down to frantic paddling over the dark water.

Behind him he heard the shrilling of Van Tromp's whistle, shouts, and the silencing of the launch's engines. He was just in time, and only just.

For half an hour he strove desperately, the corded muscles standing out on his forearms, his breath coming in sobbing gasps. The wound in his shoulder pained him, but minor injuries were not troubling Salamon Falk in that emergency. In his pocket he carried an anodyne powerful enough to drug any pain or inconvenience—the Tiger's Eye itself.

He had a start, and a good one. The last thing the police were likely to credit him with was an escape to seaward; and there was no one to notice the missing *prau*, save perhaps the stupid yellow woman. Griggs might have told tales, of course, but Griggs was—or so at least he might hope. And the fool policemen would spend half the night combing the woods, by which time he, Salamon Falk, would have had a very good prospect of making connection with the obliging Serif. He looked down at the girl.

THERE was a slight swell; nothing to trouble a handy man with a paddle, and Falk had learned in an excellent school all there was to know of managing a *prau*. He jockeyed the small craft in and out of the waves cleverly enough; yet now and then a splash came overside, and it was one of these, or their steady succession, that aroused Evelyn.

She stirred, put a hand to her head and moaned faintly. Salamon stopped paddling and looked down at her.

"You are better?" he asked, with a touch of mockery.

Evelyn stared about her, at the heaving *prau*, the dark water, and Falk's figure, ominous in the stern.

"Oh-h-h!" she choked. "Wh-what are you going to do?"

Falk laughed with ferocious humor.

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing at all, little lady—if you behave. If not—" he broke off and went on with his paddling.

A wave of terror swept over Evelyn, to be succeeded, oddly enough, by one of pure wrath. She mastered the shaking in her voice, and addressed Falk in what she fondly believed were tones of command.

"Turn round and put me ashore!" she said. "How—how dare you? Put me ashore at once."

Falk went on swinging his enormous shoulders into the paddle.

"A-ha!" he rumbled. "A liddle spitfire, eh? Maybe another tap—a gentle tap, like the last—and you would learn—"

"What do you want?" Evelyn asked furiously.

"Want?" Falk repeated. "Many things I want. Just now be silent. Later on you will see."

"I won't be silent! Put me ashore—at once!" The girl's voice rose to a high note of hysteria. Falk put his paddle down.

"Be silent, you!" he said roughly. "You understand me? You will do what you are told!"

He scrambled across the clumsy thwarts and seized her brutally. Evelyn struck at him frenziedly, her fingers meeting in the coarse hair of his beard. Then unconsciousness flooded her again, and she turned limp in his grasp. Falk dropped her without another word and went back to his paddling.

The estimable trader Serif stood at the clumsy tiller of his vessel as she lurched slowly over the monotonous swell. He was not a pretty gentleman, being from Celebes originally and with a good deal of Sea Dyak in his composition; nor was his craft overly respectable to look at, being a minor example of the great genus junk—square sterned, sloping bowed, and with the untidy slatted sails of the type.

Serif wallowed up and down the coast, as Griggs had hinted, trading in various commodities—notably spirits—and turning pennies, none of them too obtrusively honest.

A dim and smoky lantern hung at his poop and reflected itself on the slow eddies from the boat's stern, and on Serif's own unlovely countenance. He hummed a dismal, minor chant as he leaned on the tiller, while a couple of his crew snored a spasmodic accompaniment, asleep on the cluttered deck. His mind was on matters of trade, and he let the junk laze along before the wind, making at most a couple of knots—a very convenient speed for meditation.

A sudden bellow surprisingly proceeding out of the darkness roused him in a flash and, kicking his watch on deck awake, he peered overside. The attendant demons leaned over withim, each with a rusty firearm in evidence; and this was the spectacle that greeted Salamon Falk as he thrust the *prau* alongside.

Serif took him in dubiously—the tattered great man, the piratical beard in the lanternlight, and the rickety, leaking *prau*. Then his face changed as he saw Evelyn.

"What you want?" he inquired in pidgin coast English.

"Let me aboard," said Falk. "I come from a friend of yours—Griggs."

At mention of the cockney's name Serif relaxed into something approaching affability.

"Huh?" he grunted. "You come on board, mister. And what is that?"

He pointed to the unconscious Evelyn, and simultaneously a great and brilliant notion struck Falk. Picking the girl up in his arms he stepped over the side, and as he did so he kicked the aged *prau* under water after him.

"About her," he replied to Serif, "I have a proposition to make to you."

X

VAN TROMP caught at Martin's shoulder.

"Steady!" he commanded, using his parade voice. "Tell me again—and slowly. Falk is here, you say?"

"Was. And Evelyn—Miss Pellatt—I left her not ten minutes ago, there in the trees. There was a shot—and she's gone."

Van Tromp whistled thoughtfully.

"Meintjes," he ordered, turning to the launch, "take four men and search this strip of wood. There is a house yonder. Meet us there in fifteen minutes. And you have authority to shoot, if necessary."

He took Standish by the arm again.

"Now," he said quietly, "*ek sal'n plaan maak*—there is a hurry, but many things are lost by too much hurry. You left the girl in the wood here?"

"Not ten minutes ago, I tell you, Cor-

nelius. Now—" he threw out his hands—"she's simply vanished."

"And you say she learned that Falk was in the house, hidden?" Standish nodded. "And you did also? Almighty! I have a sweet talk to come with friend Griggs, yet."

He began to walk up the path toward the house.

"Almighty!" he said again suddenly. "And where is my little friend in all this?"

"Search me," said Standish. "It's an hour since I saw him."

Cornelius muttered to himself as they hurried up the path:

"There is something odd here. Very odd. It is not somehow like Griggs."

With much circumspection they approached the silent dwelling in the trees, and after cautious survey moved tiptoe over the veranda. Cornelius produced a tiny flash lamp and switched it through the door. Inside, Om-dong's two children still slept peacefully; but otherwise the place was deserted.

"Hum!" Cornelius mused to himself once more. "Now where— Did Griggs have any talk with you?" he suddenly asked Standish.

"He certainly did," said Martin. "Said he was getting out of this—back to civilization, he seemed to be thinking of; London seemed to be his idea. Besides, his woman told Ev—Miss Pellatt he was leaving her."

Cornelius chuckled.

"*Ja,*" he said. "That would be the temptation, of course. I think I see maybe a little of it. But where is Falk, and where is the girl, and where is the stone? Together, Martin, unless I am an old fool."

The constable Meintjes hurried across the glade and saluted.

"*Mynheer Inspektor,*" he announced, "we have found one of them—the Englishman Griggs."

"Dead?" inquired Cornelius.

"Alive, mynheer, but sharply enough wounded. His woman is with him—"

Van Tromp turned to Standish.

"We will go and see," he observed. "As I told you, I have a sweet little talk to come with Mynheer Griggs—if he can talk, that is. And maybe he can tell us things."

The cockney lay outstretched where he had fallen, with Om-dong crouched at his side. Falk's bullet had struck him at the base of the neck, and he was weak from loss of blood; but no artery seemed to have been touched, and he was conscious. The yellow woman had roughly bound the wound with a strip from her *sarong;* now she sat motionless and repentant, eyeing her man intently.

Griggs summoned up a twisted grin to greet Van Tromp.

" 'Ullo!" he said indomitably. "Nearly got me that time, eh?"

Van Tromp stooped over him.

"What is all this, my little man?" he inquired with dangerous affability. "I hear strange tales. Is it time for me to begin to pry into some of your little doings hereabouts? You were thinking of leaving us, I believe."

Griggs came as near blushing as his native tendencies and loss of blood would permit.

"Yus," he said. "I s'pose you'll 'ave it in for me now. Tried to skip out, I did —an' got doublecrossed by this Falk. An' by Om-dong 'ere, too. I'll skin 'er alive when I'm on me feet." He glared at the yellow woman with the suspicion of a twinkle behind his fierceness. "She's a little devil all right—not but what she's told me a thing or two, lyin' 'ere, that I 'adn't exackly thought of for meself . . ."

Van Tromp interrupted him.

"And Falk?" he asked.

Griggs scowled.

"Om-dong 'ere gave 'im the stone—to get rid of 'im. 'E plugged me, runnin' down for the beach. An' now I reckon you'll find 'im somewhere offshore in an old *prau,* lookin' for a feller called Serif I told 'im of. You'll know the bird, Inspector?"

Van Tromp's face darkened.

"*Ja,*" he said. "I know him."

Griggs reared himself on an elbow and looked at Standish.

"Why," he said, "where's that nice little bit o' a girl I seen you playin' round with so gay, mister?"

Van Tromp answered for Martin.

"With Salamon Falk and Serif," he said, and there was no jocosity in his tone. Griggs' jaw dropped.

"Gawd!" was all he could get out.

Van Tromp turned from him abruptly.

"Down to the launch," he ordered the constables. "And for you," he addressed Om-dong, "you will care for your man till I return. I have many things to say to him."

The woman smiled in the darkness and laid a hand on Griggs' forehead. The cockney grimaced comically at Van Tromp's retreating back.

"Yus," he said with rueful emphasis. "I'll bet you 'ave!"

XI

"AND SO," concluded Falk, "the matter is easily settled. You will set me ashore in Borneo; and for your trouble you shall take—" he glanced down at Evelyn—"the woman. Keep her yourself, if you wish it, or she would fetch a good price in the right market."

He leered at Serif, and that estimable gentleman regarded him more dubiously than ever.

"This no good, I think," he objected. "No can do."

Falk cursed inwardly. Here was an unexpected obstacle.

"Why?" he asked. "There is no danger, and the woman is worth many guilders."

Serif nodded agreement.

"Plenty much," he said. "But plenty much dangerous, too, eh?" He stared suggestively at Falk. "P'lice he come, I think."

Falk laughed artistically.

"No, they do not know that I am here," he said. "They hunt for me on shore."

"Griggs?" Serif asked carelessly. "Him no come with you?"

"No." Falk hesitated the merest instant.

"Him no tell p'lice you here?" went on Serif.

Falk met him with a steady negative this time, but the damage was done.

"Him dead, eh?" Serif focused his terrifying squint hard on Falk.

"Maybe," shrugged Salamon. "What of it?"

Serif paused, considering. The vessel lurched along over the swell, creaking and groaning in every plank. At his feet Evelyn suddenly moved, regaining consciousness, and Serif looked down at her once more.

"Who she?" he asked suddenly.

Falk, taken unawares, did not reply at once; and Serif permitted a smile to appear on his unlovely features.

"She plitty," he commented, and stuffed his mouth with betel.

For awhile he pondered again, while Falk cursed him more heartily than ever. Then he turned to his mate, a lanky fellow from Bali, and handed him the tiller.

"Good," he said to Falk. "I take woman. You hide. P'lice come, you not make noise. Savvy?"

Falk breathed again. His bargain seemed to have been concluded. At least this fellow was not likely to give him away to Van Tromp—a look at him was evidence enough of that. Where Salamon came from, gentlemen like Serif kept clear of the police.

Seriff addressed him once more.

"You carry lady," he said. "I hide you."

He muttered something inaudible to Falk, and the mate nodded; then he led the way down the crazy ladder off the poop.

In a murky and odoriferous cabin, carved out of the vessel's ugly sternworks, Serif halted. Along one side of the place was a frowsy couch, and he motioned Falk to lay Evelyn down on it. There was a dim light from a lantern swung from the low ceiling. The girl was conscious now, and regarded the two men with eyes of wide open horror. Serif led Falk to the end of the cabin and slid aside a square hatch, disclosing a well.

"You in there," he said, pointing to it.

It was apparently much used by the amiable Serif as a storage place for cargo he did not wish too closely scrutinized, since there was a strong scent of dutiable spirits about it, and other flavors easily enough identifiable as spices. Falk looked at it with some reluctance. Serif clapped him on the back and showed his stained teeth once more in a grin.

"You safe," he said cheerily. "In morning no p'lice find you." He thrust Falk into the well and closed the hatch.

Then he stood looking down at Evelyn, with a peculiar smile. The girl, half paralyzed with terror, made no sound nor move as he stooped over her.

"Missy," he whispered. "Missy, you no be frightened. You safe. Sleep now. Soon p'lice come."

With which mysterious words—fortunately inaudible to Salamon Falk ten feet away—Serif went slowly on deck and fell into close and serious discourse with the mate.

In awhile he took the helm again himself, steering the little ship slowly over the sea. It was not far from morning now, and a little wind rose out of the east, pushing Serif's vessel gently through the swell. Far to port the outline of the land could barely be distinguished, more as a low lying band of darkness than anything tangible. Serif watched the mate, with an occasional earnest glance toward the shore.

The actions of the mate were also highly mystifying, or would have been to Salamon, could he have seen them. Softly padding about the deck in his bare feet he produced four or five lanterns, all of various stages of decrepitude, but all serviceable. These he lighted with care, and hung in the rigging; and finally, to complete the effect, he took a strip of tarred coir and set fire to that.

As a result the ship looked like nothing ordinary on those seas. She was visible for miles, and a lookout at the cowl of Van Tromp's launch, leaping over the waves with all the power of her engines, cried out and pointed. Van Tromp chuckled.

"Now, unbeliever," he said to Standish at his side, "do you yet believe?"

Martin swore admiringly.

"Cornelius," he said, in a voice that reflected something like relief for the first time for hours, "you're a living miracle. Is there any scalawag hereabouts you don't have a stand-in with?"

Van Tromp laughed again.

"One day you will discover, my friend," he said, "that there are two kinds of policemen. One sits on the high horse and speaks only to big shots; De Groot in Batavia is so. The other kind works with such materials as come to his hand—like Griggs, if you will, although I have yet a word for Griggs—or this *schellum* Serif in front here. I am that other; but Almighty —" he scratched his chin—"you are not to tell De Groot so. It is strictly private, eh?"

Martin Standish peered ahead at the gaudily illuminated vessel, and then turned to Van Tromp,

"Do you think she's safe?" he asked anxiously. "Evelyn, I mean."

Cornelius shook all over.

"*Ja*, silly mans," he said. "She is safe enough with Serif, but she has had the worst fright of her life, Martin. You comprehend that?"

Standish ground his teeth.

"I'm only asking one thing of you, Cornelius. Leave him to me."

"Good," said the inspector. "But remember, he is poison, this Falk."

The launch tore on, and in twenty minutes was rounding up within hail of Serif's ship. Van Tromp ordered a couple of policemen to stand by with rifles, drew his own automatic, and hailed Serif as the launch ground alongside.

The smuggler looked over the bulwarks at him.

"I am going to search you, Serif," said Van Tromp grimly.

Serif favored him with his oiliest smile.

"No need, *tuan*," he said. "I show you . . ."

Van Tromp smiled slyly.

SALAMON FALK, for the second time incarcerated in gloom, among the boxes, bales and jars of Serif's illicit importations, felt more at ease than he had in the leanto ashore. Here, he reflected, there was at least a possibility, a chance of winning his way clear with the Tiger's Eye in his possession. Serif was, he thought, precisely the type of ruffian to handle a deal of this sort for him, and he blessed his acumen in using Evelyn Pellatt as a bribe. No wonder Serif had boggled a little to begin with—it was only natural, after all. He would have done the same thing himself.

In his warm darkness he commenced planning out his escape from Borneo. Saigon was his destination—Saigon, or Macao, or even farther up-coast. He had heard tales of accommodating gentry in the fence line in China—Shanghai, or even a place like Harbin. From what he had heard of it, he would like to see Harbin. Sitting on a bale, he let his bold mind run. Three or four days at the outside and he would be beyond these cursed Dutch police and their racing launches.

Overhead he could hear the pad-pad of a barefoot man, moving methodically round the deck. Some task of shipboard, he decided; it would be morning soon, anyhow. But no flicker of the mate's illumination reached his hiding place.

In fact, it was not until the launch was close at hand that he heard the sound of its engines. Then he sprang erect, his throat once more constricted, the automatic in his hand. The cursed police, after all, were on his track still.

Now it was all a question of the man Serif. Was he to be trusted? A fool he had been, Salamon Falk, to follow Griggs' advice. And Griggs—he was alive still then, the wretched little rat . . .

Falk waited long minutes for the sounds that should tell him he was trapped.

They came. There was the trample of heavily shod feet on the deck overhead, the murmur of voices, and then footsteps rapidly descending the poop stairs. Falk showed his yellow teeth in a last rat's grin. At any rate they should not get the Tiger's Eye from him without fighting for it. He slid the hatch aside carefully, silently.

Twenty words from Serif to Van Tromp put the inspector in possession of the true facts of the case, and he pursed his lips as he turned to Standish.

"It is all right," he said. "Serif has your lady—safe below. But Falk is there too, prisoner in—" he twinkled—"a private room of the captain's."

But Martin had not waited to hear the last words. He had fled down the poop ladder, automatic in hand, and thrust open the flimsy door of the cabin. Evelyn saw him framed in the doorway against the torches' flickering glare, and sprang straight into his arms.

In the darkness of the square hatchway, a figure of hate and revenge incarnate, Salamon Falk's face appeared. He raised his automatic and took careful aim at the two figures under the guttering lamp.

Something—whether it was the faint glint of lamplight on the pistol muzzle, or merely a premonition of imminent peril, Martin Standish has never decided—but something prompted him to glance at that instant over Evelyn's shoulder. In a flash he had hurled her on to the floor, and in the same space of time the cabin was full of thundering reports and spurts of yellow flame. Something struck Martin on the shoulder with the force of a hammer, whirling him round and sending him in turn to the floor to join Evelyn; and at the same moment Cornelius Van Tromp stepped over the threshold, pistol in hand.

He took three strides to the open hatchway and peered within, switching on his little torch. Then he grunted with satisfaction, and turned to where Evelyn, now in tears in earnest, was already ripping the sleeve from Martin's shoulder. Cornelius glanced at the wound and laughed outright.

"You have all the luck, my friend," he said. "Nevertheless, it is as well for you that they teach us the pistol in Surabaya."

Still chuckling, he passed out of the cabin.

XII

A quaint group sat before the door of Griggs' tumbledown home in the clearing. There was Griggs himself, now neatly plugged and strapped by a first aid constable from the launch, a roguish gleam in his entirely untamed eye. There was Martin Standish, also a casualty, and with his arm in a sling; at his side sat Evelyn, the pallor of the last thirty-six hours overlaid with a faint and most becoming flush. And, presiding as it were over the assembly, Cornelius Van Tromp filled a deck chair to capacity, rubicund, full of good humor, and with a *pahit* of gin in his hand. Probably Serif had smuggled the gin, but it was not Cornelius' way to inquire.

He had just concluded a ten minute's tongue lashing of Griggs, and the cockney was pretending to look contrite. The main counts of Van Tromp's indictment were, first, that Griggs should have presumed to think of leaving the district without the full privity and consent of Cornelius Van Tromp. Second, that he should have succumbed to temptation so far as to imagine making away with the Tiger's Eye, the property of another. And third—and here Van Tromp's tongue grew acid—that he should have attempted to desert his woman and her children. It is on record that the last count only was the one which got a wriggle out of Griggs; on the others he was entirely unrepentant, as one who knew his own worth as an abater of nuisances.

Now, Van Tromp was relaxing his more than half assumed austerity, and expanding under the consciousness of a job well done. To have made to cease Salamon Falk—and within three days of his arrival in the district—was a piece of efficiency for which he was due to receive much commendation from higher up; incidentally it was a swipe in the eye for the French down in Noumea. But to have accomplished that beneficent end himself and at the same time to have, beyond any caviling, saved the life of his friend Martin Standish, and further, to have become mixed up in a romance —this was indeed delight undiluted.

He sipped his *pahit* and turned to Griggs; Om-dong had come out of the house with one of her babies and was standing like a yellow figurine behind her man's chair.

"You are sorry, eh?" Van Tromp said to Griggs. "And you will not do it again?"

Griggs caught Martin's eye and winked.

"Gawd, no," he protested. "This 'ere's good enough for me. I must've been loony—but there, 'oo wouldn't be loony with that thing in 'is 'and?"

He pointed across at the Tiger's Eye. Evelyn was holding it in her palm, and the green thing shone with a baleful light.

"I hate it," she said in a subdued voice. Cornelius leaned over and took it from her.

"*Ja*," he said. "It is pretty, but it tempts men too far. One—two—nearly four men have died for this in two days only. Mademoiselle—" he turned suddenly serious—"sell it. Piet Brandt will buy. He is mad about such things."

"Yes," she said. "I would like to sell it. I don't want to touch it again, nor you to touch it, Martin. Inspector, will you take it to Brandt?"

Van Tromp bowed, and Standish cut in.

"And when you've sold it, Evelyn," he said, "there's another thing you can do. Remember what it was?"

Evelyn looked across at Griggs and Om-dong.

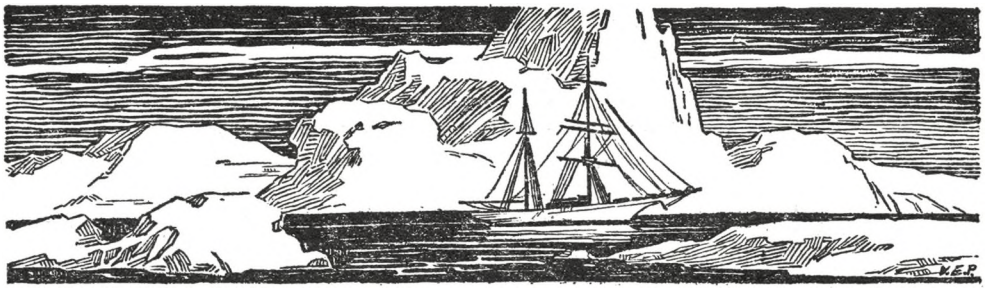
"I remember," she said softly. "If—if Mr. Griggs will let me, I'd like—" She broke off at a loss how to put it.

Griggs, however, was at no loss. He grinned at her, gap-toothed.

" 'Ere, Om-dong," he said, "we're goin' to be rich. 'Ear that, me girl? Now, you slip into the 'ouse an' get me a tot o' that rum, *jehannum ke marfik*. It ain't supposed to be the thing for a green wound; but damme, it ain't ever' day we gets the chanst to do the 'eavy polite!"

He looked at Evelyn and Standish.

" 'Ere's 'ow!" he said cheerfully; and wound or no wound, with Cornelius Van Tromp following suit, he drank.



WHEN PEARY MARVELED

A Riddle of the Arctic

By VICTOR SHAW

WE WERE in camp at the head of Olrick's Bay in northern Greenland, hunter members of a Peary Relief Expedition. It happened that I was alone, the rest of our party being out on a reconnaissance sledge trip across the Ice Cap to Wolstenholme Bay. Forced to remain behind with an injured foot, I was keeping an eye on our supplies, since our Innuits had never learned the difference between *meum* and *tuum* with respect to our impedimenta.

One day the relief ship *Diana* felt her way into the uncharted sea arm and anchored nearby. Peary, then a Navy lieutenant, was rowed ashore in a whaleboat, but came stumping unattended up across the beach on his toeless feet. I knew why he came and what he wanted, having been apprised by *kamick* telegraph.

Had we, he asked seating himself upon a convenient boulder, had any luck with the caribou? Direct, always, the Old Man was. Knowing his need, I was glad to be able to turn over quite a number of caribou hides and hams; the meat to be frozen for his own consumption and the hides to be fashioned by Innuit *koonahs* into warm clothing for winter sledge work.

When the matter was concluded and he lingered, chatting, I plied him with questions about his trip with Matt Hensen to Fort Conger the preceding February. It was the heroic sledge journey to the Greeley headquarters at Lady Franklin Bay, during which Peary had frozen both feet, afterward losing most of his toes. That tale, later given to the world, had not then been told to us. We knew the mere fact—no details. I got them, now.

Alone thus, he talked freely and I sat enthralled.

It was a terse simple narrative packed with unconscious drama: of sledging in the dead of the Arctic night lashed by one of the worst of winter blizzards; of shoving doggedly ahead when food gave out, banking on finding something at Conger even though the place had been abandoned for the past fifteen years; and of stumbling unerringly in the black night and blinding storm upon the gable peak of the house, just sticking from the drifts—the first human eyes to rest upon it since that ill fated company left it so long before.

He had found, he said, everything in a remarkable state of preservation. Supplies and equipment of all sorts—food which he needed sorely—was there in

abundance, much of it in perfect condition. There was plenty, he explained as though still amazed, to have kept fat those poor devils who starved two hundred miles south at Cape Sabine. He paused, gazing somberly into space.

As I pondered the startling statement my thought leaped back a decade and a half to 1884, when, ordered to Cape Sabine to meet the *Proteus* at the end of two years, the little band of hardy adventurers had started south unwitting that they marched to keep a rendezvous with death. Homeward bound at last, hilarious, waving farewell to ice girt Conger with merry quip and jest.

Clearly, I could see their long boat loaded deep with supplies enough to keep them until the relief ship arrived, shoving south along the black water lanes among the gleaming floes of Kennedy Channel and Kane Basin; could visualize the slumped shoulders and staring eyes when, crushed in the ice, the *Proteus* failed to appear—when, facing another dreary year before a second ship could reach them, they must have tried to hearten one another with many stout words, vain words, and empty for all but seven.

Vividly, then, unrolled the grim vision of the subsequent desperate struggle to live on the barren, storm swept headland: eking out vanishing stores; hunting frantically to restock the larder, on a coast avoided by all wild life except the walrus and the burgomaster gulls; of the ensuing creeping deadly weakness, which, chained them one by one to the noisome stone shelter they had builded—until none but Long, the best hunter who was granted a tiny increase of the too meager ration, was able to stagger about—until at last even Long was unable to crawl the few yards to the shore, for the daily meal of raw shrimp collected on their last morsel of putrid seal meat . .

Clear and vivid, the end: Schley, forcing the *Thetis* through heavy rafted floes just in time to succor the seven who barely breathed. And for them, were the *Thetis* delayed but a few hours, it had been too late.

Peary's voice jerked me back from the tragic memory. He began to detail the account of an exciting hunting trip, undertaken after the return to his base at Cape Sabine.

"On Bache Peninsula, near the Cape," he stated, "I secured with utmost ease sixteen musk oxen and might have taken many times that number. Back in Hayes Fiord behind the Cape I found the low grassy tundra fairly swarming with caribou and musk oxen, beside Arctic hare, ptarmigan and other small stuff. It's a game paradise, the best by far that I've seen in the North."

I stared at him, stunned.

"All that meat?" I gasped. "And so near?"

He sat silent a moment, as though gazing back through the years; strong weathered face set and deeply lined, steady eyes wide with a wonder which lingered still.

"Exactly—" he nodded, at last—"about thirty miles away. An awful pity, but no one can be blamed. It's the system."

"System?" I echoed.

"Orders—official orders to remain at a designated point to await rescue. Seems always to take such appalling disasters to point out errors. In this case, that leaders should never be subject to an inflexible itinerary when out of touch in the field. But it is always at too great cost that we learn."

With a deep breath, he signaled the waiting deckhands to come for the hides and meat. My thoughts were chaotic. Why not have moved that camp of death before the extremity? An explanatory note might have been deposited in a cairn. It is hard, after all these years, to recall the exact wording of his reply when I asked the question, but this is the gist of it:

"Habit of discipline perhaps, of obeying orders, though of course the near presence of a supply of game could not have been suspected. Nevertheless, one can not help but marvel at the grim jest of Fate which allowed men to die of hunger within reach of plenty."

OVER THE HILL

A Brilliant Novelette of the Border Cavalry

By CHARLES L. CLIFFORD

FROM the troop street the men could see the Mexican town plainly. It was not because the camp was on a hill; the rare air and bright sunlight of the Arizona upland has a way of painting things nearer and brighter—and often far more beautiful—than they really are. Perhaps for that reason Sergeant Pat Callahan saw brightness and beauty in Maria de la Cruz. Or perhaps it was merely a trick of his race, which from time immemorial has seen delight and danger in the eyes of exotic ladies.

To Sergeant Callahan there was no fence between him and Maria. There was a fence there, of course—stout iron stakes, five feet high, stretched with heavy, taut, barbed wire. But to him it was not symbolical. It was merely an annoying, clothes tearing inconvenience one had to crawl through in the dark of night, away from the beaten path of patrols. Patrols, often enough, that he himself had instructed in their duties earlier in the evening.

It was past the prime of winter now, but the winds were cold as they swept down from the grim Sierra Madres in the night and early morning. At midday the troopers shed their wool blouses at "stables", and the sweat poured down their faces into their eyes as they leaned, stiff armed, against the grooming brushes. Afterward, in the tents, they sprawled on field cots and smoked and talked. And every day they cursed mildly because their captain was so ungrateful and inhuman that he forbade them the joy of the saloons in the sister town across the Line.

The "guardhouse lawyer" held forth in a crowded tent. The guardhouse lawyer is a man of vision: He sees beyond the petty politics of a mere troop, the tribulations of a trooper. To him the ways of cabinets and congresses are as bold writing on a wall. There is at least one in every troop in every army in the world.

"Listen, you guys: The Old Man don't care about us an' our lousy beer. He's got his orders from Washington. Up there they got red hot dope from the Sec't Service. Any day now old Red Lopez gonna bust in on Agua Bonita. Them spicks over there may tell you different—laugh like it was all a crazy joke, an' brag about what they gonna do to Lopez if he comes within range of the town; but you notice they got the bars up at night, an' trenches and wire round the place . . . An' how about them *rurales* ridin' herd in the *mesquite* an' the spicks beggin' our patrols to leave them come across the Line every night? A blind man could see the jig's up with Santiago . . ."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. What can he do against a

bunch of Yaqui *marihuana* hop-heads with plenty rifles and ammunition? Ain't he desperate tryin' to get men outa the troop to desert and work his lousy machine guns? Where's Feeny an' Brill an' Shorty Lewis?"

There was a dramatic pause in deference to the ardor and histrionics of the guardhouse lawyer.

"Over the hill," a corporal said with conviction.

"Over the hill," the G. L. pronounced with accented agreement. "Over the hill, an' then some. Layin' out machine gun emplacements and learnin' Santiago's spicks head space adjustment—for twenty iron men gold a day . . ."

"If the Old Man lays hands on them I bet he lines them up against a 'dobe wall," an old soldier with magnificent mustachios ventured solemnly.

"Don't be old fashioned," the G. L. said. "These ain't like your days with Custer, when soldiers was men an' women was squaws. The Army's gone chicken hearted, I tell you. The Presi-

dents these days smokes perfumed cigarets 'stead of chewin' Horseshoe like Andy Jackson useter. Look at Ames an' Ellrich what they got at Slaughter's Ranch. Jes' doin' bunk fatigue, an spick snipers get' em in the guts. Bah! Don't tell me."

"Gano ain't chicken hearted," the corporal said.

"No; he's a cold blooded so-and-so," the supply sergeant said placidly.

"He's the way a soldier oughta be," the old private said. "If he wasn't tied up with a lotta red tape he'd 'a' gone across at Slaughter's an' killed twenty spicks apiece for Ames an' Ellrich. An' right now he'd go across single handed an' bring Shorty an' Feeny an' Brill back by the seat o' the pants—"

"Speakin' of bunk fatigue," Sergeant Callahan said, yawning, "I'm gonna take myself some. You guys settle this anyways you like."

The wise one looked at him.

"Sure. If I spent my nights with a hot *tamale* like Maria, I'd hit the hay myself."

"You would, would you?" Callahan said pleasantly; and he knocked the G. L. through the tent door with an unpleasant snap of his wrist.

"Whose tent *is* this, anyways?" moaned the man of vision, picking a ruined cigaret from the dust.

SERGEANT CALLAHAN walked on toward his tent, brooding. A smart looking soldier he was, with his neat tailor-mades (breeches cut down from "old issue" two sizes too large) and leather strapped leggings, too costly for any but a fancy crap shooter or stud artist to wear.

Turned out on a lathe—that was how Pat Callahan looked. And the hard, clean lines of his face, brown from many years of wind and sun, and the startling blue of his eyes, would catch your fancy among a thousand others.

"Troop commander wants to see you, Sergeant."

Pat stopped and frowned; but perforce he turned in the direction whence the summons had come.

At the captain's tent Pat stood at attention and saluted with precision. Gano sat at a field table under the tent fly, and played with a horseshoe that lay on a sheaf of papers. The papers rustled and stirred in the draft of wind through the tent. Pat said tonelessly—

"Sergeant Callahan reports to the Troop Commander."

Gano did not salute. He just said—

"Stand at ease, Callahan."

The other sergeants of the troop were there, and the Top Kick. Pat looked from face to face. What was this formation for, anyway? He thought of the cool cot waiting for him. The sides of the tent would be rolled up, and the breeze would blow across the hairy blankets. He would lie in his underwear and puff smoke toward the pole, and watch it curl up and writhe away in the sunlight through the open flap of the door. It made him ugly, this untimely frustration —this bull . . .

Gano surveyed them. The Top Kick said—

"All here, Captain."

Gano continued to look from one to the other of them, and said nothing. He was a hawk-like man with hard, cold, blue eyes. Instead of the O. D. shirt, which was the uniform of the day, he wore a well cut blouse. They knew that meant trouble. Pat looked at that blouse and the ribbons on it. One of them was pale blue with little white stars. That strip of silk, which stood for the Medal of Honor, always stirred the Irish heart of Pat Callahan, even when he hated his captain the most.

In the silent pause while the captain watched them, Pat thought back. Way back to the orderly room in the *nipa* barracks of Los Banos. He was a private then, and he stood in front of a field desk and looked across it into the hard eyes of Captain Gano. Gano said:

"Callahan, I've had enough of you—you're going to the mill. Have you anything to say?"

He knew that this last was military parrot talk. Nothing he said would make this official martinet understand the bitterness in his wild, youthful heart against brutal, bullying noncoms. But for once he would have his say. He was done for, anyway. So he told Gano—plenty. What he thought of his lousy troop, of his lousier noncoms; and his cold blooded military standard. He could lick them all if they had the guts to take their stripes off. He was a better man than any of them . . .

Even in the excitement and glory of his wild outburst, Pat had been a little bewildered that that harsh mouth did not once open to check his *lèse majesté*. The first sergeant, horrified, outraged, reached for him; but Gano waved him back. At last there was silence in the room. Gano said quietly:

"You don't think you're appreciated then, in my troop? How could we please you, Private Callahan?"

"I'm a better man than any of your damned noncoms—than any of you."

Lights like tiny sparks leaped into the cold eyes. Gano rose from behind the field desk and methodically undid the buttons of his starched khaki blouse. He laid the blouse carefully on the back of a barracks chair.

"You're not a better man than I am, Callahan," he said softly.

That had been ten years ago.

Pat looked at Gano now, playing with the horseshoe paper weight, sitting behind a flimsy field table—a table that made all the difference in the world between him and a man of the ranks. He forgot the appeal of the waiting blankets, and the breeze through the waiting tent. He looked at the pale blue ribbon and his heart gave a little jump, warmed to this hard, friendless man who seemed to hate other men, and yet understood them. Gano had understood him that day at Los Banos. He had understood a man who didn't understand himself. He had understood the sudden, unmanly rush of boyish, bitter tears that day. All Gano did, at sight of those tears, was to reach for his blouse and carefully put it on. Then he sent the first sergeant out of the orderly room. His words were still military and unmoved. His face was still hard. If there was any change in him it was, perhaps, that his eyes were a little less hard.

"Tomorrow," he said, "you will be a corporal, Callahan—and God help your soul if you've lied to me. Get out!"

Now Gano said:

"Three men of this troop have deserted. They are with the Mexican garrison in Agua Bonita. They have aggravated their offense by taking their arms and equipment with them—stealing Government property. They have violated their oath of enlistment."

He played with the horseshoe on the table and watched the faces of the sergeants grouped about the tent pole. All eyes were fixed upon him. All knew that he was ugly, bitterly aroused.

"We may get orders to mix into this. We're here to protect property and the civilian population of Brandes. I have been informed that tonight the revolutionists under Lopez will attack the town. I have asked district headquarters for permission to intervene. If we go in we are at war. And if we go in I want those three men taken—dead or alive."

The sergeants shuffled their feet and looked down at the ground. The intense bitterness behind those words embarrassed them. Those men, three fools, looking for excitement and easy money, up to now, had not been criminals to them. Merely buddies, A. W. O. L.; men on a lark who would come back with much laughing and tell delightful lies in the tents, after their ten days in the guardhouse. But now — after Gano's words . . .

Gano said:

"And if I take them alive I won't bring them back. They won't ever come back. Is that clear?"

He looked from face to face, carefully. His eyes glinted as they had that day just before he took off the starched blouse for Pat. The sergeants nodded

solemnly, stupidly. The first sergeant coughed. He said—

"They understand, sir."

Gano said:

"I want you men to tell your platoons. I know men are crossing the Line at night in direct violation of my orders. There'll be no mercy for any I get the goods on. They come back before morning, I know; but they're tempted over there, especially when they're full of rotgut booze. And if this thing breaks while they're across—well, they won't get back that night, or ever, if I can help it."

PAT walked thoughtfully back to his tent. There was a fierce feeling of guilt in him. For ten years now he had justified that impulsive trust and belief of Gano's. For ten years he had not broken a troop order. Sergeant Leach would retire any day now; and when that happened he would be made Top Kick. He knew that, and the men knew it. Gano had known it for ten years.

Pat lay on his bunk in his underwear, blowing smoke from his stained and crooked cigaret up into the shaft of sunlight that cut, startlingly, the gloom of the tent. But the delightful anticipation of sleep was gone. The smoke was bitter in his mouth. He threw the burning butt through the doorway. He crossed his arms behind his head and stared up at the ventilator at the top of the tent pole. He had lied to Gano. After ten years he had lied.

Back there at Los Banos, a raw, unbridled kid, he had boasted—boasted that he was better than any noncom in the troop. And Gano had believed it. Right now, while he was crawling through the fence to see a chit of a spick girl who spoke funny English, Gano believed it. It never occurred to Gano, who knew men almost as well as God knew them, that among those bums who ran the Line at night, his next Top Kick was the slickest of them all, the steadiest offender. That his next Top was repudiating ten years of faultless soldiering for a Mexican *bailarina* . . .

A crisis had come in the life of Pat Callahan. The troop commander's talk just now made that plain. In effect, he was already a deserter. Just as bad as Feeny and Shorty and Brill. The only difference was that they were taking Mexican gold and excitement in exchange for their craftiness with machine guns, all openly and honestly; while he was having his cake and eating it too. They at least were deserving of respect. Deliberately they had gone over the hill. They even came to the fence with bottles of *tequila* in their hands and offered their envious troop mates on patrol a drink across the wire. Their excuse at least had dignity: They were fed up with monotonous camp duties. But he, Pat Callahan, the best soldier in the troop, all he wanted was a silken sprite of a Mexican girl.

Two things he could do. Forget Maria; or get her at once into the American town of Brandes. The first, God help him, he could not do. And the second was almost impossible. Patrols on both sides in the last two days had tightened like a vise.

At first, Pat Callahan's intentions with Maria had been those of the foraging soldier. A *bailarina* in a Mexican *cantina*, dancing for soldiers. Tattered finery, scarlet lips and abandoned, flying limbs. A glorious, flaming type of *soldadera*—the Mexican woman who follows her man on the march. But Pat had learned something in these past few nights of courtship. Now, watching the patch of blue sky through the ventilator hole, he knew that her first hardness had been false bravado, and her later timidity and shame at his brutal ardor the real Maria de la Cruz. Lying there on his cot, thinking back on it all, and knowing that he might never again see Maria, he had a vision of truth in the purity of that patch of desert blue sky . . .

Tonight there would be an attack on Agua Bonita. First, there would be lights, flaring up to the desert stars. Then shots—single shots of the outguards; answered from the black *mesquite*. Like crawling snakes the rebels would defile from the mountain passes and scatter

out like thousands of sand lizards in a sinister crescent about the doomed town. Flashes, orange, with darting tongues of blue flame, ever coming nearer; and from the trenches, a stream of spitting light. The whine of ricochets, the steady thumping of platoons of rifles, the riveting song of the machine guns. Machine guns oiled, belted and cleared of jams by Feeny and Brill and Shorty Lewis. Shorty would have the little black pipe sticking out of the corner of his ludicrous mouth, and would swear frightfully at the jamming guns . . .

Inevitably the tale would be told by the more virile. The *federalista* Santiago, fattened on *cantinas*, would stand no chance against the "Wolf of the North". Lopez would take the trenches at the point of his dirty bayonets. Shorty and Feeny and Brill would be there, still sweating over their hot guns. The garrison would rush back into the adobe huts. The men surrendering casually, fatalistically; their officers, visioning the inevitable 'dobe wall in the cold dawn, fighting like desperate animals in puddles of blood.

Maria would be there, too. At the last, she would be crouched in the corner of a shack, moaning a little, her hands clenched over her tight, white lids. Drunken, mad Yaquis would rave through the houses, looting, butchering, destroying. One of them would come upon Maria, crouching, sickened, moaning there. He would seize her, tear at her clothes. Others would come in, waving bottles . . .

It was dark in the tent and Pat rose, conscious of the cold from the mountains. He put on his O. D. shirt and pulled his issue sweater over his head. He sought out his best breeches from his foot locker and carefully strapped on his tailor-made leggings. He stuck his head in the icy water in the tin basin by the tent pole, and slicked back his wet hair with a little pocket comb. From the tray of his foot locker he drew out a tobacco bag and pushed its mouth open with his two first fingers. Inside the bag was a tight wad of dirty bills. Pat closed the bag and pushed it deep into his hip pocket. He was conscious, as he peered through the door of the tent, that the men had finished supper. He could hear them laughing and calling as they washed their mess kits. He didn't care. He wasn't hungry any more than he had been sleepy. He was thinking and remembering too hard. He was seeing Maria, crouched in a corner of that 'dobe shack.

THE *federalista* soldiers grinned at Pat as he hurried through the crowded streets of the town. No sign in their light hearted shouting and strumming of guitars that Lopez was at their doors. They smiled at him because he was a *gringo amigo*, come for some cold beer, or perhaps to join up with the hero Santiago in case that braggart Lopez tried his bandit tricks against their town.

Ramon's was alive with light and merriment as Pat pushed through the wide door. Maria was dancing; and he sat at an empty table and watched her. A long bar reached the length of one side of the room. It was crowded with good natured soldiers. Their rough clothes were loosened in the heat of the place. They carried arms. They thumped their rough fists on the bar and called for *tequila* and *mescal*, and shouted encouragement to Maria. Officers crowded the cleared space in the center of the room. Their faces were flushed with liquor and with excited talk. They boasted and shouted from table to table. The men stamped their feet and beat beer glasses on the bar.

Hardy, covetous wolves stealing through the mountain passes, almost at their doors. Rifles in their hands and bulging bandoleers across their chests. With *marihuana* lashing them, tainting their breath. With lust and greed in their hearts . . . And here in Ramon's, the defenders of the citadel with their wine and their women. Songs in their throats, glasses in their hands and women

in their arms. Belshazzar's feast, with no writing they could read on the wall.

And Maria whirling, and smiling with her painted mouth at them all.

Ramon, a burly, greasy ruffian, came and sat with Pat. Ramon was a decent fellow, if he did have pock marks on his yellow face. It wasn't Ramon's fault if the spicks didn't know about the paratyphoid stuff—the needle they stick in your arm each time you re-enlist.

"'Ulloa, Cal'an," Ramon greeted. He smiled warmly at Pat. "Lees'n, Cal'an, I tole thame breeng you good stuff. Maria be through in meenut now." He turned ponderously in his tight chair and pointed a fat finger at the dancing girl. "Look! Ain' she swale?"

"She's swell, all right." Pat turned his eyes from Maria and looked at Ramon. "They're comin' in on you tonight, big boy. Lopez."

Ramon shrugged—a deprecatory hitch of his thick shoulders. He smiled.

"Avery night, now, somebody say thees seely theeng. You theenk so? Wale, let me tale you, Cal'an. Thees Rade Lopez he jos' wan beeg pain in the neck. He can' take thees ceety. Wy, we got machine gon, manny soldair—we got Santiago!"

"That slob."

Ramon looked hurt. A waiter placed a full bottle of bourbon on the table and grinned at Pat, who removed the loose cork and sniffed at the top of the bottle.

"Look, Cal'an! Ain' she swale?"

Pat looked up from the bottle and stared over Ramon's shoulder at Maria. There was a great burst of music. Maria spun, whirling her scant skirt about her bare knees, and stamped a red heeled foot at them. A roar went up that shook the drifting layers of gray-blue smoke. A sharp pain shot through the heart of Pat Callahan. He stared at Maria, sick with sudden, vengeful jealousy.

He understood none of her racing words, but all of the wild exhortation in them. She was drunk with her power to sway this mob. He was an unnoticed individual in an appreciative audience.

Maria threw out her bare arms. There were fiery flashes in her dark eyes. Her pleading to them rose to savage command. The officers leaned forward on their elbows. Their eyes gleamed; their dark faces stiffened under the lash of her words. The men drew closer about her, a mob turned to stone.

Pat Callahan hated her. He hated her because all these men loved her. Because she was part of them in her exaltation of patriotism and no part of him. But he, too, was under the urgent spell. The spell of those eyes he loved; of that tiny, stamping foot, with its flashing red heeled slipper.

He gulped the whisky in his hand. He poured himself another drink, swiftly, from Ramon's bottle. He wanted that reckless, glorious effect that spirits gave his hot blood. He knew what whisky did to him when he drank it on end that way. It made him do crazy, dangerous things.

He wanted that mood now. He wanted to feel unreal, beyond himself.

This was a night of nights. He watched this flame that belonged to him. He hated her and he loved her. In one drink he toasted her, in the next he damned her Mexican soul. He wanted to beat hell out of her and then coax her back into his trembling arms.

Ramon nudged him.

"She say," Ramon said, in a hiss that was louder than his ordinary booming voice, "soldairs of Mehico, you can not be leeked by a bandeet. You defane you home, you mothair, you babee. You fight—you ween!"

Ramon accented his translation by spasmodic grips on Pat's arm. Pat was annoyed. He was annoyed at Maria; but he took it out on Ramon.

He jerked his arm away.

"I know, I know. I know what she says. Lay off my arm, fella."

Then Maria came in swift strides and stood by the table, looking down at Pat.

THE PROSELYTING fever died down in her eyes as she looked into his sullen face. A pathetic, pleading softness was there now. She stood, pressing her body against the table, leaning toward Pat with a timid hand upon his shoulder.

Pat did not get up. He just sat and stared at the whisky bottle, which was girdled by his great, brown hand.

"Sit down, kid," he said.

Maria sat down and looked at him—an intent, almost desperate look. She sat facing him in the chair Ramon had vacated hurriedly at her coming. She pushed her elbows across the table toward him, and dropped her round face into her hands.

She smiled—a dreamy smile, and a little mournful.

"You lof' to me, Pat?"

"Don't be silly," Sergeant Callahan said. "Do you want a drink?"

"You know I don' dreenk."

"I forgot you was such a delicate flower."

He tilted the bottle and poured a huge drink into his empty glass.

"Well, this stuff here is *muy bueno*, as you spicks say. Ramon must of made a mistake in the bottle."

"I tale you dreenk beer, Pat. An' don' call me speek."

"Don't tell me what to do. I ain't takin' orders from you."

Callahan shook her hand from his arm and gulped from the glass in his hand. He set the glass down deliberately. He spread his arms wide across the table and leaned toward her. He wrinkled his eyes as if staring into a harsh sun. He stared at her.

"Listen, I don't have to drink beer if I rather drink whisky. An' what's more, if I wanta call a spick a spick, that's what I call 'em. You *are* a spick, ain't you?"

Maria said nothing. There was a desperate hurt in her child-like eyes. She looked down at her hands where they lay twined together on the table. She twisted them together. She turned her head until she looked over the shoulder farthest from Pat, down at the floor.

Sergeant Callahan looked at the side of her face and his heart turned upside down.

The shouting in the place had died down. The music was playing softly. Mexican music from love touched strings, played by lovers to lovers. It tore at the heart of Patrick Callahan. It increased the agony of Maria de la Cruz.

Maria said, without turning—

"Leesen—they play the 'Golendrina.' "

"Whatever that is—" And Pat poured himself another drink of Ramon's altruistic whisky.

Maria turned her head slowly and looked at him.

"Pat, you lof' me?"

"You people always gotta talk. Why is it you people always gotta talk?"

"I lof' to you, Pat."

"Why don't you listen to the music? Ain't that better than havin' somebody love you?"

Maria shivered. She turned her eyes, wet eyes, swiftly away from him. She looked at the absorbed musicians—soldiers, banded into an orchestra, playing "La Golendrina." "La Golendrina," the song of the little swallow and its nest—the music she loved best. And the man she loved, sitting within reach of her hand, fondling a glass of Ramon's whisky . . .

Some one had put a glass by her hand. A gesture of politeness only. Everybody who came to the New York Café & Bar knew that Maria de la Cruz had no use for whisky glasses.

Her thin shoulders shivered. She turned and poured from Ramon's fancy bottle a drink for herself. She drank it in one gasping, blinding, gulp. And she stared defiance at Pat Callahan. Pat stared defiance back at her. There was a sneer in his look; vicious condemnation; outraged triumph.

"Little innocent who never fooled nobody," he said.

The music rose higher, wilder. The soldier orchestra played the savage tune

of the *federalistas* as though in defiance of a rival rebel band playing "La Cucharacha." Maria turned her chair and stared at the orchestra, and before her eyes came a mist. Before the morning, these men with guitars in their hands would have rifles in those same hands. And all of them would be dead.

"LISTEN, kid," said Sergeant Callahan. He reached for her hand. He had been watching the soft line of her throat, and remorse for the hurt he had caused her suddenly swept over him. If they were only alone, so that he could pick her up in his arms. So that he could tell her they were going to the *padre*, never going to be separated by a wire fence any more. That he was only kidding her when he called her spick. Mrs. First Sergeant Callahan, on the noncom's line of a permanent post. A brick house with a porch. At the Presidio. That's where they were going. To the Presidio in Frisco when this flare-up on the Border was over. When her countrymen learned sense. No patrols at night. No desert dust. No tent with a sagging cot and seven other men snoring. A Gold Medal cot, white, with the gold insignia of the Q. M. at the head, like a benediction of peace. Two cots. Side by side. And the smell of onions frying when he came home from stables. And on cold nights, *chili*. He'd have it on them all, there. She'd know how to cook *chili*, all right!

"Maria."

"Don' touch me," she said, and she shrank from his reaching hand.

Her defiant eyes repulsed him. She filled a glass from Ramon's bottle. Once before he had urged her to drink. She had cried, then. Now she laughed and swallowed her drink in his face. Once, she had begged him not to drink if he loved her; or, if he must, only beer. But now he sat with a glass of Ramon's best in his hand and told her that to love was silly. Her eyes fixed on his face; she mocked him as she swallowed the hot, hateful liquid.

"Maria! What's the matter, kid? I wanta tell you something!"

Pat wanted to tell Maria that his pique was satisfied. Jealousy and the tradition of the barracks were gone from him now. That tradition which said, "Never leave a jane get the upper hand . . ." What did he care for that now?

She almost spat at him.

"You don' onderstan'. No, gringo, you don' onderstan' Mehican women—you don' onderstan' anny women. You don' onderstan' lof'. Maybe you have hear Jeanne d' Arc, eh? You hear, maybe, how she safe all off France? How she ride in fron' off the soldair? Maybe you don' know she good gir-rl. No man evair lie to Jeanne d' Arc. She don' care. Steel she go an' gate burn at the stake. Bot I know how she feel, that Jeanne. I am not good gir-rl, bot I know how she feel. I feel more like that becos' I am not good gir-rl."

They stared hard at each other, and each was remembering why Maria was not a good girl.

The whisky went out of Pat Callahan. Maria's head fell into her cradling arms on the wet table. Great sobs shook her slight shoulders.

From outside, sharp on the thin mountain air, came the sound of firing.

Pat pushed the table away from him and lurched to his feet. He dragged Maria up from her chair and held her close to him in a sudden impulse of protection. There was madness in the smoke filled room.

"Come on, kid, we're beatin' it while the beatin's good!"

Unmindful of the hoarse, urging cries of officers, directing their men to the trenches, and of the hurrying feet pattering on the earth floor, Maria was utterly calm in the stampede. She pushed Pat from her. With her hands stiff against his shoulders, she stared steadily up into his eyes. A running soldier struck the butt of his rifle against the table and sent Ramon's whisky bottle crashing to the floor. One by one the oil lights died, leaving the room in a weird darkness. A

shell burst in a blinding flash just outside the window.

"God!" Callahan said. "They're here already."

He dragged Maria to the door.

The houses of the town were dark except for thin flashes from the rifles spitting towards the desert. The thick, lowering mat of stars was crisscrossed with colored signal lights. Shrapnel from the rebel guns burst like gay fireworks above the low mud huts.

"Come on," Pat said. The hoarseness in his voice was exultant. "Lord! I'd like to be in this!"

Maria resisted him. She leaned back against the wall of the *cantina* and pressed her hands against her breast. Men with rifles crossed in front of them, raced through the streets towards the sound of the guns.

"*Viva Mexico!*" Maria screamed.

"*Viva!—Viva Mexico!*" breathless shouts sounded back.

Pat tried to pull her away from the door. She clutched at the wooden frame with one hand.

"Come on," he yelled as to a drowning person. "Come on, or we'll never make it across!"

Maria tore away from him.

"To hale weeth you, gringo! Go baack w'ere there ees no fight—w'ere there ees no lof'."

Her eyes were insane in the flashes of light.

Pat stared at her stupidity.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked humbly. "Any damned thing in the world you want me to do, I'll do."

She screamed at him above the rising horror of sound.

"Do? Do?"

She faced him and tore with both her hands at his shoulders. She pushed her white face almost against his.

"Do you lof' to me, Pat Cal'an?"

Pat put his great hands behind her neck and with his thumbs tilted her small face up toward his own.

"I love you like hell," he said.

"Thane fight for me and for Mehico," said Maria de la Cruz.

And Irish Pat Callahan, inflamed by Ramon's best and by Maria, drew his pistol from its flopping holster and rushed toward the sound of battle.

LEANING against the coping of the roof of the Gadsen Hotel the officers of the troop shivered in the cold of the coming day. The young shavetail ostentatiously dabbed at the dried blood on the back of his hand. One of Lopez' "overs" had nipped his forearm, and made him a battle hero in his own eyes. He hoped the surgeon would want to put the arm in a sling.

Gano pushed his field glasses back into their case, after carefully removing the leather thong from about his neck. Headquarters had, as usual, refused his urgent request to intervene in the situation across the Line. There was utter disgust and weariness in his lined face. The first lieutenant continued to gaze thoughtfully at the blazing buildings and the smoke which marked the vengeance of Lopez on loyal Agua Bonita.

"Listen to them yelling over there. Listen to those Yaqui fiends . . ."

Gano said shortly:

"Have the men unsaddle and fall in under arms at reveille. No bunks. Keep the patrols as they are. I'm going across."

With any other captain the first lieutenant would have made vigorous protest. He was an old soldier. He knew what was going on in the Mexican town now. He knew that drunken Indians, loot and liquor mad, were completely out of hand; that mischievous shots would echo throughout the night. Shots at anything that caught the victors' fancy.

Gano galloped down the dusty road to the gate. He turned his horse over to the patrol post behind the American customs building and proceeded through the fence on foot. The sergeant of the patrol watched Gano from the corner of

the building. He wagged his head and ejected a stream of tobacco juice toward Mexico.

"He must be nuts, that guy. I wouldn't step out from behind this brick wall for a royal flush, with them spicks runnin' *juramentado* like they are at this present moment."

"I hope they get him," a horse holder said. "He ain't got no more right over there than what Shorty Lewis has."

Gano found Lopez in the Club Social, where he had set up temporary headquarters. The club was a new concrete building, the medium of social exchange between the upper class Mexicans, and the Americans of Brandes, who wanted to drink their liquor honestly.

The rebel chief was sitting at a table in the bar. He was surrounded by officers in dirty field uniforms—admiring underlings with glasses in their hands and pistols on their hips. He was a large man, with sly black eyes. The prominent cheek bones put the unmistakable mark of the Yaqui on him.

His greeting was both ceremonious and sincere. He smiled widely, shook hands vigorously with Gano, and led him ostentatiously to an empty table, away from his noisy followers.

"You are very kind to come here, Captain. We shall have wine—Pedro!"

Gano loaded his pipe carefully and watched Lopez across the table. They understood each other, these two men. Had Gano been born south of the Rio Grande, *he* might have taken Agua Bonita this night . . .

Lopez smiled.

"You gave me one fine chase—that time near Hachita."

Gano smiled back.

"One more day—"

Lopez said eagerly:

"You know, afterwards, I wished I had waited for you. It would have been one fine fight."

Gano looked sidewise at the Mexican. A thin smile twisted his mouth.

"Oh—afterwards, eh? Well, they called me off—as usual."

"You are funny people. You chase us like mad across the Border, all ready to eat us up, then—*pouf!* When the bird is in your grasp you go back."

"We get ordered back," Gano said.

"I know, I know, Captain. You have too many civilians up there."

Pedro, all a-bustle, grinning importantly, arrived with the wine. He flourished the gaudy bottle before his master, then pulled the cork with a masterly twist of his wrist. Lopez poured it, first into Gano's glass, then into his own, with childish pleasure.

"Let us drink, Captain Gano, until the next time! I promise to wait for you then."

Gano sipped the bubbling stuff.

"You'll be sorry then," he said.

Lopez grinned. He was feeling fine. Already he had swallowed several *copitas* of the club's "Hennessey Three Star." Now he emptied the tall glass in two swift swallows. He reached for the bottle and held it poised above Gano.

"Drink up, *amigo*," he said heartily. "I will give you another toast."

Gano waved the bottle away, well aware that it was necessary to smile as he did so. He understood Mexicans.

"Colonel, you're too good a man for me. You go ahead. You deserve it after your night's work."

Lopez smiled with pleasure. He raised his glass high.

"Your country and mine!" he said.

They rose and looked very solemn.

GANO, the gringo, and Lopez, the spick, drank to each other; drank as trusting pals instead of men who had nursed bitter feelings against each other for years. Standing in the Club Social, with dead men in the outer room, with splintered glass on the floor and holes blown in the walls, they drank to each other and to each other's countries.

Lopez knew that this gringo wanted something, else he would not have risked insult by coming here. Yet in that speech about the good night's work he

had subtly caressed the Mexican's greatest vanity—his illusion of heroic military genius and destiny.

And Gano had made that remark as a mere introductory; as the light spur to that colossal vanity, which, once tapped, would pour with the wine. The victor in battle would wallow in the praise of the expert of tactics.

"I watched the attack from the Gadsen roof," Gano said. "It was beautifully handled, Colonel."

Lopez was content. He beamed at Gano; he emptied his glass.

"Ah, you noted the machine gun preparation? The reconnaissance in force? The Very lights of my maneuvering force?"

He sat back in his chair and chuckled, eyeing Gano with critical friendliness.

"You see, I have read your book on tactics, Captain Gano."

Gano, who detested the academic soldier, was not pleased.

"I was ordered to collaborate with that desk soldier," he growled. "Simply to protect anybody ass enough to be guided by a book on tactics against men like you."

This pleased Lopez.

"You understand us, all right," he said. "And, anyway, that's the sort of fighting your army and ours will always have. What do we care about corps and divisions and heavy artillery?"

Lopez rambled on, drinking steadily and explaining to Gano why only field soldiers should write military literature. Although he hated Gano, the mellowing wine urged him to explain intricately why he admired him.

"Take Hester's Ranch: You did a good job there, Captain. You beat up Abrillo with half as many men. I never like that fellow. You did right in finishing him, and I, a Mexican, say it. And I know about how you execute the five *padres* in the Philippines against the wall of their own church. We should do that with all *padres*, I always say."

"I didn't do it because they were *padres*," Gano said, a little disgusted.

Damn this filthy braggart! Must he listen to all this just to ask a simple question? Still, you had to walk warily with savages like this one . . .

Lopez was mildly surprised at the disclaimer.

"Why, then?"

"Because they were giving information about my patrols to the insurgents. Every day I lost men in ambushes."

Lopez shrugged.

"To hell with all of them—all *padres*. Let's have a drink."

Gano knew that he must drink to humor the Mexican. Reluctantly he finished his glass of wine. Already the stuff was mounting giddily to his head, for he had eaten nothing since early the evening before. He realized that his presence across the Line, especially at this critical time, was highly irregular. All through the night as he stared at the hell let loose in the Mexican town, he had stubbornly told himself that he would stand by the harsh principles he had extolled to his men. Discipline was discipline, and the troopers in his command need expect no pampering from him. Yet as he had stood, unrecognized in the dark, he overheard two orderlies talking in whispered awe. They were young soldiers and this, their first sight of the horror of war, unnerved them. One of them said:

"Gee, just think, Shorty Lewis an' them other guys over there in all that! They ain't got a Chinaman's chance to get out alive. Lord, the captain oughter do somethin'."

The other one laughed. He had a little more service than the first one and he wanted to be hard.

"Hell," he said, "what does *that* guy care? I bet right now he's prayin' to God they get theirs an' the spicks throw their bodies across the Line like they done with Anderson up at Slaughter's—to make a example, like he allus says."

Gano had walked off. He had felt a little sick. And, suddenly, he had made his decision.

THE WINE stirred him. He hoped that it had put Lopez in a frame of mind to listen to him without a sudden hardening of those cruel black eyes.

He raised his glass and smiled at the Mexican.

"To many more victories, Colonel!"

The Mexican waved his glass so that the wine slopped on the table.

"The same to you, Gano—as long as they're not against me."

They drank; and Gano thought, "He called me Gano. That's a new one. Here goes—"

He set his glass down. He leaned across the table and looked steadily at Lopez.

"Colonel," he said slowly, "I came over here to ask you something—"

Lopez waved a generous hand.

"Anything. I hoped you came just to see me; to congratulate me. But if it is something I can do for you—"

"I did come to congratulate you. I enjoyed this good wine. You have been very kind, Colonel. But I also had a duty—an unpleasant duty—still something I feel I should perform."

The Mexican's face tightened a little. The little eyes lost some of their amiability.

"Yes?" he said coolly.

"It's about some men of mine who came over here before the fight. Deserters from my troop."

Lopez' face darkened. His eyes, staring at the American, lost their last trace of friendliness.

"Yes," he said harshly. "Men of yours who fight in the ranks of the traitor Santiago. They caused me much trouble, señor, with their dirty machine guns."

Gano sipped at his wine to wet his lips. Suddenly they had become dry. This was to be war, then. He gripped his hands tightly on the wet table top. His eyes met the narrowed ones of the Mexican coldly.

"What about those men?" he said.

Lopez shrugged.

"Nothing. They are nothing."

"What has happened to them?"

Lopez studied Gano coolly.

"I've always heard," he said with studied insolence, "that the brave Captain Gano was the greatest disciplinarian in the American Army."

Gano controlled his mounting anger. He knew Mexicans.

Lopez went on:

"Now he comes to me, and over a glass of wine to celebrate a great victory, he asks me to spare a few worthless soldiers who have snapped their fingers in his face."

Gano said coldly:

"I haven't asked you to spare them. I asked you, and I ask you again, what has become of them?"

"So?" Lopez said. "People do not ask José Pineda Lopez in that manner what is he going to do."

Gano took a grip on himself. He wanted to reach across the table, yank the vainglorious fool to his feet and slug him with all he had in his right fist just at the corner of his pouchy jaw. But he knew better than to do that. With a supreme effort, both of will and pride, he smiled.

"Colonel," he said, "I have always heard said that you had a sense of humor."

For a second Lopez failed to react to the flattery. After all, such an accusation does not go far south of the Rio Grande.

"Also," said Gano, smiling amiably, "there is a rumor in our Army that José Pineda Lopez, like all brave men, recognizes bravery in others—even in enemies."

Lopez relaxed completely. He sat back in his chair and smiled expansively.

"Ah, my friend! You have me there. How can one quarrel with a brave man like yourself—a man who wears the Medal of Honor? A man who has proved himself such a soldier as myself? This is why I can not understand your asking me to do less than my duty. What you, yourself, would do in my place. You must know that my men expect certain ceremonies to accompany victories. These men of yours now contemplate their folly in the cells of the *calabozo*."

"I see," Gano murmured. "Not killed then?"

"With the pig officers of that swine Santiago," Lopez said.

"What will you do with them?"

Lopez' smile was beatific. He leaned back in his chair and threw his hands out from his body in a gesture of languid repletion, like one who has had his fill of delicious viands and contemplates a leisurely cigar of excellent quality.

"Ah—those gentlemen! My dear friend, surely there is no need for a soldier like you to ask?"

Gano moistened his lips.

"The wall?"

"The wall . . ."

There was a long silence. Lopez rubbed his hand on the butt of his oily pistol. Gano looked at the dirty window pane over the Mexican's head.

At last he said—

"Lopez, it's my duty to ask you for those men."

Lopez stared across the table at the American.

"AND IT is my duty, to my men and to my country, to tell you that they shall get what all men captured in arms against my army will always get," he replied.

There was another long silence. Lopez' little eyes were full of hate. He drank from his glass savagely.

Gano said slowly:

"I only thought there might be a chance. As you say, they deserve what you are going to give them. I've warned my men what to expect if they mixed up in your fights over here. Only yesterday I told my noncoms that I would give them the same dose for desertion if I had the authority."

Lopez was appeased.

"So?" he said pleasantly. "You tell them that? I am glad to hear you say it, Gano, because this is not a thing against you personally, you understand."

"I understand," Gano said heavily.

"You know if you capture men of mine fighting against you, you do the same."

"Not quite the same," Gano said.

"But the same according to your custom. You would not let me tell you how to treat them, eh?"

"No," Gano said. "I wouldn't let any one tell me how to treat them."

"Ah, you see?"

Lopez smiled, again in good humor. The continued drafts of wine were mellowing him. Now that Gano had agreed with him as a good soldier should, he felt magnanimous. And, after all, had he not won a great victory tonight? He had almost forgotten that in this trivial talk about a few worthless soldiers. Right now, all Mexico was probably proclaiming his name and destiny.

"Look, Gano," he said, "a little ago you said I recognized bravery in others. You think for that reason I should let your soldiers go. How do I know they are so brave? Maybe in the fighting they hide in the cellars like our friend Santiago."

Lopez laughed loudly at his happy thought.

"Those men weren't in any cellars," Gano said quietly.

"I am not so sure," Lopez said. "My men find the hero Santiago with his head in potato sacks in the deepest cellar in Agua Bonita."

Gano said coldly:

"Lopez, if there was any way to prove it, I would make you a bet of every cent I have in the world, including my next pay check, that those fellows of mine were the backbone of the defense here. God knows, I'm ashamed of them, and they deserve every damn thing that's coming to them. But when it comes to guts—"

Lopez grinned. He would bait this vain Gano.

"Ho! They lead the Mexicans here! And they are the poorest men you have because they lack discipline and run away from their duty. What heroes then you must have left in that troop, Gano!"

"I didn't mean that," Gano said sourly.

Lopez said:

"I tell you, Gano, what I will do. If these men are as you say, they shall die with all honors."

A feeling of relief came to Gano. This was the best he could do.

"All I ask," he said, "is that it's done away from the town. They may deserve punishment, but not disgrace. My outfit's right across there where they can see the whole show. You can spit across the fence to the *carcel* wall where—"

Lopez grinned.

"You don't like to say it. I see you have watched them before. Yes, my friend, that's the place. Many a brave man has fallen at the foot of that wall. It is the best place in town for the ceremony, because it is the center of everything. The whole town will come to the *carcel* to watch, when only a few hardened audiences would walk as far as the edge of the city where the cemetery wall is."

"And another reason," Gano said coldly, looking Lopez squarely in the eyes, "if you pull a thing like that off right in front of my men I might not be able—I couldn't promise to be responsible for the outcome. You know they are still talking of that sniping at Slaughter's Ranch. They think your soldiers did that, Lopez."

"You American are funny people," Lopez said amiably. "Why should they think my men did that? We have no quarrel with you."

"I only said," Gano said quietly, "that that is the idea they have."

"Well," Lopez said, "they are wrong. I always got along all right with you—aren't we sitting here drinking together? And you can tell your men that is some of Santiago's *palabra*."

A sudden thought seemed to come to him. His eyes lighted.

"I tell you what I will do, Gano. Just to show there are no hard feelings, I'll risk my own discipline. We'll find out about these heroes of yours. My men met them hand to hand. They will remember. I'll get the tale from my adjutant. The bravest of them I will make you a present of. Perhaps your famous discipline will make him more an example than my own poor efforts."

Lopez called one of his officers to his side and spoke harshly to him. The officer, Lopez' adjutant, talked so rapidly in his earnestness that Gano could make little of the Spanish.

"He says—" Lopez grinned— "that they are there in the *carcel*, all right. My gallant men took them at the point of their bayonets, right at the guns. There are four."

"Four? That can't be. Only three were reported absent yesterday."

Lopez cursed his adjutant, but the man replied with stubborn conviction. He had seen them himself. There were indeed four of the gringos.

"He is a liar, usually," Lopez said, "but now I think he tells the truth. There is no graft, as you say, in this matter for him."

Lopez sent his adjutant away with a curt wave of his hand. He lay back in his chair and lighted a crooked black cigar. He smiled condescendingly at his American friend. He said softly, looking through the clouds of smoke he blew toward the ceiling:

"It will be a brave sight, Gano. Old Mister Sun peeping, blood-red, over the Sierra Madres—the little squads marching to the wall. And in honor of your men, the firing party shall be of my own bodyguard. A fine sight, my friend!"

The adjutant had returned to stand by his master's side. Lopez ignored him. He reached for his glass and found that the wine was flat from inattention.

"Pedro!" he shouted.

Pedro came racing and grinning with a bottle. Gano sank back into his chair. He stirred the ashes in his cold pipe with the end of a match. He watched Lopez' adjutant curiously. The adjutant stared helplessly down at his chief, not daring to speak until he was noticed.

"Well, why do you not go? Why do you come back here to annoy me in my relaxation? You would like, perhaps, a gut full of champagne? Champagne is for commanders only—commanders and their friends."

The adjutant replied in a torrent of

earnest Spanish. Gano, bored, held his glass out to Pedro, who filled it with meticulous ceremony. Lopez said, shrugging a shoulder toward the adjutant:

"He has a droll story, this clown. He has been too many times to cheap cinemas."

Gano was thinking his own bitter thoughts.

"Tell him to go away," he said.

"Go away," Lopez said. "Quick!"

The adjutant went away.

Lopez began to laugh, a solemn, drunken laugh.

"Look, Gano," he said. "That fool is *loco*. He has been eating *marihuana*. He talks about beautiful ladies with pistols in their hands. Ha, that is good!"

But Gano did not appear to hear. Those bitter thoughts of his had to do with four of his men—who had taken their arms over the hill . . .

"I wonder, I wonder?" he said, half aloud.

"What is it you wonder? If the wine will hold out, eh?"

"No; the fourth man. I'm praying to God it's Freeman, the dirtiest man in the troop."

"Dirty men don't run away to fight . . . Don't you think we should have cognac now?"

THERE were streaks of pale light against the eastern mountains, but it was still black as night in the cells of the moldy *carcel*. The tipsy soldier held a lantern in front of his brutal face as he stumbled and lurched, padding in his bare feet down the line of cells. The dim light from the foul lantern threw drunken shadows of the bars, danced on the once whitewashed walls. Gano, Lopez and the stubborn adjutant followed the swaying light. Lopez complained of the odor. A guard from the door of the jail followed behind, the butt of his dirty Mauser dragging on the *caliche* floor.

Lopez turned in sudden anger to the guard.

"What is that bellowing like a motherless calf?"

The stupid fellow stopped in his tracks. His mouth fell open. He was bereft of speech at this sudden standing face to face with his anointed master. At last he said, shaking—

"It is the gringo who is afraid to die, *Señor Commandante*."

"You lie," Gano said, and he laid his hand on his pistol butt.

"Kill him if you wish, Gano," Lopez said. "No soldier of yours would whine like that unless it was liquor or a woman he wanted. Kill the cur."

"I ought to," Gano said.

The adjutant took keys from the trembling fingers of the guard. He indicated a cell to the right.

"Here is the door, General," he said.

When the door was unlocked the stupid lantern carrier pushed it in and lifted his smoking light high over his head. Its flickering rays showed heavy, adobe walls, a floor of beaten earth. A horrible stench came from the place as from a pit of dead things. From a sodden heap on the floor came a terror of anguished moans. The heap moved and resolved itself into the ragged, trembling semblance of a man. He threw up his head with the quick jerk of a cheap actor in a tragic rôle. The crude lantern light falling full into his starting eyes had the effect of a ghastly spotlight on a fantastic stage.

"*Freeman*," Gano said. "Thank God it's Freeman."

Lopez said softly—

"So you get rid of the dirtiest man!"

Three others, in ragged O. D., sat close together on a bench against the far wall. The light carrier, emboldened by the drama in the air, thrust the lantern into their very faces.

"*Aqui hay otros*," he muttered, and he laughed aloud.

The three stared at their captain. Gano's cold eyes went from one to the other.

There was Brill, all right—roughly bandaged, still bleeding, sullen resignation in his bloodshot eyes. Served the

swine right for letting his captain down like this . . .

And next to him, still cheaply cocky by the look of him, was Feeny. Openly defiant, in fact. He met the hostile eyes of his captain squarely, belligerently. Well, damned shortly there'd be the fear of God in that Puck-like face . . .

Gano's eyes passed on.

The next in the line would be Shorty Lewis. Gano liked Lewis: A dependable man; a good man with horses; a man who smoked a pipe as though he loved it. Next to Callahan, Lewis was the best natural soldier in the outfit.

Gano poked the soldier with the lantern. The light was not clear on Shorty's face. The man was hanging his head. A bloody strip of rag hid what could be seen of the face. Gano pushed the drunken soldier's arm so that it would throw the lantern light square on Shorty's face. He was more curious about Shorty, and angrier, than about the others. You might expect anything of them.

As the light fell full on the man's head and sagging shoulders, he looked up with a sudden flip of his head. It was not Shorty. Shorty lay stripped and stiff on the edge of the town, in the cold desert sand. A jammed gun belt was clenched in his claw-like fingers. His battered head was crushed against his faithless gun. His dead eyes were opened toward the throbbing desert stars. The little black pipe lay cold in the sheaves of empty cartridge cases, strewn about him. The black pipe was all that the victorious vandals had considered of no value.

"God!" Gano said.

Pat Callahan looked with dead eyes into the staring face of his captain, and said nothing. Then slowly he dropped his head on his chest and stared at the floor.

Brill and Feeny followed their captain's face with the eyes of abandoned dogs. But they said nothing.

"Callahan," Gano said, "you're the last man I'd expect to see here. Have you anything to say?"

Callahan said nothing.

"You know what you're up against, men?"

Pat Callahan raised his eyes slowly from the floor. He fixed them on Gano wearily.

"We know, Captain. These spicks been tellin' us all night."

"I only want to make it clear," Gano said, "that if I could, I wouldn't raise a hand to help you. You're a disgrace to your troop and to the United States Army. You're going to get what I'd give you myself if I had the authority."

"We're ready to take our medicine," Pat said. "You don't hear us bellyachin', do you? Why don't you get out and leave us alone?"

THE MAN on the floor writhed toward Gano. He reached desperate, clutching hands toward his knees. Great tears rushed down his grimy face, leaving white furrows in the red dust. He blubbered so that his choking words formed bubbles on his loose lips.

"God, Captain Gano, you wouldn't leave us here with these devils! They'll kill us, kill us, *kill us!* The first sergeant sent me, so help me. He sent me to get *him*—"

He thrust a palsied hand toward Pat Callahan. Pat turned his blood smeared face to the wall.

"Is that true, Callahan?" Gano asked in a hard voice.

"If he did he hoped the yellow puppy wouldn't come back. You know what a liar the man is."

Gano knew what a liar the man was.

"Shut up your whining," he said to the man on the floor.

"It is getting light," Lopez observed.

Freeman's cries rose to a scream. The three on the bench turned their hard faces on him. They said nothing.

Gano looked at the man on his left.

"Anything you want to say, Brill, before I go?"

A look of shame came over the man's haggard face. He seemed to be fighting

with some hopeless thought beyond him to express. He looked at his captain.

"I know I ain't got no right to ask nothing now, Captain Gano, but if Corporal Mason could have Thirty-six, I'd feel better."

"Thirty-six," Gano said.

"The men call him Baldy, 'count of his blaze face—one what won the high jump at the Presidio."

"I know the horse. Yes, I'll see to it . . . You, Feeny?"

Feeny's mouth was working.

"Oney thing I got to say, Captain, is I didn't desert. Nobody can say I deserted. I oney went A. W. O. L."

His voice rose hysterically. He lurched from his seat toward Gano, frenzy in his eyes. Gano held up his hand.

"Never mind. Never mind that now."

"You ain't gonna tell *my* bunkies I went over no hill. If you do you're a dirty, lousy—"

He was on his feet now. He advanced on Gano, his hands working before his twisted face. His voice had risen to a scream of hate. He lunged at Gano.

Callahan knocked him to the floor with a backward swing of his great arm.

"Don't be like *that* guy," he said, spitting toward Freeman. "The captain don't want to hear no post mortems."

Feeny shook himself and sat up. He passed his hands over his wet eyes. Suddenly he became calm.

"I'm sorry, Captain Gano. I seen red for a minute."

"Why did you do it, Feeny? Didn't I give you a square deal?"

"You always was on the level, sir. It wasn't that. It's just—just I wanted to get in a fight. I ain't never been under fire, an' all them old-timers back there in the troop razzing a guy an' sounding off about fightin' Moros an' spicks an' all. I just wanted to get in a fight."

Gano turned his hard eyes on Pat Callahan. There was a long silence as the two men, on the same level now, looked at each other.

Gano found it hard to say any word to this man. It irritated him. It made him feel, somehow, that this sergeant was the better man. At last he said—

"Can I do anything for you, Callahan?"

"Yes, sir," Pat said steadily.

Somehow Gano was surprised at this. He expected very little in the way of words from this prototype of himself.

Pat pointed at the moaning bundle of rags at his feet.

"If the Captain wants to do something for me, he can have that man, what pretends to be a American soldier, thrown out of here an' his uniform taken off. That's all anybody can do for me."

"That's the kind of man you must expect to associate with if you desert, Callahan," Gano said.

"That's what I expected to hear," Pat said.

When the cell door closed Gano had a giddy feeling. He wondered, with alarm, if he was getting chicken hearted. Some officers did when a favorite soldier was in trouble. He knew that had Pat Callahan, the best soldier in his troop, his next Top, not been in that cell room, there would be no conflict in his mind. But now . . .

Lopez led them to a cell at the end of the building. The guard was bending over the lock on a heavy door. The stupid light bearer was throwing shadows where he should have thrown light. Gano moved his feet impatiently. What was all this? He had seen his men and he wanted to be gone.

"Colonel," he said, "I must be going. It is getting light, and I have seen my men."

Lopez beamed on him. His little black eyes danced in the dull light.

"Ah, Captain Gano! You have seen nothing yet. Inside here we have a lady who turns aside bullets! It must be so because my lying adjutant vouches for it. We have a beauty here who inspired the defenders while the gross Santiago lay in a cellar with his head under potato sacks. Ask my adjutant. He will tell you how she rushed from trench to trench and from one hot gun to another, calling on the saints to give them strength against us.

My adjutant will tell you all this in inspired language, though from where he was in the fighting, I can not understand how he saw."

Lopez laughed loudly in his adjutant's face. The man, who knew little English, yet knew he was being derided, scowled at the floor. Gano reached for his pipe and fumbled it about in his worn pouch. Damn Lopez and his whims! He had a pressing bit of work to do on the other side . . .

THE DOOR swung open. The dirty light threw its dull rays about the bare cell. Maria de la Cruz sat upon a backless chair. She shrank deep into her rags as an animal shrinks against the farthest corner of its cage at the intrusion of its captors. She would not look up into the brutal, peering faces. She turned her eyes from the searching light. She drew her small bare feet up under her. She reached with a thin hand to pull the folds of her scant skirt about her legs.

"Look at me, little tigress. Lift up your face and look at José Pineda Lopez, conqueror of Agua Bonita and of northern Mexico. Raise those dove eyes, little Joan of Arc, who they say prefers to die upon a flaming cross of *piñon* instead of before the rifles of the Liberator of Mexico."

Maria de la Cruz raised her eyes.

"I spit upon you, Lopez," she said.

"Bravo, bravo, bravo! Gano, she spits upon me. And you, too, without a doubt! Yes, the little Joan spits upon you as well, Gano."

Gano didn't say anything.

The adjutant crossed himself furtively, so that his master, who hated *padres*, could not see.

"She is with God," he muttered.

The drunken light bearer again laughed aloud, a horrid, obscene laugh. And above that laugh came to them the screaming of the soldier, Freeman, who was shaming his race and his troop.

Maria's face was dead white. Her great black eyes burned up at them in a repellence that was physically shocking. Gano stepped nearer to her. The glory of hatred and defiance in those eyes, as they turned from face to face of her tormentors, fascinated him.

They fixed themselves on him.

"You are American officer?"

"Yes."

"For shame!" She turned from him and spat on the floor.

There was nothing Gano could think of to say.

Lopez roared with laughter.

"She is ashamed of you, Gano. Ha-ha-ha! The little one is ashamed."

"Shut up!" Gano said.

Maria said to Gano:

"You 'ave one unde't, two unde't soldair who cain fight like 'ale—who cain wipe thees Lopez to nothing. Bot you seet an' laugh, w'ile thees butchair, here, keel weemens an' keeds. You jais seet an' laugh!"

"I could do nothing," Gano said. "It was none of my business."

Maria laughed—a harsh, hysterical laugh that twisted her white face out of all semblance of beauty.

"Non' you beesness—non' you beesness! W'at beesness thane you got, soldair?"

Gano wondered why he had patience with this dancehall woman in a cell.

"I am an American soldier. My men can not fight in Mexico."

He felt very virtuous when he said that. He forgot, for the moment, his last night's agony of desire to sweep through the rebel ranks in a pistol attack . . .

Maria grimaced at him, mocking his quiet words.

"Can not, ha? Bot they do. W'y thane Lewees, Breel an' Faney, an' Pat Cal'an they com' fight een Mehico? W'y? You tale to me that, Capitan!"

Gano only wished he knew. He said heavily:

"They are deserters. They will be punished."

But Maria cared nothing for his answers. She rose and stood straight and slim before them. The drunken soldier,

the guard and Lopez followed with lustful eyes the lines of her body. The adjutant looked over his shoulder at the floor. Gano stared into Maria de la Cruz' flaming eyes.

"I tale to you, Capitan Gano, w'y those mens com' here to fight—" She breathed viciously.

"I wish to God you would."

Maria threw her head up proudly.

"They com' becos' I tale thame to com' —an' they do w'at I tale thame becos' they lof' to me!"

She glared defiance at Gano.

Lopez laughed loudly. His laugh applauded Maria de la Cruz. He poked an obnoxious finger against Gano's ribs.

"She is nice, that chicken," said the lantern carrier.

Gano turned blank eyes on Lopez.

"What will you do with her?" he asked. "Surely not shoot her like the—others?"

Lopez smiled—a sly, bright smile

"What would *you?* Tell me, Gano, on your word of honor, what would you do with her in my place?"

Gano said slowly, his eyes roving over the still figure of the girl—

"I don't know—" he smiled sourly—"unless I was running a recruiting office for machine gunners."

Lopez thought that very humorous. He held his fat sides as he laughed.

AS THOUGH the Mexican's mocking laughter had driven the last spark of defiance out of her, Maria sank back on to the chair. The light went out of the dark eyes. She crouched there before them, a pitiful, shaking child. She gripped herself with her arms crossed on her bosom, and shuddered as from the cold. With an impatient gesture of pity, Gano jerked the soiled *serape* from the shoulders of the guard and threw it about the girl's hunched and trembling shoulders. Her suspicious eyes watched him as she shrank back against the wall and pulled the blanket about her.

"Eet make no deef'rance eef I am col'," she said in a low voice.

Gano said crossly:

"Do you know what's going to happen to those men you got to desert? Those men you say loved you?"

She shuddered, but her eyes met his steadily.

"They were soldairs," she said simply. "I—I know. They are dade, now. They fight for Mehico becos' they brave . . . Please go way—go way . . ."

She pulled the blanket about her face and shrank deeper into its enveloping folds.

"She cry," said the drunken soldier, and he shook his head slowly from side to side philosophically. The light from his wavering lantern sent bobbing shadows about the walls.

Gano took a step toward Maria. He said steadily:

"They are not all dead. Three of them —four of them are locked up in here."

For a moment Maria seemed not to understand his words. Gano said sternly:

"Do you hear me? Only Lewis is dead. The others are here in another cell."

She moved the *serape* slowly from her face so that she could look at him. A sudden dawning of understanding came into her sunken eyes. A swift gleam of hope and excitement brought life back into her face. She fell on her knees before Gano and clutched at his blouse.

"Not dade? My Pat—Cal'an?" She crossed herself swiftly, her eyes pleading into those of the man staring down at her. "Tale to me— *Dios*, do not lie!"

Lopez said admiringly—

"She loves that Irish, I think."

The drunken soldier said:

"She loved them all—all machine gun men." He laughed softly. "But love is not so good at dawn."

Desperately Maria clung to Gano, who tried to pull away from her tearing hands.

"Leesten, Capitan," she begged. "You soldair Cal'an do not ron away. He com' to me las' night and say 'Maria, I com' take you to the *padre*.' Bot first he make me *triste* becos' he jalos an' dreenk moch weesky. He laugh w'en I say I lof to 'eem. 'You lof' afery one,' he say. I am

very angry so I say 'You do not know lof—' "

She burst into a spasm of weeping. She clung closer to Gano, who looked down at her with startled eyes.

"Go on," he commanded harshly.

Maria pushed at her wet eyes with the back of her hand.

"An' thane Lopez, he com', an' I say, 'Eef you lof to me you fight for me.' He say, 'No, we go queek to Brandes.' Bot I say, 'You theenk Maria de la Cruz go ron away an' leave her pipple? Eef you go now you go for always. You theenk I marry weeth a coward?' "

Maria looked piteously at Gano, and Gano knew that this fantastic story was the truth.

"Go on," he said. "What did Callahan say to that?"

A proud look came into Maria's eyes. She said softly:

"He say w'at I know he would say. He say, 'Maria, keed, I fight like hale for you!"

"For God's sake!" Gano said.

"I wish I had several of those Irish," Lopez murmured.

Gano said to Maria:

"Callahan is alive. They will shoot him at daylight."

"Bot you are hees capitan—you weel safe heem," Maria said simply.

A STRANGE thing happened to Gano. Quite suddenly he became chicken hearted. Born three hundred years too late, he understood the urge that led men to fight Mexican machine guns. And, too, he understood the sublime martyrdom of Maria de la Cruz. But where his men had smirched discipline, and so the profession of arms, Maria had glorified them. He could not forgive them that; but he could forgive Maria.

But Callahan. The lure that weakened him Gano could condone. A man without women himself, he had lived vicarious romance in his dreams. Romance, his armor of harshness forbade him to accept before the world.

In his errant sergeant he saw a touch of Galahad. The loophole he had been unconsciously seeking for the best soldier in his troop was here to his hand. And Lopez had promised him the bravest.

His silence frightened Maria. Quick suspicion leaped into her eyes.

"W'at you goin' do?" she asked sharply.

Gano's voice was kind. He dropped his hand on her head.

"You are going back to Brandes with me," he said. "Colonel Lopez has agreed. He is chivalrous. He meant the bravest woman as well as the bravest man.

He looked at Lopez. Lopez grinned.

"It is as you say, Captain Gano. As usual, you come out on top."

Maria shrank from Gano. The sharp intake of her breath made a little hissing sound.

"No! No! No!" she shrieked.

"I won't hurt you," Gano said.

Utter contempt was in her eyes.

"No, you not hurt me!" She threw her arms out in a swift gesture of abandon. Her eyes flashed at him—black, blazing. "No, all you do ees stan' my man agains' the wall. You lat Lopez keel heem becos' he lof to me an' becos' he fight for me. You theenk I go Brandes an' leave Pat Cal'an to Lopez?"

"Callahan is a deserter," Gano said doggedly.

"Thane I am desaitair, too!" Maria flamed. She turned on Lopez. "Dirty skinned one, tell this fool gringo that no *soldadera* leaved her man even at the firin' squad. Tale to heem eef he would plead for me to ask I can be put beside heem in fron' you seex rifles. I weel die weeth heem, laughing' at you both!"

Lopez said:

"You are worthy, little one. But I already tell the gringo that he can have your Irish if he so wishes."

Maria drew in a deep breath.

"I will curse you from heaven if you are lying."

"It's God's truth," Lopez said. "Ask him."

Maria's fingers caught Gano's arms.

"Leesten, gringo capitan. He say Cal'an can go. You safe heem an' I go back weeth you." Her small white teeth were set in a tight line, her lips drawn back from them like a snarling jungle cat. In her desperation she had pushed Gano back against the wall. "Tale to me you weel!" she screamed. "Tale to Lopez!"

"Let go my arm," Gano said.

She shook him with the strength of a fury.

"Tale to Lopez!"

"Lord," Gano said, trying to push her from him. "All right. Send her across, Lopez. I'll get Callahan."

Lopez turned to his adjutant. He indicated Maria with a gallant wave of his hat.

"Take the lady to the fence," he said ceremoniously, "and hand her with all honors to the gringo guard. Being gentlemen, they will know what to do with her."

Maria eyed them all suspiciously.

"I wait for Cal'an," she said sullenly.

But Gano had reached the limit of his softness.

"You beat it now," he said harshly. "Before I change my mind."

He watched them drag Maria, protesting, from the cell, and out the door at the end of the long corridor. Then, accompanied by the guard and the muttering lantern carrier, he went in to his men.

Callahan was surprised when his captain again stood before him. It was not like Gano to reopen a subject once closed. Pat rose to his feet with elaborate ceremony. The others remained pressed back against the wall.

"No need to rub it in, Captain." Pat grinned.

The others looked up with dull eyes. They, too, knew their captain well enough to realize that they could hope for nothing from him once he had said his say. Freeman lay quiet, sprawled face down, on the *caliche* floor.

"I didn't come to rub it in, Callahan," Gano said quietly. "I've just heard the truth about you. It's bad enough, but it makes your case different from these other men's. I've come to take you back to the other side."

Pat sat down slowly beside the others on the bench. He looked at Gano with a sour grin on his hard face.

"Know any more good jokes, Captain?" he said.

His every movement was an affront. His tone was sarcastically insubordinate. Gano's face stiffened. It darkened with outraged vanity.

"Get up!" he said. His voice sounded like the crack of an unexpected bullet above a trench.

THAT voice that Pat Callahan had jumped to for ten years worked its miracle now. The sneer left his face as though painted out with the sudden stroke of a brush. Like a man on springs he came to his feet. His fingers sought the seams of his breeches.

"Yes, sir," he said, tonelessly.

"Let's get out of here," Gano said.

Pat twisted his fingers against his breeches. He looked down at his troop mates where they huddled on the bench.

"How about them?" he said.

"Never mind them," Gano said.

"Ain't they goin'?"

"They're deserters. You know that, Callahan."

Pat Callahan looked slowly from his captain down to where Feeny and Brill stared up, white faced, from the gloom of the cell. Like a man utterly wearied he sank down beside them on the rough bench. He looked up squarely into Gano's impatient eyes.

"Then I'm a deserter, too," he said.

"Don't be a fool, Callahan," Gano said.

Brill, who was next to Callahan on the bench, pushed a friendly hand against his shoulder.

"Beat it, Pat," he said.

The sergeant looked at the floor sullenly. He pushed out his rough issue shoe and poked it against the inert body of the luckless Freeman. He turned his red rimmed eyes up to Gano.

"*He'll* go," he said. "Take him across with you. He'd appreciate it."

"He's fainted," Feeny said. "Go on with the captain, Pat. Me an' Joe don't mind."

"I don't care whether you mind or not," Callahan said.

Gano tried to control his rising anger.

"A Mexican girl explained about you, Callahan—a girl called Maria."

"A swell kid," Feeny said.

"I believe her," Gano said. "And when you're brought before a court, her evidence may help you."

"The most you'd get, Pat," said Brill, "would maybe be busted an' a ten dollar 'blind'—"

"I won't get no blind," Pat said.

Feeny laughed self-consciously.

"A summary looks just like a field day to me now," he said.

Pat growled out a hard laugh.

"It always did," he said. "Where's my girl now, Captain Gano?"

Gano said:

"She's back in camp. She wouldn't go till I promised to bring you back."

"So you promised," Pat said. He looked down at his feet and rubbed his big hand across his face. Feeny said—

"Cap'n, you got any chewin'?"

"No," Gano said. "Here's a cigar." He handed Feeny a ragged cigar from the breast pocket of his blouse. "It's a little torn," he said.

"That's all right," Brill said. "Let's cut it in halfs an' smoke it, Spud."

"O. K," Feeny said. "You get the top end—"

Gano reached into his pocket again.

"Here's one for you, Brill," he said. "It's torn a bit, too."

"That won't hurt it none," Brill said, grinning. "I wouldn't be able to finish it, anyway."

"Let's get out of here, Callahan," Gano said, trying to put briskness into his voice.

Pat got up from the bench. He stretched his long arms above his head in a graceful, yawning gesture. He reached into his breeches pocket and drew out the soiled tobacco bag. He handed it to Gano.

"Leave the little spick have that," he said.

Gano fumbled the bag in his hands.

"What's this?" he said.

"It's a greasy Bull Durham bag, Captain," Pat said. "Tell her to buy herself some new stockings and put it in one."

Feeny said mournfully—

"I'll bet they's a thousand bucks there, an' you an' me sittin' here all night, Joe, with my hot bones."

Pat looked scornfully at Feeny.

"Oh, yeah?" he said.

"It wouldn't of done us no good—not with that guy. We'd oney be naked now," Brill said.

Gano had opened the bag and stared within. Now he closed it. There was an air of finality in the brisk action. He buttoned the bag carefully in his blouse pocket.

"What about Freeman, here?" he asked, pointing at the senseless man on the floor.

Feeny said:

"He's a lying buzzard, Captain. He come over here on his own to souse *tequila*."

Gano turned away.

"I thought so," he said.

He faced Pat Callahan.

"I'm not going to argue with you, Sergeant," he said coldly. "Are you coming with me or not?"

Pat grinned in his face.

"I'm stickin' with the gang, thanks," he said.

Gano shoved the Mexicans out the door and banged it after him. He was livid with rage.

LOPEZ was exalted with the wine of France and with his own splendid magnanimity. He was elaborate in his leavetaking with Maria at the custom gate. He repeated his imagined arguments with Gano to the bewildered girl several times over in the trip from the *carcel* to the fence. He explained drunkenly how

Gano had challenged his chivalry and his appreciation of bravery in a defeated foe. And how he had met that challenge—magnificently.

"Nobody," he reiterated, "can now say that José Pineda Lopez is the savage he is reputed to be in the circles of the ignorant. Did he not see bravery in a worthy enemy, and recognize it with the generous gesture of freedom? Did he not see romance and appreciate the beauty in this love between the little wildcat of his own people and the heroic soldier who would have laid down his life for her?"

Lopez was quite drunk. He must go back to these soldiers. He would, in the presence of their captain, who doubtless was still with them, congratulate them on their—courage.

He met Gano at the entrance to the jail. Gano's face was white. He only growled at the Mexican's pleasant greeting. Lopez made the mistake of seizing the American with rough comradeship by the arm, as he attempted to brush past him.

"Why this great hurry?" Lopez asked blandly. "And where is the hero?"

Gano spun about and faced the Mexican. His self-control had completely gone.

"You go to hell," Gano said distinctly.

Lopez stared. Slowly a dull flush beat into his swarthy cheeks. His hand went to his pistol—but Gano was too quick for him. In a lightning movement he had a Colt automatic within two feet of Lopez' chest.

"Get in that door, Lopez," he said quietly.

Lopez looked at the haggard face and the almost insane eyes behind the pistol. Then, swiftly, he glanced about him. The *carcel* guard was inside the jail. The streets were deserted. It was but a matter of a hundred yards to the American side of the fence. And at that fence, in plain view from where they stood, were khaki clad soldiers idly staring into the town. Behind them were others—over a hundred . . .

Lopez slowly dropped his hand from his holster.

"So?" he said softly.

A wild look came into his eyes. His fingers trembled against his breeches.

"So you do this to me, eh? Then listen to this, gringo. I tell you when I think you are a gentleman, a soldier, that I treat your men with honor. I should know there is no such word with you. Now you will see how I repay you for your treachery. Those rats of yours I will do to what I did to the others who sneer across the fence at my brave soldiers. They shall be lined up against that wall and shot down like the dogs they are, where you can watch their cowardly writhings."

Gano, his pistol steady in his hand, said—

"You do that, Lopez, and I'll be back—with a hundred more behind me."

Lopez sneered.

"You come on! Bring a thousand loud mouthed gringos with you, and you get what I have like to give you many months now."

From the corner of his eye Gano saw people approaching. He backed away, the pistol still ready. A voice came from behind him—the tough duty sergeant at the gate—

"Captain Gano, anything wrong over there?"

"Not a thing, Miller— Get in there quick, Lopez!"

Lopez darted in the door of the jail.

Gano put his pistol carefully back in its holster and walked calmly toward the gate. There was boiling hate in his heart. He cursed himself for his loss of temper and the horror it now insured for his deserting troops. Bad as they were, he might have done that much for them—let them die an unadvertised death, without vindictiveness. And to make matters worse, he had bluffed. He hated a bluffer. He had bragged to Lopez that he would retaliate with armed force. He knew that any order of his sending men across the Line on such a mission would be not only illegal, but

would precipitate a ghastly crisis. Would mean court-martial, disgrace; besides gambling unthinkably with the lives of the men under his command.

ON THE Border the day comes suddenly, rushing over the sharp tops of the mountains with a breath taking wash of almost unnatural color. It is a moment of wonder in each clear, bright day. A pause comes over the desert. Life hangs still, suspended, quiet. The streets of the little towns are dead. When the great sun pushes over the top of Nigger Head, its full brightness floods the dirty walls of the *carcel* in Agua Bonita.

It shone now on those walls, and on the wrecked houses of the Mexican town. The streets were empty. A stray dog or two, a few separate figures of drunken soldiers, aimlessly searching the charred ruins for petty loot, were the only signs of life in the stricken place.

Then came the high note of a bugle. There was a stir about the door of the jail. Mexican soldiers stumbled out of the doors of *cantinas* where they had been enjoying the reward of conquerors. They stared dully down the dusty streets. Many of them shrugged, and went back. What was an execution of pig heads to them? An old story; and not as interesting as the free *mescal* and the abundance of brown cigarets.

The idle populace of the place, their timidity overcome by morbid curiosity, peered from doorways. The bolder ones moved in chattering groups toward the scene of carnival. It was an old story, truly; but part of the fun. After all, they had spent an uneasy night. Matters were normal again. And it was good to show an interest in the doings of the new rulers of the town; that Lopez was, after all, *un soldado muy bravo!*

The sun rose red. It seemed to select for special brightness, as a spotlight selects its target on a stage, the grim gathering near the *carcel.*

Order prevailed there. It was evident that Lopez' guard, and the firing squad, had endured unwelcome discipline during the night. Their movements were all business. Men of the guard were flung out in an orderly movement to keep back the onlookers. Others spread a sinister cordon about the doomed prisoners. The firing squad, conscious of their momentary importance, lounged in an insolent group, their backs to the boundary fence, their rifles leaning against their hips. They lighted cigarets, and grinned at each other. Some of them laughed aloud. They gesticulated toward the prisoners with quick movements of their thumbs.

What was to be found on those bodies later would, by the law of war, be theirs. Even now they picked their loot, agreeing beforehand among themselves. There would be much laughing and jibing later, when the more bullying choosers would, perhaps, turn out to be defrauded by their greedy estimate of exteriors.

The prisoners were herded together in a compact group, wedged together like sheep by the growling guards. Those who had coats had turned the collars up against the early cold of the day. They stood, dejected, mostly staring at the ground. And as if to make their last moments more peaceful, they kept their backs to the grisly bustle about them. Some of them were smoking—a last concession allowed by their bored guard. The men of the firing squad scowled at this. One cigaret less for them when it came to rifling those ragged clothes . . .

Already some of this loot was gone, torn from helpless backs by the first captors. Little was left on them now. Ragged shirts, ripped trousers; few had shoes. They shivered, holding their naked arms tight across their chests.

Smoke rose about them from the toppled walls of Agua Bonita—the sullen, lingering smirch of war. And smoke—the smoke of peaceful breakfast fires—came from the chimneys of Brandes, a hundred yards, a million miles away. The prisoners watched it with wistful, sunken eyes.

The sun warmed. It gleamed on the wrecked walls of the town; made them screw up their eyes against its brilliance.

It warmed the huddled, bedraggled creatures, ringed with the glinting bayonets of their guards.

And now from the north, from beyond the brick buildings of Brandes, came a grim, drab column. A steadily moving column of fours, the bright sun glancing from a rigid rectangle of rifle muzzles. The Mexicans stared. The women in the crowd called out, pointing their brown fingers.

"*Los gringos!*"

The American troop came steadily down the dusty road, a thin golden cloud rising from their feet into a haze above their bobbing heads.

"Column left—march!"

The Mexicans watched curiously. The long column turned sharply, parallel to the fence, not a hundred yards from it.

"Fours right—march!"

It swung into line, facing south.

"Tro-o-op—" it marked time, with the regular, even movement of two hundred polished boots—"halt!"

"*El Gano!—El Capitan Gano!*"

The cry in a low murmur swept through the crowd of Mexicans.

THE MEXICAN guards glanced nervously across the fence toward that quiet, business-like line. It was a sight they cared little for. Through some of their minds shot quick remembrance, fearsome guilt. These were the men who had ridden savagely after them at Hester's—in the wake of their pillage, burning and murder of that ranch-house. They were the men who had hurled a vengeance of words across this same fence after the killing of the postmaster at Hatchita, and the sniping of their camp at Slaughter's. It was as well there was an impassable fence just where it was . . .

The troop steadied, dressed, and brought their rifles to the "order." Gano gave the command to rest. There was dead quiet in the ranks in spite of that order. It was a long line because the troop commander's orders said all but the sick must be there.

The troopers leaned the cold muzzles of their rifles against the bulging cartridge pouches of their belts. They dug their red fists deep into the warmth of their breeches pockets. It was cold before breakfast in this upland dawn.

The few American civilians abroad stared curiously, then moved on. They had learned, in many troubled years, that the innocent bystander in these affairs often got what was coming to somebody else. And this crazy Gano . . .

The men shifted their feet. They looked briefly across the fence toward the long wall of the *carcel*, upon which the sun was now shining gayly. Some of them, the old ones, looked tired. They had had a hard night, and this before breakfast formation was a "run on the eagle." The young ones tried to talk a little—the banal talk of the self-conscious soldier. They laughed, until they caught the hostile, sidelong glances of the old soldiers.

But under it all was growing excitement, tight suspense. Why had the Old Man marched them here? Something was in the air.

The silent old first lieutenant, out in front of his platoon, leaned on his saber, which gleamed like the edge of a bright wave on dancing water. He stared with steady, unfocused eyes across the Mexican town to where the snow seemed pink on the distant mountains.

The shavetail was absent. His wounded arm had swelled and fevered during the night.

Gano stood before his troop, brooding, silent. He stood with his thin legs apart, his saber in both hands, bent across his thighs. His bitter eyes took in the small details, the preliminaries of horror, across the fence; the moving figures casting grotesque shadows on the sunlit wall.

The stubbornness of the balked fighter boiled in him. His decision had been swift but, because he was Gano, had now become irrevocable. And Lopez, knowing him, must know this. Years of his military character were at stake. And so was his commission.

Would Lopez dare?

He could afford to be bolder now. He had many men under arms. He was a grandstand player and, as war goes, he was in the right—the right as Mexicans see it in the treatment of important prisoners of war. An American attack, under the circumstances, could only be considered as unprovoked, even by the rough custom of Border foray.

Gano hoped that Lopez had sobered up; that he would realize that his command was disorganized by victory, drunk, and out of hand; that he had little to gain and much to lose if he humored this grim whim he had boasted.

Lopez was no fool. His threat had been made under great provocation. His pride at being threatened, at being placed in an absurd position in the very heart of his stronghold and while still full of liquor, had naturally made him ugly.

No; there was not much chance that Lopez would play the fool. He had had time to think. He was well ahead of the game as it was. The only thing that would happen, at worst, would be a bluff. Lots of noise and swaggering, and the dubious triumph of shooting down his Mexican prisoners before the American. He would realize that even that would flaunt his hateful power before Gano—arouse a more intense antagonism in him.

Gano searched the faces of the prisoners. Most of them were back to him, and the surrounding guards made it difficult to see. But, so far, he was quite certain that none of them was one of his men. He could tell them from their size, he thought. They were all well made, upright chaps, and the prisoners, he could see, were typical, slouchy Mexicans.

He was conscious of the eyes of his lieutenant looking sidewise at him. He had told him nothing of the purpose of the formation. He knew there was reproach and hurt behind those curious eyes. He felt a little sorry. He liked the old soldier, but why, because of that, should he make him party to a dubious piece of work? Before moving out from camp he had made it clear to his junior that he was not required to go with the troop. But the lieutenant had studied him silently for a moment and then said shortly—

"I'll go with the troop if it's just the same to you, Captain."

Gano had shrugged.

"Suit yourself. It's just a parade, and you're not needed."

Suddenly Gano stiffened. The fingers on his saber tightened. A low murmur came from the Mexican crowd. It rose to a clamor of many voices. He could hear the words distinctly:

"*Los gringos! Los gringos!*"

THERE was a quick rush of the crowd toward the door of the *carcel*. The guards shouted the people back, some striking at them with their rifles. An empty space was quickly cleared before the door. And in that space, surrounded with scowling guards, Gano saw the white faces of his absent men.

They towered above the guards, their faces picked out like chalk masks against the surrounding brown of the Mexicans. They stood, shoulder to shoulder, and stared across the heads of their captors into their own country. Gano could even see that Callahan threw back his great shoulders and drew in a deep breath as his eyes took in the line of his troop mates.

Gano stared.

And every one of those haggard eyes, for a brief moment, seemed to stare back into his own. A feeling of awful ugliness, of bitter defeat, shook Gano. He had made a mistake, a fatal blunder before his men. He had guessed wrong. They, who had never seen him give ground, would witness his public shame at the hands of an ignorant bandit; who, before this, had killed others of their own. They would see him flouted, mocked, probably jeered at by the drunken Lopez . . .

But maybe that grim wall of men at his back, bitter hate in their eyes, fierce purpose in their array, might give Lopez halt. He could hear their amazed muttering behind him. Words ran down the line,

swift oaths, and many feet shuffled nervously in the stony ground.

Gano was aware of the lieutenant's eyes, now blazing at him. He knew what the man was thinking; he was thinking what those hundred men behind him were thinking. Stunned by his vicious heartlessness, his vainglorious gesture in worship of his fetish of discipline, loathing him for this horror they believed he had put upon them in the interest of his military vanity.

A sudden hush came over the troop. Gano sensed hate in the unnatural quiet. The men were suddenly comprehending the part they thought he was playing. Believing that he had brought them here to see their comrades shot down in cold blood. Damn them! The fools believed just that—as though he wouldn't gladly charge that murderous gang of Mexicans, pistol in hand and alone, to save even the dirty Freeman!

Why didn't they hate Callahan and the rest? They were the ones that had caused this mess—who had made a damn fool of him before the world.

A bugle call—a thin, tinny, foreign sound, rising to impossibly high, wavering notes; sinister, exciting, blown with all the exaltation of a half drunken artist. Not like the wholesome, workmanlike trumpets of the Army— The curtain call.

Again the bugle call, weird, drawn out, exultant.

"Ah-h-h!" A deep growl of sound from the rank.

A line of ragged men stood back to the wall.

The firing squad raised their ill assorted rifles. It seemed to Gano an odd thing that he noticed that some were Winchesters, some Mausers, and—hello!—one little Krag carbine. He hadn't seen one of them for years. Old friend, the little Krag—made to carry on a horse . . .

The line of rifles wavered, hung poised. Through the clear air the words of command came plainly to the watching troop. Words that needed no translation.

Gano had meant to wait. He had intended to be psychological in calling his men to attention—if there were need for it. Then it would not be a salute, but a menacing gesture.

But that thin, defiant line of tattered Mexicans, standing so philosophically there, unaware of their gallantry, stoical in their acceptance of the inevitable, did something to Gano. Spicks or not, they loosened the heart of the fighting man. And besides, like himself, they were victims of Lopez.

Before the volley rang out he spun about and hurled the command "Attention!" at his men. By sharp force of habit, at the sound of that voice, the line became a silent, immovable wall of wooden faces.

The explosion was clean, precise, like one magnified shot. In the back of his thoughts Gano gave Lopez credit for that. It was a mark of discipline.

Gano, saber straight, fixed in position like a toy soldier, staring straight to the front as though on dress parade, understood the sounds in the rank behind him. A young soldier had gone down, as soldiers sometimes do on a hot day. He heard an unmanly gurgling, a soldier sobbing, like the last sound of a man with a bullet through his throat.

He said, through set teeth:

"Shut those men up! Hit them if you have to, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir," growled old Leach from the rear of the rank.

There was a ghastly silence—then Gano saw Lopez.

He could tell him by the glory of the new uniform he had donned for the occasion—and because he was smiling in the midst of set faces.

LOPEZ approached the fence. He stared insolently at Gano. He made an insulting Mexican gesture. He knew that Gano understood that movement of his hands. Gano stared straight at him, not changing his rigid look. Lopez pointed toward Callahan and his companions. He grinned. He shouted something in Spanish at

Gano. Something for the crowd of Mexicans to laugh at. He'd show them what he dared say to this bluffing gringo . . .

But the crowd did not laugh as Lopez expected. They stirred uneasily and watched the American soldiers timidly. Some of them moved closer to the shelter of the buildings near which they were standing.

Lopez moved back into the crowd. It was evident that he meant to be the presiding genius for Gano's benefit. There was no delay. Three times more that frieze of death fixed itself in brief immortality against the 'dobe wall. Three times more that precise volley banged out—more precise each time be-because of the practise.

Suddenly an awful weakness overcame Gano. The group of prisoners inside the circle of guards was reduced to a handful; to—four. To four men whose faces were whiter than it seemed possible for men's faces to be.

Gano watched them for some hint of what Lopez meant to do. Then he saw the Mexican commander press toward the guard, giving loud orders. The Mexicans all watched him. He seemed to be making a little speech to the crowd. He was explaining, Gano thought, the presence of the American prisoners here, and why, perhaps, it would be better that they should die by the cemetery at the back of the town. Probably he was directing them to that place for the last act of the show.

Gano turned his eyes from Lopez to the deserters. One of them stood staring and moving his hands toward the troop—like the hands of a mute. A guard reached for him. He dragged back from the guard. A faint sound came back from across the fence; like the sound of a child's wail in the dark.

Callahan towered above them all. A guard struck the man who was dragging back. Gano could see now that it was Freeman. The guard hit him brutally across the shoulder with his rifle barrel. Lopez ran toward them, saying something. With a terrific blow, Callahan knocked the guard senseless against the pitted wall.

A mass of guards rushed in. The prisoners were dragged against the wall. Suddenly they ceased resistance, as at a word of command, and stood defiant, staring over the heads of the firing party.

"Callahan did that," Gano thought.

They stood very straight. The firing squad moved into position.

"My God!" Gano thought. "This isn't happening. He's only bluffing to the last. He doesn't know we can't call his bluff . . ."

But it was happening.

A sudden hush on the Mexican side sent a chill of premonition down Gano's back. They, at least, believed it was going to happen.

A tall priest, holding his black robe from his feet like a woman with a train, stepped from the crowd and stood before the men along the wall. Another of Lopez' grim jokes, Gano thought.

Lopez stood near. He lighted a cigaret and watched the priest. He grinned and guyed the man, making blasphemous suggestions. The adjutant said something over the priest's shoulder. He was speaking to Brill. Gano saw Brill shake his head; saw him spit to one side, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. Still chewing the end of the cigar . . .

Freeman looked steadily at the ground, never once up at the priest. The priest moved sidewise with a feminine delicacy. The ground was wet under his feet. He lifted his robe to avoid staining it. He spoke to Callahan and Feeny, now. Gano could see Feeny grin. He shrugged and put his hands into his pocket. He seemed embarrassed, annoyed. The priest made the sign of the cross, carelessly. He looked at Callahan. Callahan stared back at him. He spoke to the priest, who shook his head. He was chiding Callahan. He reached out and held something up before his eyes—something that dangled from the sergeant's bare neck down under his olive drab shirt. Callahan pushed the priest away. Lopez

laughed loudly. A low murmur arose from the Mexicans.

Gano heard a soldier in the rank behind him whisper:

"Pat's scapular . . . It ain't helpin' him much now, but ain't no spick gonna take it off him."

The priest made the sign of the cross, with an extra flourish. With stately steps he walked back into the crowd. There was a moment of tense hush on both sides of the Line. Gano could feel a terrific beating in his heart. Surely this was a nightmare, and about to end. Lopez dare go no further . . .

The firing squad took careful position. A little dandy of an officer took his post beside it. He wore a blue tunic with enormous frogs down the front of it, and flapping blue denim trousers too long for him. His feet were out of sight in their folds. He held a bright, fancy sword against his shoulder. He called to his men. They straightened to attention, side by side.

A MURMUR ran down the rank of the troop, like the low growl of a beast in a hole. Louder, deeper—a rising protest. Words, now, oaths. The hands on their rifles, hard red hands in the cold, trembled and clenched. Gano heard his name above the chorus. Suddenly he was aware that not until now had all his men realized the significance of the scene before them. But mob leaders in the rank had passed the word along. The horror of the thing dawned on the troops with a rush.

With blazing eyes the lieutenant confronted him, his jaw set, his saber held like a club in front of him. He saw that the man was mad with pent up fury.

"God, Captain, you're not going on with this! Stand here if you want and gloat—you've no business to order these men here—"

And then came running Maria de la Cruz.

The men stared dumbly. For this instant their eyes were off the four against the wall. They looked with stupid wonder at their quiet first lieutenant defying their captain, then at the wild haired spick girl who tore at him furiously, whose words lashed him; who screamed and tried to drag him toward the fence.

The camp surgeon, out of breath, reached for Maria.

"She broke away from the hospital tent—one of the orderlies told her," he gasped.

Gano jerked at the girl's hands.

"Get her to hell out of here," he snarled.

Lopez came closer to the fence. He motioned to the little officer of the firing squad to hold his fire. He leaned his fat arms over the top strands of wire. His laugh came plainly to the men in ranks. He called to Gano mockingly:

"Bravo! The heroine of the cinema arrives. *Por Dios!* How perfect!"

Maria struggled in the arms of the big surgeon. She screamed at the troopers.

"Safe—safe Pat Cal'an!"

She clawed toward Gano.

"You—you yallow coward, *you!*"

Lopez heard Maria's screeched words.

"Gano," he mocked, "she call you a coward. I think she is right, that little one. And now I tell you before your men that you are one white livered, dirty yellow coward!"

Lopez' ugly words came plainly to all of them. Even Maria ceased her struggling and stared, first at Lopez, then, slowly, back to Gano. A dead quiet settled over the troop. To these men, who understood clearly every word Lopez had said, a greater spectacle was now presented than that across the fence.

A Mexican, the hated Lopez of all people, had called their captain a coward in their very teeth—a white livered, dirty yellow coward. A thrill of ugly loyalty, of wild suspense, ran through the rank. Every eye fixed itself on Gano.

As the full import of the Mexican's taunting words sank in, Gano's brown face drained slowly of color. He never

moved. For a brief space he gazed straight into Lopez' eyes.

The first lieutenant saw that look. As Gano's hand reached down toward his belt, he seized it in both his own.

"For God's sake, Captain, don't make it worse!"

Gano threw him off, without taking his eyes from the mocking face, leering at him from the fence.

He said curtly:

"Take charge of the troop. Get away from me!"

The lieutenant stumbled away from that stabbing hand.

With a flash of his fingers, Gano unhooked his belt. It fell at his feet, the saber scabbard clattering on the stones. The saber fell with it. He turned and faced his men. They saw that his cocked pistol was in his hand. Never, in all the years the oldest had known him, had one of them seen such an expression on his hard face. For once, they saw those cold eyes ablaze.

"Men," he said distinctly, "I'm going over there. I'm going to bring Pat Callahan back!"

Then he turned from them and walked swiftly toward Lopez.

One glance at the face of the man coming on told Lopez that at last he had gone too far. He whipped his pistol from its holster and started shooting wildly.

It was as though he had fired a signal, carefully waited for by those hundred men.

A wild yell went up from them. A tide of rushing men, shouting, cursing, almost swept Gano from his feet. But at that, he was the first to fire at Lopez—and his shot struck squarely in that snarling face as he bawled his last order to his men.

All hell was let loose.

"Save Pat Callahan!"

The cry was a pæan of hate. Nothing in the world could have stopped that racing wave of men, as they broke ranks and, with arms in their hands and murder in their hearts, leaped like crazy men toward Mexico. No five foot wire fence, no soldiers of Lopez, no Gano—

"No firing, men! For God's sake, no firing!"

The first lieutenant did his feeble best to carry out what he thought his duty.

There was no firing. Shooting was too impersonal a vengeance for the savagery in their hearts. The rifles in their hands were the clubs of their caveman ancestors. Their frantic hate could be appeased only with the feel of their hands.

The Mexican women screamed their coming.

"*Madre de Dios! Los gringos! Los gringos!*"

LIKE magic, the crowds melted into the town. The adjutant cursed at the trumpeter, beseeching him to call to arms. The best the man could manage was a cracked and frantic blare before he too scuttled for his life. The little captain of the firing squad, in the very act of dropping his poised sword, and shouting out the command to fire, stood fixed in his tracks. His mouth dropped open; the words froze in his throat.

The adjutant bellowed at the firing squad, who, still unaware of the peril almost at their backs, stared stupidly along their sights, waiting for the word that would complete their perfect performance for the day.

Maddened with rage, the adjutant shrieked at the little captain to finish his work. But the little captain's mouth was still open, his tongue too dry to form the words he knew so well. He was seeing a nightmare.

The adjutant shot him in that mouth.

Pat Callahan, white faced, but steady on his feet, called softly to the men beside him along the wall.

"Steady, guys. Don't make a move. We ain't out of this yet."

As the little captain fell, the men of the firing squad turned at last. The finest butcher squad in all Mexico broke and, throwing down the implements of their glory, incontinently fled, just as the first

cursing trooper hurled himself over the wire fence.

He landed beside Gano, who was standing quietly, his feet spread, firing carefully at perfect targets running down the narrow streets.

A few scattered shots came from the houses of the town. But the square in front of the *carcel* was empty. Empty, save for the valiant adjutant and a handful of drink crazed Yaquis, who stood to the last and fired frantically toward the brown bodies pouring with the agility of apes over the high wire fence.

The adjutant's pistol jammed.

"*Viva Mexico!*" he shrieked.

Gano lowered his pistol.

"Don't kill that man!"

"Murder the rat," screamed the little trumpeter, who hung, kicking, caught ignominously by the seat of his breeches to the top strand of the stout fence.

As he yelled, he fired. The shot tore a white scar in the wall behind the adjutant.

Shots from the town increased. They kicked up dust along the fence. Ricochets from the iron stakes of the fence whined into Brandes. The tall horseshoer of the troop sat swaying stupidly on the top of the fence, like a drunken tightrope walker. His long legs dangled.

"Damn!" he said, and reached a quick hand to his face. It came away, smeared with red. "He nearly took my ear off!"

He laughed foolishly. He wiped his bloody hand against his breeches. The grin left his face. Slowly, he drew his pistol. He pointed it at the adjutant. The fence shook under many scrambling bodies. The first sergeant grabbed at his arm from behind.

"Cut that out, Farley!"

"Leave me be," Farley snarled—and fired.

The adjutant fell hard on his face.

Brown bodies blocked Farley's sight. The troop was over . . .

Gano blew his whistle.

"First platoon form a march outpost beyond those buildings!"

The first lieutenant yelled at his noncoms. Miraculous order was restored. Squads formed, moved out. The men of the platoon spread out behind the nearest buildings. Patrols pushed down the narrow streets.

"Get patrols well out on both flanks, Sergeant," Gano said quietly to old Leach.

"Right away, sir." Leach grinned.

Gano watched the rest of the troop crowding about Callahan and his companions in an admiring mob. The *carcel* protected them for the moment from firing from the town. His watchful eye took in the men of the march outpost. The 'dobe shacks covered them from sniping. He could see their eager, grinning faces, looking back at him. Still breathing hard, they fingered the safeties on their rifles, and shot hopeful glances at him. He knew what they wanted: To hear his whistle and to leap forward at his order to clean up the town. At worst, they prayed for a rush, that they might start shooting.

Against the 'dobe wall of the *carcel*, a little ceremony of congratulation was going on over the dead bodies of the adjutant and the men of his forlorn hope. Men shook hands, a little shamefaced. Feeny, his voice shaking a little, yelled out:

"Let's go get 'em, fellas. Let's clean up the town!"

All eyes turned on Gano, standing apart, quiet, by the fence.

A cry went up.

"Yeah! Let's clean the dump up. Let's go, guys."

They all watched Gano's face.

A beaming faced private, bold in the excitement of the moment, called—

"How about it, Captain Gano?"

A sudden, odd glow, came over Gano. He studied the friendly, pleading faces. A strange tightness came in his throat. Hate him? These men would ride to the Gulf behind him if he said the word . . .

He could not speak.

Pat Callahan, a little swagger about him, said:

"Don't be crazy all your lives." He

grinned. "Only place us guys will go is Leavenworth. We got the captain in enough trouble, now. Any you guys got a cigaret?"

A dozen eager hands proffered one.

Pat lighted it as a hero of a play might, conscious of the spotlight on him. He grinned and jerked his thumb toward old Leach, who stood near Gano, still purple in the face from his valiant run. Pat lowered his voice:

"Gee," he said, "the old Top is lickin' his lips for me. Us guys'll be in irons before chow today. But you know, Joe, the Old Man looks to me like he enjoyed the whole sketch. He's a swell guy, men."

Then Pat saw Maria. She stood, pale, her big eyes wide with eagerness, leaning against the fence.

"Look who's here!" somebody yelled. A great shout went up. Pat crimsoned.

"She's a good kid," he said.

"She's gonna be a pretty corpse," Feeny said, "if she don't get away from that fence. Her an' the Old Man, too."

"Wane you com' back?" Maria called.

Gano blew his whistle.

The firing from the town had ceased.

"Right now," Gano said to Maria. "Sergeant Leach, send the men back by squads. Get word to the lieutenant to cover us and then pull out. I'll stay here awhile."

"Yes, sir."

So ended the second battle of Agua Bonita.

GANO sat in his tent. The camp was quiet. Gano's pipe was out. It still clung, clenched in the corner of his hard mouth. His telegraphic report to district headquarters was gone some hours, now. By this time the astounding news would have the War Department in an uproar. By tomorrow his arrest would be ordered: Relieved from command; trial by court-martial; dismissal from the service . . .

He could hear the men shouting from the kitchen tent. Their morale was up a thousand per cent. Still talking, boasting of the morning . . . Thank God he had given them that much fun before he left them.

Old Leach stood before him, his hand full of serious looking papers. Oh, yes, the old fellow was retiring today. He had completely forgotten it.

"My discharge, Cap'n. You know it came this morning. I'd like to make the seven o'clock Golden State goin' east. I already got my ticket an' berth an' all—if the Cap'n will sign my papers."

Gano signed them in silence. It only meant he'd be saying goodby to Leach a little sooner than the rest. His last official act, probably. He gave Leach the finest entry under "Character" he had ever given a soldier. The old man read it, upside down, as the pen traveled. He had been doing it for years. A slow flush ran up under the tan of his tough face.

"Thank you, Cap'n," he said simply.

Gano handed him the papers. The old soldier shuffled his feet awkwardly. Desperately he wanted to say a word of hope to this grim man before him. It was hard to form the words.

Gano held out his hand.

"Good luck, Sergeant," he said.

The old man gripped the hand fiercely. He swallowed. His faded blue eyes blinked. His own voice sounded strange to him.

"Before I go, Cap'n, I just want to—to tell the Cap'n they's a hundred men in this troop never seen the Cap'n in Mexico; a hundred guys what will swear they broke ranks against the Cap'n's orders."

Gano was not shocked. He understood this strange loyalty in soldiers.

"Thank you, Sergeant," he said quietly. "How are the prisoners?"

The old man brightened.

"I just been to say goodby to the four of them in the guard tent. They all feels terrible—gettin' the Cap'n into this mess an' all."

"They didn't get me in any mess," Gano said.

Old Leach cleared his throat.

"They wanted me to say they all deserved what was comin' to them. They said they'd go back right now if it will help the Cap'n any. Course you heard, sir, how it was with Callahan an' that spick girl?"

"Yes, I heard. Where is she now?"

"She's sittin' on the floor of the guard tent a-holdin' hands with Pat Callahan—an' I left her do it, sir."

"Yes," Gano said.

"Way I feels about it, sir, when a guy's gonna face a general court, an' maybe get Leavenworth for ten years—he got at least that comin' to him."

"Yes," Gano said.

The Top relaxed. He felt better now.

"There's another thing been botherin' me, sir—the new first sergeant to take my place. I thought, maybe, Walker. He's a first rate man, an' he gets along pretty good with the men."

"He'd be all right," Gano said. It didn't matter much to him who was first sergeant, now.

"Then, sir, will I have the clerk make out the order?"

Gano stared out toward the high Dragoon Mountains, where the sun was low in a bank of pearly clouds. He shivered a little in the evening cold. Below him through the troop street he was caught by the sight of a mounted man, with saddle bags flapping at his cantle. The mail orderly—hurrying.

He smiled grimly.

"Better wait a minute, Sergeant. I guess the lieutenant will have the making of the new Top."

The orderly rode up, dismounting smartly. He slipped his arm through his reins. He saluted Gano briskly.

"Official wire for the Troop Commander, sir."

The color left the old first sergeant's face. Why couldn't he have gone before this happened? . . .

Gano took the envelop and laid it on his flimsy field table. He reached into a saddle bag and drew out his code book.

The two soldiers watched him.

He tore the envelop.

There was a dead silence while he decoded the message, writing the words one by one.

The men could tell nothing from his face.

Suddenly he sat upright. For the first time his eyes changed.

"Orderly," he said quietly, "my compliments to the First Lieutenant. I want him here at once."

The orderly saluted, mounted and galloped away.

Gano handed the paper in his hand to the old man.

"Read that aloud," he said. "I want to see if I've gone crazy."

The old man bent to the paper in the dim light. His blunt finger followed the words as he read.

YOUR ACTION THIS DATE APPROVED. MEXICAN FEDERAL AUTHORITIES AUTHORIZED REPRISALS; PLEDGE COOPERATION. PURSUE LOPEZ AND HIS BAND WITHIN HUNDRED MILE RADIUS YOUR STATION. KEEP THESE HEADQUARTERS INFORMED—

The paper fell from Leach's shaking hand. A great grin seamed his wrinkled old face.

"Any orders, sir?" he said.

Gano got to his feet. He reached for his belt.

"Tell First Sergeant Callahan to have the troop saddle up at once," he said.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

A MEMBER of the old Seventh Cavalry offers further information relative to "Custer's Last Stand", and an anonymous poem commemorating it:

San Francisco, July 30, 1930

In the May 15th edition of *Adventure* appeared several questions and answers under the caption "Custer's Last Stand."

Will you permit an old Seventh Cavalryman to reply to questions No. 1 and 10 which were answered very unsatisfactory by Captain Glen R. Townsend.

In 1893 the Seventh Cavalry erected a monument at Fort Riley, Kansas, to commemorate the memory of those brave soldiers who fell at Wounded Knee and Drexel Mission. Prior to the unveiling of the monument the history of the Seventh Cavalry was written by reporters sent to the post by Kansas City papers. In the Kansas City *Times* and the Junction City (Kansas) *Union* of July, 1893, will be found the following which is a partial answer to Question No. 1:

> "The officers killed were General Custer, Captains Keogh, Yates and Tom Custer, Lieutenants Cook, Smith, McIntosh, Calhoun, Porter, Hodgson, Sturgis and Reilly of the Seventh Cavalry, Lieutenant Crittenden of the Twentieth Infantry and Acting Assistant Surgeon DeWolfe. Lieutenant Harrington of the Cavalry and Assistant Surgeon Lord were missing. Mr. Benton Custer, a brother, and Mr. Reed, a nephew of General Custer, were with him and were killed. Captain Benteen and Lieutenant Varnum of the Seventh were wounded." (The latter two were not in the immediate Custer engagement.)

REPLYING to question No. 10. For some years after the Custer massacre the Seventh Cavalry had no standard or colors. When the regimental headquarters were at Fort Riley the regiment had a beautiful standard—not official, however. This standard was presented to the regiment by Helen Keller, if my memory serves me correctly, and these were the colors, loved and cherished by officers and men, carried by the regiment for years.

Because the regiment had suffered such a marked defeat on the Little Big Horn, the regiment was punished by being denied official colors, it being considered a disgrace for a regiment to lose its colors, until such a time as it had redeemed itself. In the Spanish-American war, the Philippines, the Mexican invasion, the World War, in fact every time the war clouds appeared on the horizon, the Seventh Cavalry has been the first regiment to request permission to be immediately sent to the front. The Seventh Cavalry is a glorious regiment, fit to follow men like Custer, an honor to the Stars and Stripes.

I am enclosing a copy of a song entitled "Custer's Last Charge". So far as I am aware I am the only person possessing this song. When regimental printer at Fort Riley, I printed the song for one of the regimental veterans. He did not know the name of the author nor do I.—CHAS. J. CRELLER.

CUSTER'S LAST CHARGE

We are lonely and sad on the prairie tonight:
Our thoughts are now with the dead,
With the brave mounted men, who lie buried in the glen,
On the Big Horn they all met their fate.
They fought in defence of their chieftain:
Though outnumbered by the foe they would not yield,
But their force was too small, they were killed one and all,
With Custer they died on the field.

Chorus:

All honor to the memory of Custer,
His life for his country he did upyield.
And three cheers for the men, who lie buried in the glen,
With Custer they fell on the field.

'Twas little they thought when they left us:
When they went forth to fight the savage brave,
That the red Indian's knife would so soon end their life,
And on the Big Horn they would all find a grave.
They fought with the greatest desperation,
Though outnumbered by the foe they would not yield,
They fought to the last, to the trumpeters blast,
And with Custer they died on the field—*Cho.*

They all loved their long-haired chieftain:
And the Seventh will venerate his name,
And the much dreaded foe in history will glow,
In history will glow to his fame.
How nobly he died in his harness:
While trying his brethren to shield,
And the red Indian foe, respect for him did show,
When they left him unscalped on the field—*Cho.*

A NOTE from Arthur O. Friel in connection with his novelette, "Hell Diver," in this issue:

Brooklyn, N. Y.

In view of the fact that I once told you *hombres* that my wanderings had been in South, but not in Central, America, it may be worth mention that since that time I have been in southern Mexico; also that my recent Mexican tales were picked up down there. Not that the origin of a story matters much. But still, in some ten years of spinning yarns to you old hawk-eyes I've noticed that you like to know where the spinner gets his stuff. So I'm telling you.

To which let me add:

The queer lake "Tzontzun" of this yarn is a variation of a real bottomless lake in the hills of Michoacan. The Tarascos are real people, and, though now decadent, were considered by old Spanish chroniclers to be the finest tribe in all of old Mexico, which, at that time, included most of our present western United States. And, as for the treasure, there was a real one in a certain lakelet, some years ago, which was revealed to an adventurer by a hill girl who fell in love with him. That bit of water was far south of Michoacan, but there's no particular reason why the same thing shouldn't happen there. Mexico, like most of the mountainous countries south of it, has more than one old Indian cache of gold waiting for the man who can find it—and get away with it. Some men have. More haven't. But the stuff's there.

—ARTHUR O. FRIEL

ON this the first appearance of a story of his in the pages of our magazine, Major Charles L. Clifford rises to say a few words about himself to the members of Camp-Fire.

Philadelphia, Pa.

My career has been the average one of the Regular Army cavalry officer: a couple of tours at the Cavalry School at Ft. Riley as a student officer; duty on the Mexican Border in California, Arizona and Texas and a tour at the Command and General Staff School at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. I was also an instructor with the New York National Guard, and at present am stationed in Philadelphia as instructor of a reserve cavalry regiment.

Before coming into the Regular Army I was a midshipman at the Naval Academy at Annapolis and I later was for several years an officer in the Philippine Scouts, serving on Corregidor, at Los Banos and for some time at Parang in Mindanao. I also served for three years at Camp Stotsenburg in Luzon with the Ninth Cavalry (Colored).

It seems to me that the most pleasure and excitement I have had in the army has been in our garrison polo games. And I am still an inveterate devotee.

I feel highly honored at your acceptance of my story and hope soon to get a good one to you of the Scouts. I don't suppose there is anywhere a richer untapped field. To my knowledge none of them has written a word on the subject and there were never any civilians down there in the real places except for a few joy riders on the transports from Manila, who saw only from the dock or about the towns on the beach. —CHARLES L. CLIFFORD

A NOTE from Victor Shaw concerning his article, "When Peary Marveled," in this issue. Tragic as was the fate of this luckless band of the Greeley Expedition, it is the grim irony that shadowed it almost from the beginning that makes the adventure the more terrible to contemplate.

Loring, Alaska

Peary's words have always haunted me, together with the knowledge that another very unhappy discovery was made at Cape Sabine—that charred human bones were found in the ashes of their camp-fire. *That* particular proposition has not been told by any one there, so that the public became aware.

I knew Biederick and Long well. We used to often chew the rag at dinners of the old Arctic Club, but neither man ever forgot himself so far as to tell one thing of the sort. In fact, it was always hard to get them to talk at all about it. Long, if you recall, was the hunter. He was given a bit larger ration in order that he might have strength to hunt for the rest. But, he never could have gone far afield, and every account I've read states merely that he made one trip of any length—and that was *down the coast line!*

You see, they weren't up against it so hard that first year. It was after the *first* relief ship, *Polaris,* was crushed in the ice and they had to wait another year that the real straits came. If they'd not destroyed their whaleboat for a roof to their stone igloo, they could have made the 60-mile trip across the Sound to Etah, where the Innuits would certainly have furnished food in plenty. I know that Hensen made the trip many times. Told me he'd just as soon do it as cross the Delaware River.

THE Greeley Arctic Expedition was purely a Navy proposition. In 1881, ten nations established stations in the Polar regions to conduct simultaneous magnetic and meteorological observations.

Uncle Sam, in carrying out his end of the arrangement, made an arbitrary and wholly routine selection of twenty-four men who were picked no doubt for their scientific qualifications—certainly not for any special fitness for Arctic work, either physical, or by way of having previous Arctic experience. It was a Government Expedition, under Navy orders and subject to arbitrary Navy restrictions. That was where the error lay. General A. W. Greeley had no recourse but to obey.

The man who marveled has gone, as are all, I believe, except Gen. Greeley and perhaps Brainard. If Peary ever discussed those immense game herds with Greeley, I'm rather sure from personal touch with the General that he would have been vastly interested—nothing else.

—VICTOR SHAW

WILLIAM R. SCOTT, who's managed to see a good bit of this globe, tells of a convention of baboons that compares favorably, in number at least, with T. S. Stribling's council of apes in his African fantasy, "Mogglesby" (June 1st).

San José, Costa Rica

I was out in Rhodesia in the early days—not quite one of the Pioneers, who were out in 1896, but went out before the Boer War. When war broke out, the mining company for whom I was working allowed ten of its people, including the consulting engineer, and one of the managing directors, to go to the Front on six weeks' war leave. We younger ones could have the next six weeks. Seven out of the ten got killed in the first six weeks, including the managing director, at Elandslagte, and we had to carry on. I was all alone on the southern edge of the Matopo Mountains, running nine sinking shafts and never quite certain when the Matebele would cut the rope and let me drop back into my lighted shots—a playful habit they had developed only three years before, when they murdered every white man, woman and child outside of Bulawayo and Salisbury.

Hence, when all the British disasters were happening in the first few months, it was thrilling to watch their signal fires right along the range of the Matopos and know that they were discussing whether they should rise again or not. I kept my end up with the blighters largely by riding to near where I heard some witchcraft was going to be carried on, crawling close to the kraal at night to watch and getting away again without being seen. Then, when they tried to put anything over on me I would ask quietly, "Well, what about it? What about the 'Tagati,' and the 'Isanusi bird' at Endopi's kraal last full moon?" As they were due for three years in gaol if prosecuted, they got the wind up and thought I was just as big a witch-doctor as theirs.

I was up in the corner of Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Sora in Porfirio Diaz's time. Very interesting too. Had nearly four years of that; coming out to Mexico every March and going back to London at Christmas time, riding across the Sierra Madré in mid-winter. Did it with my wife once, though I had an *andas* made to carry her over the slippery places on the snow and frozen spots.

BY THE way, "Mogglesby" is not so far fetched though as one might think. I built the first road through the Matopos, and one day while riding alone along a Kaffir trail I thought I saw some klipspringer. Nipped off my pony, and then to my horror saw that it was a troop of about sixty or seventy baboons. They were all pretty big fellows. The biggest I have ever seen shot measured five feet six, though they are usually smaller than that. They lined up against a rock on one side of the road I had about ten feet of road to come and go on and a drop of fourteen feet or so into a "sluit" or arroyo,

on the other side I was not afraid for myself, but very scared that my Basuto pony might get nervous and kick if one of them touched him.

Only the week before I had had experience of what they can do. The Native Commissioner had been out shooting, and a very large dog he had with him unfortunately fell foul of a baboon. The latter merely stretched out his arms, made one gulp at the dog's throat and straightened his arms again, with no apparent exertion, dropping the poor animal with the whole of his throat torn out.

The next thing was that when I got back to London on leave I was ragged by a lot of my Stock exchange pals with the yarn that "Scott kept a company of baboons up in the Matopo Mountains as servants." Then it grew that "he had put them into red tunics, like a British soldier, and they had to line up and salute every time he passed through." I knew a good deal about baboons before I finished with them. They got to be such pests that finally the Rhodesian authorities had to send the Mounted Police out to poison them. I often wondered if one could learn their language.

—WM. R. SCOTT

"Pigboats. When you get a flotilla of 'em alongside the mothership, they look like a litter of suckling pigs snuggling up to an old sow."

"Pigs is it? I was thinkin' last night in me bunk they was the original model for sardine cans . . ."

I QUOTE from the manuscript to explain the rather curious title of a novel you are all soon going to have the pleasure of reading. "Pigboats," I venture to say, is as thrilling a story of submarine warfare as I ever expect to see.

The author, though he's never before appeared in *Adventure*, really needs no introduction. Everybody has heard of him—Commander Edward Ellsburg. You'll all remember his splendid work in salvaging the ill-fated submarines, S-51 and S-4. For his services with the former ship, the Navy awarded him the Distinguished Service Medal (the first time that honor was conferred in time of peace). The Court of Inquiry which investigated the S-4 disaster characterized him as "the foremost expert in the United States and probably in the world on deep sea rescue work."

"Pigboats" will appear in the very near future.

HAVING made this announcement, I'm tempted to make just one or two more. I spoke of Talbot Mundy's new novel once before. It begins in our November 15th issue. Jimgrim and Jeff Ramsden are in it, and the babu, Chall-under Ghose. It is built around a mighty and sinister character, possessor of one of the most destructive principles ever discovered. From his stronghold deep in Tibet he scatters his ruthless agents into all lands, and dreams of becoming the new World Conqueror.

Mr. Mundy thinks it's one of the best things he's done, and the *Adventure* staff is inclined to agree with him. I expect you will make it unanimous. "King of the World" is the title.

AND finally, I want to call your attention to Emmett Dalton's memoirs, featured in the current Trail Ahead under the title "West of 96." Many's the discussion we've had in our Camp-Fire columns about the famous old-time gun toters. We've argued about their guns, their abilities and their reputations. Many of you who have risen to speak have talked authoritatively, from a fund of personal knowledge.

It is interesting, in view of the various opinions heard, to read Mr. Dalton. The last of the famous Dalton Boys, he had direct contact with many of the hard bitten characters, peace officer and outlaw both, whose exploits colored the frontier chronicle. Through the stirring narrative of his life these men walk and ride, roughshod and *real*—probably as accurate a picture of them as we are ever likely to get. It's a story that must be set down as a definite contribution to the historical record of the Old West.

—A. A. P.

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Pistol

WHO FIRED the fatal shot at Carthage, Illinois, in 1844, when Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon church, was killed? And with what weapon? The Colt .31 here under discussion can hardly have been present, for its design and serial number date it as later than an 1844 model.

Request:—"The writer has a very interesting question to ask *Adventure.* I am secretary of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which held its last annual general conference at Independence, Missouri, from April 6 to April 20 last past. At this conference a missionary presented to the presiding officer of the church, Dr. Frederick M. Smith, a cap and ball pistol made by Samuel Colt of New York City, No. 118,466, having a guard around the trigger, the cylinder having etched thereon a scene depicting what appears to be a holdup or highway robbery of a stagecoach.

The claim was made by the person who sent this revolver to be given to Dr. Frederick M. Smith, that this pistol is the identical weapon that fired the fatal shot at Carthage, Illinois, on June 27, 1844, when Joseph Smith, the founder of the so-called Mormon church, was assassinated by a mob; and that the pistol had been used at that time by a certain reverend gentleman who was the grandfather of the husband of the donor.

The writer made inquiry of the Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company at Hartford, Connecticut, giving them the number of this revolver and asking them the date of manufacture. This company replied that their records had been destroyed by fire some years ago, but if we would send them an outline drawing of the revolver they believed they could give us more information in regard to it.

Under date of June 24, Mr. A. L. Ulrich, secretary of that company, addressed a letter to the undersigned in which he stated that the inquiry had been referred to their New York manager, who is an expert on Colt arms, and that the New York manager had replied stating in part as follows:

'Referring to your communication of May 19, inclosing letter from the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints signed by I. A. Smith with attached drawing which represented the Colt New Pocket Revolver cal.31, which was introduced about 1860, the contention of Mr. Smith's seventeen-year-old son is absolutely right—that this arm could not have been used to assassinate his grandfather, Joseph Smith, on June 27, 1844.'

What do you think about the claim?"

—I. A. SMITH, Independence, Missouri

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—I believe the stand taken by Mr. Ulrich of the Colt's Patent Firearms Mfg. Co. is correct, and that the revolver you describe was made much later than the tragic affair at Carthage in 1844.

While the first Colt revolver, the one called the Paterson Colt from its being made at Paterson, N. J., was a .31 caliber, still it had no trigger guard, the trigger springing down from its concealing slot in the bottom of the lock frame as the arm was cocked. You describe this pistol as having a guard.

The serial number also precludes the pistol from having been present on that night. Its high serial number gives it a much later date, according to Saterlee.

I can only say that some years since (I seem to recall the *Scribner's* or the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine as the vehicle) there was published an account of the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith by the mob, and in the body of the article it said, if my memory errs not, that some one used a pepperbox pistol in the killings. This was a weapon that had a long cylinder containing the charges, and which revolved. No barrel, as in the Colt revolver, was used, and no accuracy was possible to be had.

Automobile

THE end of a famous motor company.

Request:—"Do they still make a Stanley Steamer automobile? If so, how much are they, and where is the factory?"

—THEO. C. PACKARD, Kelso, California

Reply, by Mr. Edmund G. Neil:—Manufacture of the Stanley Steamer automobile was discontinued about three years ago, following the death of the second of the Stanley brothers who were instrumental in keeping this car before the public.

The factory was formerly located in Springfield, Mass., but since the production of the Stanley car was discontinued I believe that a firm in Pottsville, Pa., has taken over the service on cars of this make. So far as I know this Pennsylvania company is supplying service parts only, without engaging in making any completed cars at this time.

Spider

A SINGLE species, the black witch, is supposed to cause death. It is suggestively marked with a yellow or red hourglass design on its coal black abdomen.

Request:—"I am very much interested in insects, especially spiders and beetles. Could you therefore kindly answer the following questions about either of the aforementioned which are poisonous:

1. Habitat and general life history.
2. How poison enters victim and result of poison on the victim.
3. Information about poison in question as to antidotes, etc.
4. Appearance of sting or place where poison has entered the victim."

—KURT WEIDIG, New York City

Reply, by Dr. S. W. Frost:—I am aware of no beetle that is poisonous in the sense of biting or stinging. There are, however, some beetles that have in their blood a poison which, if taken internally, is poisonous. The blister beetle (Meloidae) is one which has a substance known as Cantharidin which has been known to be fatal when taken internally. There are other beetles with blood poisons and they have been used by certain Indians to poison their arrow heads. The poisons referred to above should cause the collector no worry or bother. Spiders are for the most part not to be feared. They are exceedingly shy creatures and very reluctant to bite man. All of them have poison which they use to kill insects upon which they feed. The tarantula is often cited as a venomous species, but numerous workers have allowed this spider to bite them with no serious results. Few or no North American species of spiders are fatal.

1. There is a single species of spider, the black witch (Latrodectus mactans) which is supposed to cause death. It is coal black in color and marked with a yellow or red mark shaped like an hourglass on the under side of the abdomen. It occurs in the South but is said to be found in Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Hampshire.

2. In all spiders the poison is located in a pair of sacs in the cephalothorax (front end of the spider) and is forced out through the jaws (chelicera) as it bites its victim.

3. No antidotes are suggested for spiders as none are definitely known to cause death. Frequently complications develop as a result of infection. Cathartics and at night strong narcotics as well as warm baths are said to give relief.

4. A spider bite is followed by a reddening of the area, slight swelling and in severe cases fever and shooting pains in the limb bitten rather than in the spot where the bite occurs.

Sumatra

STRAW hats, not topees, are worn. The Hollanders are good neighbors. The natives good servants.

Request:—"The company for which I work may send me to Sumatra.

Being entirely ignorant of all conditions down there, it would be greatly appreciated if you would be so kind as to advise me concerning the following:

1. The Company would pay me approximately $450.00 per month as a starter. They would furnish transportation, subsistence and all other expenses for myself. I would have to furnish subsistence for my family of two. Transportation and housing would be furnished for all of us. Do you consider this a good living wage in that country?

2. Diseases. What kind; how severe?

3. My wife and child. What kind of social contacts could they expect? Would it be a healthy place for them? The contract would be for three years and at the end of that time I could return to this country in order to educate the baby.

4. Natives.

5. What is the maximum temperature; minimum? Rainfall; dry season.

6. Clothing. What kind would be advisable? Extent of wardrobe? Dress clothing?

7. I have a Colt .38 and two small rifles. Would I be allowed to take these?

8. Would three years in this climate be injurious to a healthy child?"

—JOHN WILKINSON, Baltimore, Maryland

Reply, by Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturler:—1. $450.00 a month is a fair salary in any place in the Dutch East Indies; it equals Fls. 1125.00 and should enable you to live quite comfortably with your small family.

2. As to diseases: The entire Orient is always subject to more or less frequent and virulent maladies, but they need not worry the European (white) unduly, provided the usual rules concerning

cleanliness are observed in everything, such as food, water, milk, meat, etc. Medical assistance of high degree is provided by Dutch Govt. (not gratis) in any town of any size in which whites live.

3. Social contacts are a matter of personality as everywhere else. The Dutch are stoic, phlegmatic, hospitable, thoroughly honest and frank (no graft), good natured, well bred and mannered and when once they have taken a liking to a person, will stick to him through thick and thin—that has been my own experience. Besides, there must be other Americans co-employed with you; then there are the club or clubs, but all contact, of course, depends or is subject to your quickness in picking up the language of the land, "Dutch," though cultured Hollanders generally speak 3 or 4 foreign languages.

MOST whites send their children to their home country for schooling and you will probably arrive at the same conclusion because the Orient grows on one and you will dislike to leave it, provided there are no other reasons that make your stay there unpleasant.

4. Personally I can get along with almost any natives; whether Bataks, Malays, Atchinese or any others. These last three are those you will have to deal with and they make excellent servants if treated justly and fairly, provided you avoid a common mistake made by whites by becoming familiar or permitting the native to do so—you lose your dignity and his respect and the end is that you will have to fire him. No native the world over, excepting Abyssinians, should be treated as a white man's equal, and the only reason that the Abyssinian is thus treated lies in the fact that he is entirely independent from European rule or influence. Their attitude is anomalous and will some day have to be changed.

5. The average annual temperature all over the Sunda Islands to which Sumatra belongs is 73 degrees Fahrenheit, the maximum 97, the minimum 48 degrees. The average annual rainfall is 105.6 cubic inches.

6. Europeans in the Islands as a rule dress in white, smoking or evening dress being worn only on official occasions. The best is to take summer clothing and have white suits made on arrival by a Chinese tailor at about Fls. 20, or $8.00 U. S. per suit (in normal time, much less). One-half dozen suits are necessary as they can be washed from day to day. Topees are not used, the straw hat being the usual headgear. There very rarely occurs a case of sunstroke.

7. See your nearest Dutch Consulate for revised rules of landing and stay in the Islands—I am not not as yet in possession of the latest regulations. Also inquire there about your arms and ammunition—there are restrictions that are strictly enforced and arms can not be imported without permit.

8. I have lived all over the Orient for about 25 years—had every sort of illness and disease—and at my present age am as fit as any man 20 years younger and I am 58—that much as to the "injurious climate."

Big Game

WYOMING offers a great variety.

Request:—"I would like to leave here in October and go somewhere where I will find both large and small game hunting. I would like to be able to spend in the neighborhood of from eight to twelve months in such a location. I wish you would write and tell me where you think I might find this kind of hunting and still be in a desirable place to live. Also information as to all kinds of equipment I would need and information as to climate and everything in general. I would be taking my wife with me."

—WALTER J. RAWLING, Greenville, Michigan

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—It is not possible to find (in this day) small and big game hunting in the same vicinity. Where you find the latter would not fill your requirement as "a desirable place to live" to include your wife. There is also another feature difficult to overcome. If you are anxious for a variety of big game, it is necessary to vary somewhat your hunting grounds. Perhaps Wyoming offers the nearest to your requirements, since you can get elk, deer and bighorn hunting in the mountains with grouse, and sage chickens and wild fowl shooting in the lower country. However, the former is bound to be expensive since it is necessary to employ guides with the necessary pack outfit. They furnish everything including horses, grub and bedding. All the hunter is required to furnish is the firearms and ammunition.

For elk, sheep and bear, the .30 Gov. Winchester lever action is hard to beat. For bird shooting a ten gage automatic Winchester is the best to my notion.

YOU could outfit from Jackson Hole, going in through Idaho over Teton Pass by stage, which would be closer to the hunting country, but would not be so desirable a place to live for the balance of the period you mention, since usually they are "snowed in" there during mid-winter. I am assuming that you are going by train and are not considering going out by motor. You can go to Cody Wyoming and reach the hunting country from there by a little longer pack trip. Feathered game is more plentiful in the sage brush country below Cody than in the Hole. But neither locality is, to my way of thinking, desirable in winter. It is very cold.

I have in mind a place in Montana that might be excellent for your needs. Address Dick Randall Corwin, Montana. He runs, in season, what is locally known as a dude ranch, but seldom has any one with him winters. He has a very excellent place well isolated in the hills, only three miles from a rail road, yet in the edge of the game country, is a good hunter and guide, and a good camp companion.

When at the headquarters ranch, which is modern and comfortable, Mrs. Randall does or oversees the cooking, and no fault can be found there. Also Corwin, which is on the Yellowstone Park branch

of the Northern Pacific between Livingston and Gardiner, is not a great journey to the Thompson Falls country west of Missoula, where there is no better deer hunting today, bar none. Both black and white tail.

To my notion there is no finer place to spend a summer than within the Yellowstone Park. Both Cody and most places in Jackson Hole are a long trip to the points of interest in the Park, whereas at Randall's you are fairly close. There is quite a possibility that the hunting is better on the Wyoming side. However that is largely as it happens. There are elk and deer, though not abundant in Montana, but no sheep. That is, sheep to hunt. They are there but the season is closed indefinitely. That is true in both Wyoming and Montana on antelope.

In fact, I know of no State in the Union today where there is an open season on antelope. I could tell you of many places in Colorado and New Mexico or Arizona where the country is equally attractive, and where it is a better place to live for an 8 or 10 months' visit and where the bird shooting is equally good or better, but the big game feature is almost zero. The open season on deer in Colorado is only 6 days with few deer, and no open season on what few elk can be found.

Samoa

ONE WONDERS if Robert Louis Stevenson ever dreamed of a World War which would reach tranquil Apia. His residence "Vailima" is now Government House.

Request:—"Where are the likeliest ports in Samoa? Are any fruits exported from Cook Islands and Samoa?"

—MAX FUHRMAN, Detroit, Michigan

Reply, by Mr. Tom L. Mills:—If you mean your own American Samoa the port is Pango Pango (pronounced Pago Pago). The ex-German group of the Samoan islands, captured by a New Zealand expeditionary force during the late war, has Apia for its port and capital city. The Administrator's residence, Government House, was the late Robert Louis Stevenson's residence, "Vailima." New Zealand has the mandate over this Samoan group. From the Cook Islands which are owned by New Zealand we import tomatoes and bananas and oranges. Samoa exports preserved pineapples. Like all the South Sea Island groups, however, the chief export is copra (dried kernel of the coconut).

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

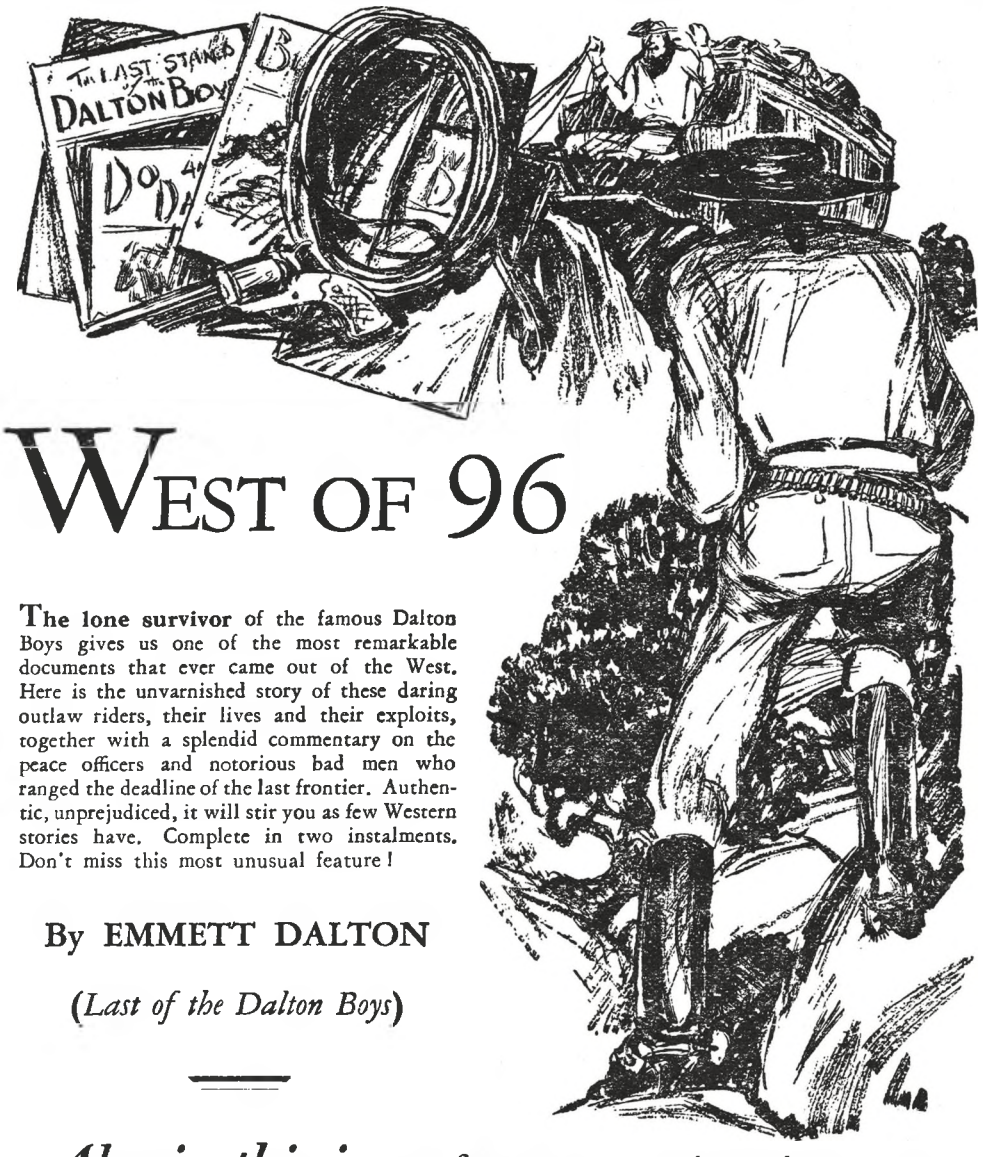
1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month



WEST OF 96

The lone survivor of the famous Dalton Boys gives us one of the most remarkable documents that ever came out of the West. Here is the unvarnished story of these daring outlaw riders, their lives and their exploits, together with a splendid commentary on the peace officers and notorious bad men who ranged the deadline of the last frontier. Authentic, unprejudiced, it will stir you as few Western stories have. Complete in two instalments. Don't miss this most unusual feature!

By EMMETT DALTON

(*Last of the Dalton Boys*)

Also in this issue: SHADOWED, a novelette of that strange criminologist, Professor Poggioli, by T. S. STRIBLING; TABOO, a story of the Foreign Legion, by GEORGES SURDEZ; STORM, a story of a convict ship, by ROBERT CARSE; THE GAME, a story of the Kentucky racetracks, by THOMSON BURTIS; THE BIG BOSS, a story of a sea feud, by RALPH R. PERRY; BREAD ON THE WATERS, a story of the Southern pine country, by HOWARD ELLIS DAVIS; RUNNING THE GANTLET ON THE SINAI FRONT, reminiscences of a noted soldier-of-fortune, by GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES; and Part III of THE DARK ROAD, a novel of the American Revolution, by HUGH PENDEXTER.

A man's best friend—
LISTERINE
AFTER SHAVING

ends rawness—soothes and cools
prevents infection

IF you're one of those fellows with a hide like a rhino that defies any razor to damage it, this is not for you.

But if you have a sensitive skin, and most of us have, there are several grains of comfort in this statement:

Listerine is great after shaving—your best friend, in fact.

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