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# Adventure

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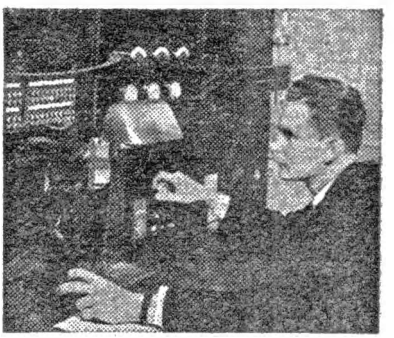

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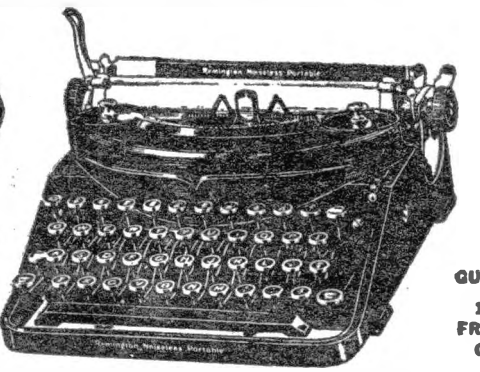

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*"He wasn't big—but he was dynamite."*

# THE COMANCHE KID

## by E. B. MANN

*First of Five Parts*

### CHAPTER I

CROSSROADS OF THE WINDS

IT seems to me that some men move through life in the center of an invisible white light that prints them and the things they do indelibly upon the memories of those they meet.

There may be women like that, too. Personally, I've never met any. I've seen a dozen dazzling beauties in my day, but now, looking back at them over a span of years, their faces are little more than pleasant blurs. If I were an artist I couldn't paint a picture of a single one of them and be entirely sure


that I hadn't blended the others into it.

But of the men I've known, two or three stand out like sharp-cut cameos.

Take Dallas Spain. Given the skill, I could paint you a picture of Spain that would be as accurate as a photograph. Yet even that painting would be less accurate than my memory of him; it could never catch Spain's little twisted, changing smile, nor the deep brilliance of his eyes, nor the feeling of coiled springs that was in him even when he was still. It would have missed the bright, quick-burning fire that burned down deep inside the man.

I can see him now as I saw him first, riding down a dusty street on his white horse, erect, head high, smiling a little, the sunlight gleaming on his bridle-bits and on his spurs and on the inlaid silver in his saddle and on the bright brass cartridges that made a slanting line across his hips. I know now that he was under strain, that his eyes and muscles were alert with a hair-trigger expectancy. I did not guess it then. He seemed at ease.

Perhaps it was the peculiar alertness of Spain's that set him apart from other men. I saw him many times later where I could watch that constant vigilance of his, and I never tired of watching it. Sitting at the end of the corner table in the old Paystreak, his smooth voice making a pleasant ripple in the gruff talk that goes with poker, his eyes would catch the smallest movement in the crowded room. I've seen other men sit there in that same chair; men wanted by the law, and men who lived by the gun and would die by it, who chose that chair, as Spain chose it, because it put a safe thick wall against their backs. But Spain's alertness was not like theirs. There was no strain in it, no uneasiness. Instead, it seemed to me there was an eagerness, a keen anticipation. The same thing that marked his play with cards.

Gambling, Dal Spain was a trial and a temptation to men who held a high opinion of their skill. He seemed so young, so willing to be fleeced. He never wore the poker face so many men assume when they pick up a deck. His face was constantly alive. Yet there was always a growing stack of chips in front of him.

I owned the Paystreak then, and I know that the four hundred dollars Spain put in my safe the day he came increased until, within a week, I made him take the bulk of it and put it in a safer place. He played a skillful game, of course; and yet I think the secret of his winning lay deeper than that. He'd scan a poker hand, and smile, and bet; and you'd never know unless you called him whether his grin meant that he held a pat full house or that he needed a six to fill an inside straight. Yet there was no intention to deceive in that grin of his. I'm sure of that. I honestly believe he didn't care much what he held or whether he won or not. He simply had a zest, a bright curiosity, that made the swift uncertainties of cards a sheer delight to him.

SPAIN hit Comanche on a Sunday. In order to get the picture right you'd need to see Comanche as the town was then—a boom town newly risen there in the foothills of the Shogun peaks, noisy, brawling, dangerous, like a great ungainly boy too quickly grown to know his strength or see the need of curbing it; a grinning, uncouth youngster drunk with gold poured down on him out of the hills. Those were the days when miners paid for drinks with gold dust and a big thumb was an asset to a bartender, who took a thousand "pinches" of the stuff out of bulging pouches in the course of a single shift at work. The bigger his thumb, the better the price he got for his whiskey. And what if the price was high? Who cared? A man could always hock his gun for the price of a pick and wander off into the Shoguns somewhere and come back in a week or a month with a pouch full of the stuff and, maybe, with a new "location" worth millions. So damn the price!

There was a stamp-mill working three shifts of men a day, eight hours to a shift, and there were more than twenty major "diggings" within five miles of town, from which an endless procession of ore wagons came rumbling down behind their long eight-span mule teams, the mule-skinners' long whips cracking like rifle-shots as they lumbered through Fremont Street.

Gold! No wonder we were drunk with it. No wonder men went down in leaden arguments in our saloons and in our streets. Gold drives men crazy, like a potent drug. We had too much of it.

Comanche had long ago been a way-station on the long trail of the Texas herds driven northward to the rail-ends. When that traffic diminished before the western reach of the railroads, a goodly number of those trail-drivers, remembering the rolling ranges and the sweet water here in the shadow of the Shoguns, had come back to settle here; so

that Comanche was a sturdy cow-country county seat before the gold discovery made it a new Helldorado. Cowboys, striding the plank sidewalks in handmade boots with jingling spurs at their heels, shouldered miners in hobnailed brogans. Blanket Indians squatted in the shadow of busy stores and watched with impassive eyes the crazy doings of the white men who had scared away the buffalo. Cattle kings, killers, mine owners, rustlers, gamblers, capitalists from the East, outlaw and law-man —all brushed elbows on Comanche's streets.

And they brought their women. Girls from the honkytonks stood side by side with fine ladies to look into store windows rich with female finery. Girls from the ranges smiled down from dusty stock-saddles at girls in red-wheeled buggies under silken parasols. It was a town of contrasts.

My own part in this already rambling chronicle is small, yet I suppose that even I must be identified. I'll call myself Sandy McNair. The name is Scotch enough to be my own, if it is not. I was hardly more than an onlooker, really, at scenes more vivid than those in any of the books I've read. But I stood at the crossroads of all the whispering winds that blew across that stormy land and so heard more, perhaps, than most men heard or cared to hear. That crossroad was the Paystreak Bar.

I owned the Paystreak during the years that formed Comanche's day in history, and I often think that the man behind the bar can hear the heart-beat of a community more clearly than a man in any other position can do. Certainly every breath of rumor and every stir of public sentiment that touched Comanche came sooner or later, and mostly sooner, across the Paystreak bar or across the green baize covers of the Paystreak gaming tables.

So it was in the middle of a warm spring Sunday morning when I stepped up onto the deep porch in front of the Paystreak and turned and saw Spain riding up that dusty street. He wore a white hat set at a jaunty angle, a faded blue shirt and faded blue Levi pants tucked into soft-topped boots, and he was gray with dust; but no man, or woman either for that matter, ever saw Dal Spain on that white gelding of his without knowing that here was the way a man on horseback ought to look. I know now that it took cold nerve to set that horse down the length of Fremont Street, knowing that there were men there who would kill him with exactly the same lack of compunction with which they would kill a rattlesnake. I didn't know that then. Nothing in the way Spain looked so much as hinted it.

SUNDAY was just like any other day in Comanche, just as the only difference between day and night was the difference in the light a man had to work by, or play by, or shoot by. The stamp mill never stopped and the mines worked day and night to feed it, and when one shift of men was working another shift was in town. There never was a key to the Paystreak while I owned it. The games ran day and night and so did the bar; and a blind man couldn't have told whether it was noon or midnight unless he judged by the temperature. It was cooler at night.

So there was plenty of other movement on Fremont Street that day when Spain rode into it. An ore wagon had tried to turn off Fremont onto Seventh Street and had got itself hooked onto a load of lumber that was hitched in front of John Fink's General Store and the resulting talk between the two drivers promised to end in homicide, at the very least. A shooting gallery two doors south of the Paystreak was going full blast, with a crowd of cowboys plugging away with .45s and laying bets between shots and Sol Silverman, the proprietor,

pleading with them with tears in his eyes to stop busting up his backstop.

Paula Doran came into the north end of Fremont on her big sorrel, riding fast the way she always did, and I saw her shoot a sidelong glance at Spain as she passed him, which was more than she usually did at any man. She swung in to the rail in front of the Paystreak and was out of the saddle and up the steps while Spain was still some yards away.

I took my eyes off Spain for a minute to look at her; I remember thinking that if I could shed ten years or so I'd give Brick Zimmerman and Link Morgan and the others a race for her. I'm not a ladies' man, but I know beauty when I see it. She was as straight and slender as a boy in her shirt and boots and riding breeches, but she was sweetly rounded too and her dark hair lay soft and pleasantly against a skin as rosy as a peach under its creamy tan. She was as pretty as a Blackhawk Morgan filly running in the sunlight, and I say that with due regard to how a Blackhawk filly can look with the sun on her. She had the bluest eyes I ever saw.

She said, "Mac, your skin is sallow from lack of sun and there's black circles under your eyes from lack of sleep, and there's lard instead of hard muscle under your belt buckle. When are you going to sell this den of iniquity and live a self-respecting life again?"

"About the time you stop sassing your elders and start wearing skirts like a lady," I told her, speaking sharper than I meant because her description had fitted me closer than I liked.

I'd come up from Texas behind a herd, myself—not as an owner, the way Manning Doran had come, but as a hand. A gun-hand, really, for those were the days when every town along the cattle trails was a danger spot to Texas men and Texas cattle, and herd owners learned to send a gun-fighter or two along with their herds as a form of insurance.

But a man gets soft and parts of him spread amazingly when he starts sitting in a chair instead of a saddle, and Paul's words reminded me of that. Manning Doran had already been well on his way to be a cattle king when I landed in Comanche to stay, and for almost a year I'd worked for him on his D Slash spread out west of town. But it was horses I wanted, not cattle, and when gold started rolling in across the bars and the gaming tables in Comanche I quit Doran to try my luck at bigger stakes for a quick clean-up. I'd done right well, but I'd had time by now to get a little sick of it.

Paula must have known that, because every so often, like today, she'd let slip a hint that town was bad for me. I've wondered since how much she knew of what went on. She had a nice faculty for keeping her mouth shut, but not much escaped her eyes and there was a brain behind those eyes that was capable of adding two and two.

Her voice was gently mocking now. "Poor Mac! Wedded to his gold! . . . Is Bob Harvey inside?"

I said, "I'll see." But I didn't move, for I was watching Spain again. Watching him swing down out of his saddle and hook his stirrup over the horn and loosen the cinches to let that fine white gelding fill his lungs, watching him swing under the hitching rail and come up onto the sidewalk and stand and lift his hat and mop his forehead with his sleeve.

SOMETHING about that movement puzzled me, but I had to think twice before I realized what the something was. I got it finally. He'd used his left hand for all of it. And that was the first time I really noticed the gun he wore swung low against his hip. We saw a lot of guns like that, hung low and tied down, in those days; but that one gesture of Spain's told me something about him that I never forgot. He was a gunman, with a gunman's habits grooved in-

to him until they'd come to be instinctive. Even in such little things as wiping the sweat off his face. He did it with his left hand, because to do it with his right would have taken his hand too far away from his gun.

Paula was watching him, too, but I doubt if she saw what I had seen.

"If Harvey's in there," she said, "send him out to me, will you Mac? Dad sold a couple of hundred head of cattle to Olsen yesterday and that crazy Swede paid him in cash. Dad and Link are bringing the money in. I rode ahead to find Harvey and get him to open the bank." She grinned at me. "I want to make sure that money's deposited safely before dad sits into the Sunday game with you bandits."

I heard her, all right. Bob Harvey was president of the Comanche First National Bank and he was as apt to be in the Paystreak as anywhere on a Sunday morning. But I was still looking at Spain. He was coming up the steps toward us now and I saw his eyes cover me and catalog me before he looked at Paula. His hat was off and his yellow hair had a dark streak around it where the sweat had dampened it. His eyes were blue.

He wasn't a big man, as big men go. He lacked two inches of being a six-footer and he weighed one-sixty-five within a pound or two. And yet I always had the feeling that he was big. I have to check myself to keep from thinking that. He wasn't big. But he was dynamite.

He went inside and the swinging doors closed behind him and Paula Doran looked up at me. I had the feeling then that she hadn't moved for some small time.

"Who is he, Mac?" she said, and something in her voice made me look at her.

What I saw in her eyes angered me. There was no reason for it, except that Paula Doran could have had her choice of a dozen steady, hard-working boys and I didn't like the way her eyes caught fire at first sight of this gun-toting stranger. And so I snapped at her.

"Now, how would I know who he is? Just another drifting gun-fighter, from the looks of him. As if we didn't have enough of them here already! Wait. I'll see if Harvey's come in yet."

So that was how Spain came to town.

See what I'm driving at? Just a man riding a white horse down a dusty street, and walking up four steps to a saloon. Yet two of us who watched him do it felt the impact of his personality before we'd even heard him speak a word.

Maybe it was some sixth sense that warned us that Spain's coming was the signal, the lightning-flash that foretold the storm that was about to break. I don't know.

The storm broke, certainly. I stepped into the first sharp clash of it, the thunder following that first lightning-flash, when I opened the swinging doors into the Paystreak that morning.

## CHAPTER II

### SHOWDOWN

PAULA'S grin was downright impudent as I turned away from her and I was grumbling a little, under my breath, when I stepped into the Paystreak and saw Spain standing at the bar. He'd done a right oblique as he cleared the door, arriving at the bar where it joined the wall. That tallied with what I'd told Paula about him, and I was sorry to see it. I'd seen too many brash youngsters clear that door and head for that corner where they could feel the wall against their backs while they looked things over. I'd seen a lot of them go into shallow graves under the cottonwoods east of town, still with their boots on. Comanche was a hard town in those days. No town for any young,

unseasoned fighting man to earn a reputation in.

Lefty Sullivan, who might have been a welterweight champion if a slant-eyed knifeman hadn't slashed a tendon in his leg one night in 'Frisco, was nearest to Spain of the two barmen and his "What's yours, cowboy?" was in my ears as I let the door swing shut behind me. Lefty's face was an Irish map and friendly, in spite of the knobby look it had got after Lefty's leg lost the art of carrying him out of the way of punches. Lefty had been behind the Paystreak bar a good long time by then and he'd heard a lot of funny things, but his jaw dropped a good two inches when he got Spain's answer.

"I'd like a lemonade," Spain said.

We had lemons, all right. They cost us plenty, but we had them because it takes lemons to make a lot of fancy drinks and we had some fancy drinkers in Comanche then. There were men in Comanche who were used to stepping up to the bar in the old Waldorf, or to bars in London and Paris; and those men wanted the kind of drinks they were accustomed to. They got them at the Paystreak. We aimed to please.

But lemonade!

A poker game that had been running since midnight had just busted up across the room and the players were lining up at the bar when Spain gave his order. George Poe, who was sheriff of Comanche County then, was in that game from the beginning and had won better than a hundred dollars. Tom Olliphant, a wealthy young sportsman from New York, was in it and had lost. Tuck Taylor was in it, and Dave Samuels, both cattlemen; and both had lost more than they could afford to lose. Brick Zimmerman was the big winner, and Brick was the noisy kind of man who crows a good deal when he wins and sympathizes with himself when he loses. He was crowing now.

I'm putting in all these details because, as it turned out, they were important. That poker game was part of one of the slickest schemes I ever heard about. The only thing that could have kept that scheme from working out, I think, was Dallas Spain; and he was a stumbling block the schemers couldn't possibly have foreseen or guarded against. Even then, if Spain had been the ordinary man, the scheme would have worked in spite of him. It was that nearly perfect.

I never liked Brick Zimmerman and I liked him less that morning, hearing him crow over his winnings. Maybe my nerves were ragged. I hadn't got to bed till dawn and here I was up again and it only the shank of the morning. I'd have slept all day except that it was Sunday. Paula's dad, Manning Doran, and me and Bob Harvey and Sheriff Poe and a few more of the old Texas crowd were in the habit of playing a friendly game of draw poker every Sunday and that game meant more to me than a little sleep ever did. It looked now as though we'd be short-handed, what with Poe's being fagged out already from the all-night session he'd had, and maybe that irritated me some. Anyway, Zimmerman's loud talk got next to me.

Don't let me give you a wrong picture of this Brick Zimmerman, though. He was one of the leading contenders for Paula Doran's favor, and it took a man to stand any chance at all with Paula. Brick was a man. He was a big hombre, as big as I am, lean and broad-shouldered, with a bony face and red hair and a pair of the coldest milk-blue eyes I ever saw. But he was a handsome man. There's no denying that. It was only when he was mad that his eyes had that milky coldness, and he was not a surly man. He had the booming, overwhelming laughter of a man who's supremely sure of himself. He shaved every day, and he was under thirty, and he had money. His Glory Hole diggings was said to be one of the richest of the

smaller strikes in the Comanche field; so that, financially, he would have been a catch for any girl. And he was generous.

But he was also one of the reasons why Comanche was a bad town for youngsters out to build themselves a reputation as gunfighters. Brick had big hands that could smother the whole rear end of a .45, and he was fast, and there wasn't a drop of fear in him, nor of mercy either. Which is a deadly combination, any way you look at it.

But there was something about Dal Spain that took the tuck out of Brick Zimmerman.

"I'm buyin', boys," Brick was saying. "Money ain't anything to a man who can take it off the suckers as easy as I can! Step up to the bar and name your poison."

He was within six feet of Spain now, and Spain was watching him. Lefty had set a glass of water on the bar as he asked for Spain's order, that being a standing rule in my bar because that was a thirsty country and a man often liked a drink to cut a path for his whiskey after long hours in the saddle. Spain's fingers groped for the glass and found it and circled it, but he didn't look at it because his eyes were busy with Zimmerman. It was in that little pause just after Zimmerman said ". . . and name your poison," that Spain asked Lefty for that lemonade.

I heard Brick grunt. It sounded as if somebody had hit him in the belly and knocked the breath out of him. I looked at him and his face had sort of come apart. He'd turned toward Spain and I saw the high color run out of his face and leave it pasty under the stubble of last night's beard, and his jaw was down in a funny way that threw his features out of focus with each other.

I thought, "He looks like a man that's seen a ghost." I didn't know how right I was.

That shock, or whatever it was, halted Zimmerman dead in his tracks. But not for long. He took a long slow breath that rasped so you could hear it all over the room, and when he had his lungs full he went for his gun.

I SAW it coming, yelled and jumped for him. But, hell! I've told you that Brick was fast, and I was a good ten steps from him. I was a fool to try.

You read in stories how a man's hands "blur with speed." That's true enough. I've seen men move so fast the eye caught nothing but a moving blur. They say the hand is quicker than the eye, and I reckon it's true. Only this time it seemed to work the other way. Zimmerman and Spain were both inside my vision, and so were Poe and Samuels and the others, and I seemed to see their movements in slow motion. Understand me, it was fast, all right—damned fast. But there was so much of it, all so close together, that it seemed to take a little time for it all to happen.

Zimmerman could have fired three shots, maybe four, before I could have touched him, he was that fast. Poe was reaching for him too, but Dave Samuels got a glimpse of Brick's hand going for his gun and Dave was gun-wise enough to know he was standing in a mighty unhealthy spot, so he moved. Moving, he blocked Poe off of Zimmerman. When I saw that, I figured Spain was a goner. Poe looked to me to be Spain's only chance.

You see, I'd seen Brick draw before and it never occurred to me that Spain might get his gun into action. If I'd figured there was any chance of that I might not have flung myself into the line of fire the way I did. But it never occurred to me that Spain would shoot. I'd bracketed him in my mind as a gunman, yes; but I knew Zimmerman, and there was Spain with his right hand up on the bar, out of position, smiling that

twisted little smile of his, and I didn't think he had a chance.

Well, I was partly right, at least. Spain didn't shoot. He never touched the gun he wore. He simply whipped his right hand forward along the bar, carrying that glass of water with it. Some of the water sloshed back over his hand, but most of it went with the glass, straight into Zimmerman's face.

And Spain's fist was right behind the glass.

How he covered that six feet of distance so quickly is still a mystery to me, but he was there, and his left hook jolted Zimmerman's jaw over into the line of a pile-driving right. I had my hands on Brick by then and I felt him go limp. I went down with him, and when I came up again I had his gun. So I didn't actually see Lefty Sullivan come over the bar and onto Spain.

Lefty told me afterward that he never dreamed that Spain's blow, started off-balance as it had been, could be a knock-out, so he vaulted the bar with some wild idea of riding Spain down and covering him so Zimmerman wouldn't get a fair target at him. Personally, I think the smell of a fight he wasn't in was more than Lefty's Irish-terrier soul could bear.

I looked up just in time to see a thing that still strikes me as more than half impossible. Some men are so geared that mental impulses flow directly into muscular action without the split second of willing that action that makes other men seem slow by comparison. There's no transition time between brain and muscle. Else how do you explain a thing like this?

Understand, Lefty Sullivan was a fighting man. He was trained in the ring, and he knew the tricks of rough-and-tumble fighting from long years of experience. And he took Spain from behind, so that he had both arms around Spain's neck in a strangle-hold before Spain knew it was coming.

Yet I was watching Spain and I knew that there was no break in the smooth rhythm of his movement. He was leaning forward a little in the follow-through of the blow that had dropped Zimmerman and, when Lefty's weight struck him he sagged a little and then stiffened and hooked his hands behind Lefty's head and bent forward.

That's all there was to it. I don't think Lefty's feet ever touched the floor. Spain caught him in mid-air and flipped him over his shoulder in a hip-throw that tossed Lefty a good ten feet and spread-eagled him into a bunch of chairs.

Spain straightened then and shucked his gun.

There's a funny thing about gun-fighters. Maybe it's the same with all fighters. If you're one and you see another good man in action you can't help wondering, down deep inside of you, if you could beat him. Take Zimmerman, for instance. I never saw Brick go for his gun but what I got a little tingling feeling along my arm and my heart beat faster and I'd tell myself, "He's fast, but I could beat him if it came to a showdown." It was the same when I saw other men reach for a gun. I was always ashamed of that feeling, but I couldn't help it.

I never had that feeling about Spain. I knew, after seeing him draw that first time, and I still believe, that I was looking at the sweetest piece of human fighting machinery that ever lived. That's a broad statement, I know, and it will get me plenty of argument. But a man is entitled to his own opinion, and that is mine.

Once when I was a kid I saw a coon fishing. He was sitting on a rock in the edge water of a little mountain stream and, suddenly, his paw flashed down and came up with a fish. I've always thought of that as being the fastest movement I ever saw in nature. Seeing Dal Spain draw a gun reminded me of that. His draw was one smooth, sure movement.

fast, without a flaw or a break in it anywhere.

Of course there's never any certainty about a fight with guns. A gun may stick the least little bit in the leather, or your thumb may slip on the hammer, or your fingers may fumble a little, or any one of a dozen things may happen and a man not nearly as fast as you may stick his lead into you. Or you may get caught out of position, like Spain standing there with his arm up on the bar. But even so, in spite of that, I think Brick Zimmerman was lucky to come out of that fracas with nothing worse than a punch on the jaw.

I STOOD up then with Zimmerman's gun in my hand and Spain looked at me and sort of waited for me to move. I didn't, and I saw his eyes crinkle at the corners, sort of friendly. He said, "I don't know exactly what this is all about, but under the circumstances it seems to me that maybe you better drop that gun."

I shook my head.

"If I drop it and Brick comes to and sees it he might reach for it," I said. "I own this place, and I wouldn't care to have to clean it up after Brick had committed suicide that way."

"There's sense in that," Spain said.

So I walked over to the bar and laid Brick's gun on it.

I could hear Lefty swearing soft and gentle and surprised-like and the rattle of chairs as he picked himself out of them, so I knew he wasn't hurt much. I heard him stop swearing sooner that I'd ever have thought he would and I turned to look and that was the first I knew that Paula had followed me into the room. She stood there between the swinging doors, holding them apart with one hand out on either side of her; and with her lips parted a little and her eyes wide and the yellow sunlight behind her, she made a picture. Spain saw her too, and sheathed his gun.

George Poe was standing beside Dave Samuels, staring at Spain with a funny look on his face like he was finding it hard to believe that Spain was still alive. He closed his mouth and swallowed hard before he opened it again.

"Just what the hell," he said, slow and sarcastic, "is the meanin' of this?"

"Ask him," Spain said, and tipped his head toward Zimmerman.

Brick was sitting up by now and staring goggle-eyed at Spain, and if ever I saw amazement in a man's eyes—and relief—I saw it then in Zimmerman's. He said, "I thought—", and stopped, and shook his head hard and got up, moving stiffly like a man not quite sure whether his legs are going to hold him or not. And all the way up he kept looking at Spain.

Poe said, "Well, Brick?" and Zimmer-

man turned his head slowly, as if it was hard for him to drag his eyes off Spain.

"I thought he was—somebody else." Zimmerman's voice was hoarse and low and breathless, unlike his usual full-lunged speech. "I couldn't see his face plain, the way the light hit him, and I thought—" He stopped and made a little gesture with his hands.

Poe grunted. I was standing about where Brick had stood when he first looked at Spain and I turned and looked at the spot where Spain had been standing. Poe saw what I was thinking and he moved over to stand where Spain had stood. I nodded, and we changed places so Poe could see it, too. Brick was telling the truth, all right. Sunlight streaming through the front windows made a screen of yellow dusty haze between us so that a face on the other side of that haze, looking through it the way Brick had done, was just a blur. Looking the other way, a man could see all right. Spain could see Zimmerman, but Brick couldn't have seen Spain to recognize him.

Poe didn't ask Brick who he'd thought Spain was, and I understood that, all right. Prying into a man's past wasn't considered either polite or healthy in those days, and Poe didn't figure it was any of his business. It was easy to figure that a man like Zimmerman might have left men behind him somewhere who would shoot if they saw him again, and if Zimmerman had thought that Spain was one of those men it sort of justified what he'd done.

Poe just turned to Spain and said. "Well, stranger, this is a hell of a reception you got. But you seem to be able to take care of yourself all right, and nobody's hurt, and unless you want to lay a charge against Zimmerman it looks like all I can do is let it drop."

I looked at Spain. He was looking at Zimmerman and he was still smiling, but his eyes were tight and sort of cold and not at all friendly the way they'd been a while ago. He shrugged.

"Maybe some day I'll ask Mr. Zimmerman who he thought I was," he said. "I'm sort of curious. But not right now. I'm—satisfied."

Zimmerman turned then, without saying another word, and walked outside. Paula stepped to one side to let him pass, but I don't think Brick ever saw her. He was sort of stumbling, like a man that's half blind, or drunk.

Spain watched him go and shrugged and his eyes crinkled again in that little friendly smile.

"Seems like I've cost you all a drink," he said . "Your friend was buying. Seeing me seems to've jolted it out of his mind. Only fair thing for me to do is set 'em up."

He faced the bar. Lefty was still nursing a couple of bruises he'd got from the chairs, but there was another barman on duty and we all lined up. Poe stood at Spain's left and I was at his right. There was a little pause while everybody waited for some one else to give the first order. Spain laughed.

"In case anybody's got opinions about drinkin' with strangers," he said. "My name is Spain. Dallas Spain. Mine's Bourbon, gents. What's yours?"

He'd ordered lemonade before, but now he ordered Bourbon whiskey and drank it neat. But it was some time later before I thought of that. Hearing him announce his name jarred all of us. He might as well have tossed a bomb.

## CHAPTER III

### KILLER'S BREED

I SAID he might as well have tossed a bomb. The fact is, he had tossed one. Spain was a name with bombshell qualities anywhere in the Southwest then, and it was doubly so in Comanche. Wherever you went in those days you'd hear men

talk of "Angel" Spain—only, in Comanche, we did our talking mostly in whispers because nine men out of every ten in Comanche believed that Angel Spain was lurking somewhere in the nearby hills and the shadow of his presence hung over us much as the fear of a man-eating lion might hang over some isolated African village.

Bob Harvey hadn't been in Zimmerman's all-night poker game, but he'd been in the Paystreak when Spain entered it and he was standing near me now. I remembered then that Paula wanted him and I told him so. I could see that he didn't like the idea of leaving while there was a chance Spain might talk, but he shrugged finally and walked over to where Paula was standing. I saw her start to talk to him and guessed she was telling him what she'd told me. I walked around behind the bar then to help set out the round of drinks Spain had ordered and when I looked toward the door again it was empty. Harvey had gone, and I supposed of course that Paula had gone with him.

*"Well, stranger, this is a hell of a reception."*

But I didn't really think much about

it, because I was busy thinking about the name I'd just heard.

Angel Spain. He must have had another name, but Angel is the only one I ever heard for him. Even Dal, the few times I ever heard him mention him, called him that. And if you'd ever seen him, with his yellow hair and his clear blue eyes and that seraphic smile of his —if you'd ever heard him sing "The Bells of Auld Scotland" as I heard him sing it one night beside a camp-fire somewhere south of Dodge—you'd understand that the name fitted him.

I didn't know him well at all. That night he sang, and casual contacts with him during half a dozen hectic days and nights in Dodge City, were the only times I ever saw him. He was a broad-shouldered laughing boy then with a voice that could tear the heart right out of you. What he became later is a question that can still get you a world of bitter argument.

One thing all hands are agreed on, and that is that Angel Spain was a wizard with guns. I saw him, one night in Dodge, bet that he could spread both arms shoulder high with a hat balanced on the back of one hand and draw two guns and fire a shot from each of them before the hat hit the floor. He won the bet. The hat, when it fell, covered both the bullet holes in the floor. Spain laughed at that and said it was an accident; but I have my doubts about its being an accident. The bet was for a hundred dollars and I happen to know that Spain needed the money. I think he put those bullet holes where the hat would cover them, so there wouldn't be any argument about his having won. He turned that hundred dollars into a sizable roll at poker that same night. I saw him do that, too.

I suppose it was inevitable that a kid like Angel Spain, grinning, reckless, with gun-magic in his hands, thrown into the hair-trigger atmosphere of those hell-roaring trail towns, should get himself a reputation as a gun-fighter. He killed a man here and another there and, while those killings were all fair and square and above board according to the code of the times, they branded him. Take any kid in his early twenties and give him the sense of power a skill like Spain's can give him and you set him on a narrow pedestal from which it's mighty easy for him to topple. You've given him a dangerous contempt for other men and for other men's laws, and it's easy for him to get the idea that he's cut above ordinary mortals and not bound by the same set of rules.

Spain married soon after I met him, and soon after that they pinned a badge on him and he went to work cleaning up those same tough towns he'd made his reputation in. He put in ten years at that and the story of those ten years would read like a Dead-Eye Dick dime novel. Whether he was a hero or not is something I can't vouch for. Remember, they made him a peace officer because he was a killer, and as a peace officer he had to be a killer. Call him a hero or not, he made good at the job they handed him. For ten years he was the most talked-of law-man in the Southwest. Then his wife dragged him out of the peace-officer job and for close to ten more years the Angel lived a more or less domesticated life as a cattleman.

Then his wife died, or maybe she ran away with another man. I've heard it both ways, and either may be true.

Whatever happened, it must have soured Spain on the life he was leading, because he offered everything he owned for sale. Everything, that is, except the clothes he stood in and his guns and a big red colt with a white spot the size of a pie-plate on his left hip. He got two customers. One was a big hombre named Jorgensen, representing the A.C. Cattle Company, and the other was a one-legged man named Ed Riley.

Their bodies were found some six weeks later, the bones picked clean, in an

arroyo five miles from Spain's ranch house. The story was that Spain had pretended to close a deal with each of them, had demanded payment in cash at his home, and had killed the two of them for the money. Spain disappeared.

WELL, you can imagine what happened after that. Angel Spain, one of the most colorful of the old reckless, gun-fighting law-men, an outlaw. Stories sprang up about him. Angel Spain robbed a bank in some town in Texas. Angel Spain killed a man in Abilene. Angel Spain was the leader of a gang of train robbers in Oklahoma. He'd have had to wear seven-league boots to do half the things they gave him credit for; but if you offered that as an argument in his favor folks would just say, "Sure; but where there's so much smoke there's bound to be a good deal of fire." Which is true, of course, as far as it goes.

Then the stories began to center around Comanche. Brick Zimmerman was the first man to say he'd actually seen the Angel. Brick said he was coming through the Ten-Mile Canyon about noon one day and he met a man riding a big rangy sorrel with a white spot on his hip. Brick said the man's face looked familiar to him, but it was maybe an hour later before it came to him who the fellow was. He'd seen Spain, he said, during his days as a peace officer, and this man looked a lot older and hadn't shaved but Brick was sure that it was Spain.

After that, hardly a week went by that somebody in or around Comanche didn't get themselves a day or two of publicity by telling how they'd seen Angel Spain riding that red horse with the white spot on his hip.

Just a few weeks before Dal Spain hit town, a man held up the cashier at the Nugget mine and got away with better than three hundred ounces of loose gold. He wore a black mask that was really a sort of hood that covered his whole head down to his shoulders; but the horse he rode was a big sorrel with a white spot the size of a pie-plate on his left hip. The cashier was a cool jasper who didn't forget to use his eyes and he was able to describe the gun the hooded one had stuck under his nose. Angel Spain's guns during his days as a peace officer were a presentation pair of Smith & Wessons, the Schofield Number 3 model, forty-five caliber, nickled, with hair-line gold inlay on the cylinders and with pearl butt-plates. It was such a gun that the cashier described.

Of course, the bright work and the pearl butt-plates might not have meant anything, because there were plenty of guns like that. But this Smith & Wesson Schofield is a different-looking gun from most. It's built different than the Colt, for instance, and it's got a sighting rib on the barrel so that the muzzle end of it looks very different from the ordinary gun with a plain cylinder barrel. This cashier had noticed that particularly, since it was the front end of the gun he was looking at.

The Schofield is a tip-up ejector gun. The cylinder doesn't swing out the way it does on so many revolvers you see nowadays, nor does it have a plunger and a breech-gate the way the old so-called "Frontier Model" Colt did. A tip-up gun is hinged in front of the cylinder, with an unlocking catch just over the hammer, and the gun breaks in the middle so that the cylinder is exposed for loading and unloading. Most tip-up guns have an unlocking catch that pulls up to open it, but on this Schofield model the unlocking catch had to be pulled back instead of up. They tell me that was done to make it impossible, in close work, for anybody to break your gun open by snatching at the unlocking catch.

Anyway, this cashier had a good long look at the gun and he described it in such detail that there wasn't much

doubt in anybody's mind but that it was one of Spain's guns.

Four days later the man in the hood held up two men who were bringing a sack of high-grade down from the Yellow Star diggings. That time a man was killed. One of the two men reached for a gun and the hooded one shot him. The survivor couldn't swear to any description of the outlaw's gun, but he saw the white mark on the horse's hip.

Both times the man in the hood worked alone. But there was talk in town of strange men riding in the hills and a lot of people, including George Poe, figured that the man in the hood was Angel Spain and that he was gathering a bunch of kindred spirits—long-riders with quick trigger fingers and a past that kept them on the dodge—around him. It wouldn't be long, they were saying, before Comanche, with its sudden wealth, would be a tough spot for a peace officer.

There were plenty of men riding the back trails then who would have liked nothing better than to bunch up under a leader like the Angel in a spot where gold was as plentiful as it was around Comanche, and if enough of them got together they could make Comanche a poor hang-out for peace-loving citizens.

So you can see how it was something of a shock to us when this youngster says his name is Spain.

Poe thought he was joking at first.

"Not Angel Spain, by any chance?" he asked, grinning.

"His son."

Well, hearing that told me where he'd got the fine split-second precision of his draw, at least. The Angel had taught him. They looked alike, too, now that I knew enough to make the comparison, except that this Dallas was cut on a smaller pattern than the Angel was. Same hair, same eyes, same reckless, twisted smile. I always meant to ask Dal some day if he could sing, but I never got around to it. I'd give a good deal to hear "The Bells of Auld Scotland" sung again the way the Angel sang it.

THAT sort of ended the talking for the time being. It didn't leave much to be said, really. I was busy sliding glasses down the bar and setting out bottles, but I could see the faces of the men I served and I knew that every one of them was itching to know what Spain was doing here, and if he knew his dad was here, and if he'd come to join him. Only somehow it didn't seem that anybody cared to do the asking of those questions. I know I didn't, and I was as full of curiosity as anyone.

Spain filled his glass and held it, waiting for the others to fill theirs. While he was waiting he looked at me and raised his eyebrows and, while I don't often drink my own poison, I felt the need of it just then and I set out another glass and waited for my turn at the bottle.

I said, "Since you're paying for the liquor, maybe you'd like to know who you're drinkin' with."

Spain nodded, so I went down the line. I've named all the important ones—Poe and Olliphant and Dave Samuels and Tuck Taylor. I pointed each man out to Spain and sort of identified him, and when it came to Lefty Sullivan's turn to shake Spain's hand Spain said, "I've just been figuring. If I'm wrong, you can check me: but I think when you jumped me a while ago the idea was to cover me in case Zimmerman still had ideas about killing me. In which case, I'm thankin' you."

Lefty grinned sheepishly and nodded.

"You got a good straight left," he said, "and a fast right hand. I knew them things before I jumped. What I didn't know was that you packed a knockout. Or was that an accident?"

"What do you think?"

"I don't know," Lefty told him. "But

pride. What d'you say we put 'em on some day?"

"Any day while I'm here, if you're willing," Spain said, and grinned. "All I've got is a little speed. If you can teach me how to use it, I'll be grateful. And you can, I reckon. You're the man who fought Sailor O'Hara for the right to meet the champion, aren't you? I

*The man in the hood worked alone.*

I've got some gloves in my trunk and if you'd put 'em on with me sometime it wouldn't take me long to find out. I sort of hope it was an accident. I ain't used to bein' tossed around the way you tossed me, and if I was able to cuff you some, it'd maybe heal the bruises on my

saw that fight. I was just a kid then, there with my dad. You knocked him out in the seventh with a left hook. Dad said it was a right, but it wasn't. He was already on his way down when the right landed."

"Imagine you rememberin' that! And

you're right; it was the left that got him. Look. Here's how it was—"

Lefty caught my eye then and he subsided. Poe was standing there with his elbow hooked on the bar, watching Spain, and I knew he was chewing on what Spain had said and figuring ways to use the kid to catch the Angel. I halfway hated Poe for that, because I was already liking Spain. I liked the way he'd handed Lefty back his self respect, for one thing.

I'd squelched Lefty, but Tom Olliphant stuck his oar in then; and Olliphant was a man I couldn't squelch. He was looking at Lefty and he was smiling and his eyes were narrowed a little.

"So you're *that* Sullivan," he said. "Imagine my not knowing that. Of course, I never saw you fight; but I've heard a lot about you. You were good. I'd like to put the gloves on with you myself, some time. I've boxed a bit, just amateurishly. Be great to have a go against a good professional."

"I'm just a has-been," Lefty said. But you could see how pleased he was. "Not that I wouldn't be glad to put 'em on with you. I would Just name the time."

"Fine!" Olliphant turned, speaking more to all of us now. "You know, we might set up a ring and have some fights, eh? Drum up some interest, match some good tough boys—lots of 'em here, in the mines and so on. It ought to go."

He glanced at Spain and grinned. "You'd be the man to feature on our first card; you and Zimmerman. Grudge fight. Bill you as—let's see. Comanche Kid. How's that?"

Spain grinned. "Sounds like an Indian name. Better make it Sitting Bull, hadn't you? That's what I'd be, I reckon, if Zimmerman ever landed one on me."

It got a laugh. It's odd how a little thing can brand a man. This was just a small by-play in the backwash of much bigger things. And yet it branded Spain. Right now, folks speak of him as the Comanche Kid. That always puzzled me. His own name, Spain, was colorful enough, I thought.

ALL this took time. The shooting over at Silverman's gallery had stopped now. Word of a fight spreads quickly and some of the boys who had been doing that shooting were already in the Paystreak, asking questions and eyeing Spain. I remember noticing that and thinking how still it was all of a sudden.

Poe raised his glass.

"I always wanted to see a prize fight," he said. "Here's how. To the Comanche Kid!"

It was while I still had my teeth set against the backlash of the whiskey that I heard the shots. They weren't at Silverman's. Somehow I knew that these were not just playful shots. Poe knew it, too. He set his glass down very gently and licked his lips and looked at me. You could have counted ten, maybe, before we heard boots hit the sidewalk to the north of us. Whoever wore those boots was coming south, and coming fast.

It took time for that man to reach us, yet it seems to me that it all happened very quickly. Poe had taken maybe three steps toward the door when it burst open. Link Morgan stood there, his face flushed from his run, yet sort of sick-looking under the red. He'd lost his hat, and the holster on his hip was empty, and there was blood running down the back of his right hand and off his finger-tips. I saw those things before he spoke.

I saw something else, too. I saw Paula Doran step out of the shadows beside the door where she'd been standing, and I saw the fear in her eyes as she reached out and grabbed Link Morgan's arm. I'd thought, of course, that she had gone.

Link looked at her, and the shock of

seeing her there in the Paystreak jolted him in spite of the excitement that was clawing at him. Ladies didn't frequent bars in those days, and Link said, "Paula!" as if he meant to reprove her for being there.

But she jerked free of him and said, "Link! Dad—?"

Link looked at Poe.

"The Hood," he said, "just held us up—Doran and me—down at the livery stable. He—shot Doran."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BLACK HOOD STRIKES

PAULA was gone before he'd got the words out of his mouth. I heard her gasp and saw the doors swing out and back again, like a camera shutter that gave me a split-second picture of her against the outside light, and I heard Link Morgan call her name.

Poe snapped, "Go with her, Link! Lefty, run get Doc White. Olliphant, you and Samuels and Taylor round up some men and don't let anybody leave town. Spain, you and Mac come with me."

I knew what he was thinking, of course. There hadn't been any sound of a horse going away after those shots cracked out. That meant The Hood was still in town.

Or did it? While Link Morgan was getting to us, The Hood could have gone an equal distance in another direction. He could have gone twice that much further since. He'd be getting further and further away all the time it took Olliphant and Taylor and Samuels to gather men and spread their net. If he had a horse waiting for him somewhere on the edge of town, for instance, he could be long gone before anything could be done to stop him.

But I didn't think he'd done that. I thought, as Poe did, that he would stay in town. I thought this time The Hood had slipped.

I was the last one through the doors to the street, because I had to circle the bar first. Even at that, I didn't lose much time. The bunch ahead of me scattered, except that Poe and Spain kept together. Those two were moving fast toward the livery barn and I followed them. We'd left the sidewalk and were angling across the street past the Brill House when somebody yelled at Poe.

"Hi, Poe. What's up?"

Poe looked back over his shoulder, but he didn't stop. I did. I recognized the voice. It was Brick Zimmerman. He was standing on the upstairs porch of the Brill House, where it overhung the sidewalk. There was a door behind him that opened onto the porch out of his room, and that was open. He'd taken his shirt off and his hair was tousled and he was holding his pants up with one hand. He had a gun in the other hand.

I stood and looked at him and his face got quiet and sort of hard and defiant. He said, "Well, Mac?" and I saw his shoulders stop moving up and down with his breathing.

I said, "The Hood just shot Doran, Link Morgan says. Poe's wanting men. You'd best come down."

Doc White was coming now, a fat man lumbering along and breathing hard, swinging a black bag in one hand and buttoning his shirt with the other, and I turned and went along with him. He said, "Confound this town! I spend the night helpin' a woman have a baby she don't want and that she'll raise to be a worthless scamp, and now they get me out o' bed to watch a good man die. Who did it, Mac?"

"Link Morgan said it was The Hood. Damn him, I wish—"

But we were shouldering through the crowd in front of the livery stable by then and I stopped talking, because I

was looking down at Manning Doran. Paula had his head in her arms and his eyes were open, but I saw the hole in the front of his shirt and I thought, "He'll never see another poker game. He's through."

He thought so too. He saw me standing there and he smiled at me, and when I bent over him he said, "Take care of Paula. Mac—you and Poe." I said I would. Then Doc White shoved me away and I stood up again.

Link Morgan was telling Poe how it happened. "So Paula rode ahead to get Harvey to open the bank for us, and Manning and I stopped here to put our horses up. We'd watered them and Manning was standin' here in the doorway while I unsaddled. I was in that third stall back. First thing I knew, I heard a man say, 'Stick 'em up, Doran!' "

Poe interrupted him. "You sure he said 'Doran'?"

Link nodded. "It was somebody that knew Manning, all right. I looked through a crack in the stall partition and I could see Manning. He was standing about where you're standing now, facin' south. I didn't see anybody else then, but I saw Manning's hand go up and I knew I hadn't imagined what I'd heard. I figured whoever'd said it was outside the door, back of Manning, where I couldn't see him. But I was wrong. He was hid here in the first stall on the left, back in the shadows."

"Get on," Poe said immediately.

"Well, I figured if this jasper was outside, where I thought he was, maybe he didn't know I was in the barn and I could get the drop on him. So I started edgin' toward the back of the stall, figurin' to get a shot at him, when he stepped out into the doorway to lift the money out of Manning's pocket. I had my gun out, but just as I poked it out past the back end of the stall partition there was a shot and somethin' hit my wrist. It was just a splinter the slug had knocked out of the partition, but it made me drop my gun. It went off when it landed. I heard Manning yell and saw him whirl and start clawin' for his gun. There was another shot, and I saw the flash of it in the stall here close to the door, so then I knew I'd made a mistake and the jasper knew where I was all the time. Manning was hit. I saw him going down."

He paused for breath and I saw him swallow hard, as if something were stuck in his throat. "The man in the stall here jumped out then and bent over Manning and I saw he was wearing a hood. He got what he wanted and ran. I couldn't find my gun in the straw back there, but when he ran I ran up here, figurin' to get Manning's gun and get a crack at him. But he was gone, so I headed for the Paystreak."

IT SOUNDS crazy, I suppose, us standing there listening to Link Morgan talk while a man was dying at our feet and the killer was getting further away, for all we knew, with every second that passed. So some folks said afterward, anyway. But I thought then, and I still think, that Poe had already done all he could do. It was an even bet that the man we wanted was still in town. If he was, Poe had already taken steps to keep him there. And, if he wasn't, there was no use going off half-cocked until we had some sort of a trail to follow.

Doc White had been busy while Morgan talked. He'd sent a couple of men running after planks and neck-yokes to make a stretcher out of, and they were back now and Doc stood up. I heard him tell Paula, "He's got a chance. The bullet struck bone and slanted up. I'll have to probe for it. If I get it, he's got a chance to live."

Paula stood up then, too; she was crying and I guess she didn't see Spain until she stumbled into him. He steadied her and she looked up and jerked away from him. I'd never seen her face go

hard and hateful like it did then, and I never want to see it again.

"You!" She made it sting, the way she said it. "You're looking for your father, you said—Angel Spain. Well, he's here, all right! You're not far behind him. This is his work. You must be proud of it!"

"What's that?" Link Morgan whirled and looked at her and his gaze turned, following hers, to Spain.

Paula's smile was ugly, and that was something I'd have said was impossible if I hadn't seen it. She said, "Oh, yes, his name is Spain—Angel Spain's son. At least he's got more courage than his father has. He doesn't hide behind a mask."

Spain's face went white. I think if Paula had been a man he would have hit then, without a word. Instead, he said, "There's some mistake. My dad is dead."

George Poe was watching them, listening, and I knew he was waiting for somebody to let a word slip out that he could fasten on. Well, he got more than he bargained for. When Spain said that his dad was dead I saw Poe jump.

Paula said, "Of course you'd lie."

Someone back of me let out a laugh.

I didn't need to turn my head to know who it was. It was Zimmerman. I'd recognize that laugh of his in hell.

Lie. It's an ugly word. It doesn't seem to mean much now, but it did then and men have died for using it. Using it on Dallas Spain was like taking a whip to a high-strung colt. But he was tied. I saw him realize that there was nothing he could say or do against Paula Doran. I saw him look at Poe and realize that Poe, too, thought he was lying. But Poe was too wise to say so. Link Morgan thought he was lying, too, but Link didn't speak.

So it was Brick Zimmerman's laughter that cut Spain loose, that gave him a target he could strike out at. He turned toward Zimmerman and I stepped aside a little, because I didn't want to be standing between those two just then.

"You're laughing, Zimmerman. The name *is* Zimmerman, isn't it? Or is it—Jorgensen?"

Jorgensen. I saw Poe catch that name and turn it over in his mind.

"You know my name, all right," Zimmerman said flatly. "Call in your wolf! A man's got a right to laugh, ain't he?"

"It's a hell of a time for it," Spain said, and I nodded. "A hell of a time for it. It was a man named Jorgensen who killed my dad. If I was Jorgensen and I came face to face with somebody who looked like Angel Spain, it'd startle me some, I reckon. What was it startled you a while ago, Zimmerman, when you went for your gun against me? Who did you think I was?"

I saw Poe nod. He saw the sense in that, all right.

Brick said, "That's *my* business!" He was wearing his gun-belt again and his gun was in the holster. There was defiance in his voice and I saw his right arm stiffen a little, his hand hanging motionless beside that gun.

I remembered then that Brick hadn't seen Spain draw. Brick had been knocked out when that happened, and I wondered if he would have talked back quite so sassy now if he had seen it. Maybe he would have, at that. There was no yellow streak in Brick, so far as I could ever tell, and Spain had hit him. I reckon Brick was hoping Spain would give him a chance to wipe out the sting of that knockout. I could have stopped it, but I didn't try. I figured Spain could take care of himself; and as for Zimmerman, I had no love for him. Less then than previously.

But Spain let the challenge pass.

"A man," he said, "that knew my dad could wear a mask and play bandit and make folks thing it was Angel Spain behind the mask and maybe get away with it. Like this hooded bandit is

doing, for instance. Where were you, Zimmerman, when this man was shot?"

It was more interesting, really, to watch George Poe than to watch either Spain or Zimmerman. Poe just stood there and let them talk and his eyes got bright, swinging back and forth from one man to the other, and you could tell that he was trying to make it all add up to something in his mind. George Poe was smart. He knew that when two men are mad enough they're apt to say more than they mean to say.

Zimmerman glanced at Poe now, too. He said, "I was in the Brill House. After the—fight—I went to my room. I was gettin' ready to hit the hay when I heard the shots. I stepped out on the porch to see what was goin' on. You saw me, Poe. So'd Mac."

SOMEBODY helped Doc White lift Manning onto the litter he'd made by laying a couple of wide planks across two neckyokes. There was a crowd around us now, and four men lifted the litter and walked off with it. I looked at Manning as they carried him past me and I didn't think much of the chance Doc said he had.

Doc stepped over and took Paula's arm to lead her away and she gave Spain one last long look before she turned. I reached out and patted her shoulder as they passed me and she looked up and tried to smile at me. Zimmerman spoke to her, too low for me to hear, and Paula said, "Thanks, Brick. I'll be all right."

More men were coming on the run to join the crowd there in front of the livery stable, so nobody noticed Isaacson until he'd shoved through the crowd and handed Poe a telegram. Isaacson was the station agent there in Comanche then. He was a thin man in gray trousers and a white shirt with black sleeve-guards up to his elbows and he was panting.

Poe took the message and looked at it and started to put it in his pocket. Isaacson stopped him.

"You'd better read it," he said. "It's from Lyman Junction. They've had a hold-up there. It's important."

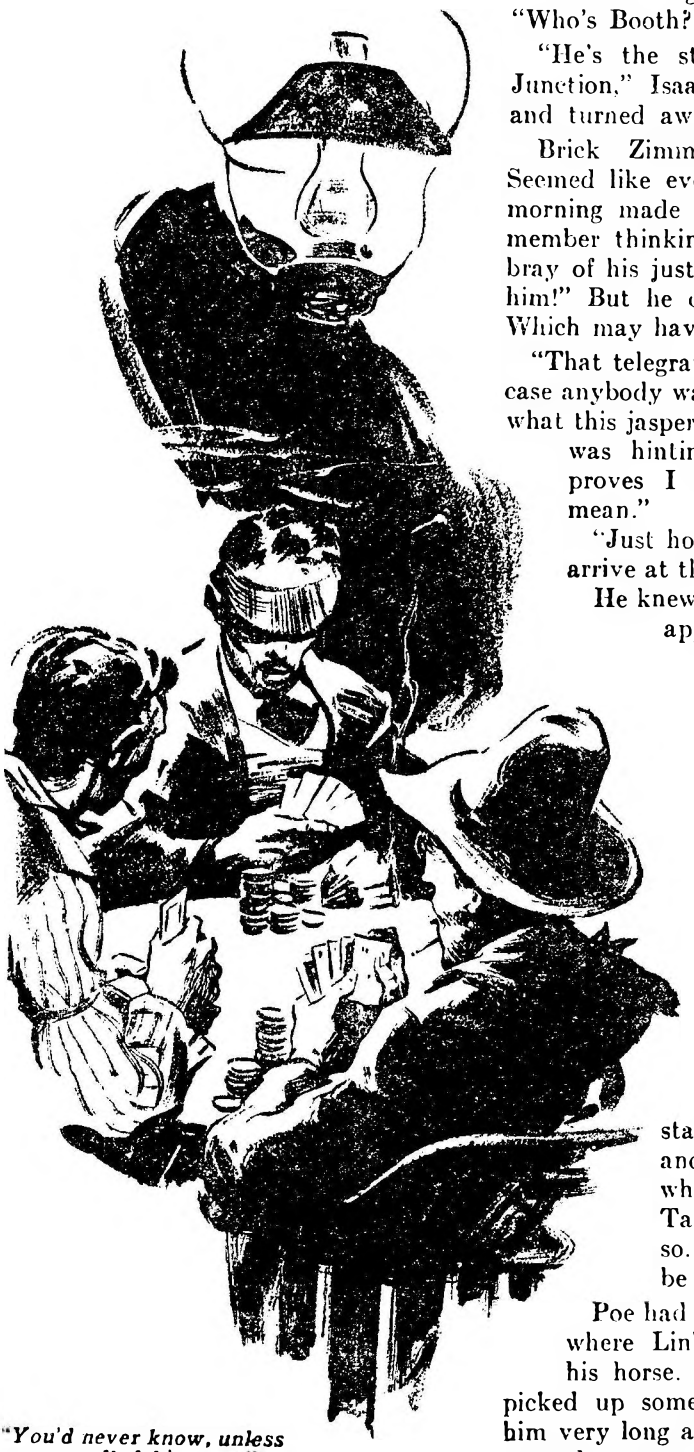
Poe ripped the envelope. I don't know why he read that message aloud, but he did. Telegrams were sort of public property then. Folks didn't get many of them and those that did come were mostly death messages or things like that. Poe read this one and everybody shoved forward a little, listening. Poe had some trouble figuring out Isaacson's handwriting, and once or twice Isaacson had to help him with a word. I remember thinking that it was the longest telegram I'd ever seen.

Poe was frowning as he read:

"HOODED BANDIT HELD UP RAILWAY STATION HERE LAST NIGHT AT 3:45 A. M. GOT AWAY WITH EXPRESS SHIPMENT OF EIGHT HUNDRED OUNCES OF GOLD FROM LOCAL STAMP-MILL AND SMALL AMOUNT OF CURRENCY FROM TILL BANDIT CUT ALL WIRES MAKING IT IMPOSSIBLE TO NOTIFY OUTLYING TOWNS UNTIL REPAIRS WERE MADE STATION WAS CLOSED WHEN ROBBERY OCCURRED BUT BANDIT GAINED ACCESS BY SMASHING WINDOW BESIDE TELEGRAPHER ON DUTY AND COVERING HIM WITH GUN HE WAS BIG MAN WEARING BLACK HOOD GUN WAS SAME AS THAT DESCRIBED IN NUGGET HOLDUP HE RODE BAY HORSE WITH A WHITE SPOT ON LEFT HIP WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE—"

Poe's voice died out. He went on reading, but he didn't say the words out loud and I could have choked him. I'd have given a good deal to know what was in the rest of that telegram.

He finished reading it and crumpled the paper in his hand. I could tell from the way he looked that whatever it was that Lyman Junction had reason to believe had hit Poe pretty hard.



*"You'd never know, unless you called him. . . ."*

"This is signed 'Booth'," he said. "Who's Booth?"

"He's the station agent at Lyman Junction," Isaacson said. Poe nodded and turned away, frowning.

Brick Zimmerman laughed again Seemed like everything Brick did that morning made me like him less: I remember thinking, "If he lets out that bray of his just one more time, I'll kill him!" But he did, later, and I didn't. Which may have been a mistake.

"That telegram sort o' lets me out, in case anybody was fool enough to believe what this jasper that calls himself Spain was hintin' at," Brick said. "It proves I didn't shoot Doran, I mean."

"Just how," Spain said, "do you arrive at that?"

He knew, all right. I saw the disappointed look on his face and knew that he knew. But he made Brick tell him.

"Hell! Morgan said it was The Hood that shot Doran, didn't he? And it was The Hood that pulled this job up at Lyman Junction. At 3:45 this mornin', the wire said. That's twenty miles from here. And I was playin' poker in the Paystreak all night. The game started before midnight and was just breakin' up when you walked in. Ask Taylor, here, if that ain't so. Or ask Poe. I couldn't be both places, could I?"

Poe had walked back to the stall where Link Morgan had stabled his horse. He'd stooped over and picked up something. It hadn't taken him very long and he was coming back toward us now. I saw that what he car-

ried was a gun. He cut right into Zimmerman's remarks.

"The Lord forbid your bein' twins," he said. "If you was twins, and both halves talked as much as you do, I'd sooner herd a batch of sheep."

Poe scowled.

"You folks clear out o' here," he said, speaking like a man who's very tired. "Not you, Spain; I want to talk to you. And you, Mac—you busy? Then s'pose you stay, too. The two of you come to my office. I'll meet you there."

I didn't like it, but I stayed.

## CHAPTER V

### CROSSED TRAILS

THE crowd split up into little groups, each group buzzing like so many bees as it moved away. I saw Poe commandeer a horse from a hitchrack and ride off toward the old dancehall on the hill back of the Brill House that Doc White used now as a hospital. It was only a distance of three hundred yards or so, but Poe was bred to the saddle and wouldn't walk where he could ride.

Spain and I walked together to Poe's office and neither of us said anything until we got there. I had things to think about myself, and evidently Spain did too. I looked at him once and saw frown-lines between his eyes.

Spain perched himself on the edge of the desk in Poe's office and started to roll a cigarette. I sat down in the swivel chair behind the desk, thought better of it and got up and walked to the door to look for Poe. He wasn't coming yet, so I came back and sat down again. Spain looked at me and I knew he was wondering what made me so restless.

I said, "You don't really think Zimmerman's the hooded bandit, do you? Just because you don't happen to like the man—"

Spain shook his head. I don't know whether he meant "no" to my question or just that he didn't want to talk about it. He said, "Is Paula Doran engaged to marry Link Morgan, or do you know?"

I guess I've got a one-track mind, for I had to blink a couple of times before his words made sense to me. When they did, they made me mad.

"What's it to you?" I said.

That little twisted smile of his made me feel silly.

"Nothing, maybe," he said gently. "Is she?"

"It's sort of a toss-up between Link and Zimmerman, the way it looks," I said.

It jolted him. He said, "Zimmerman!" and frowned at me like he thought I was lying.

But I wasn't lying. Zimmerman had no sooner hit town than he'd set his cap for Paula, and here of late it had looked as if he was making progress. There'd been a lot of competition at first; but with two outstanding entries like Zimmerman and Morgan the others had got discouraged and the race had sort of narrowed down to the two of them, with Brick getting a little the inside track. I figured then that it was the old marry-a-man-to-reform-him instinct in Paula that was giving Brick his place in the running. But I found out different later, which just shows how wrong a man can be, even about the people he knows best.

Spain didn't say anything more and pretty soon I got up and walked over to the door again. Poe was coming now; I saw him rein up sharply and turn back to speak to a man who had just stepped out of the Brill House. There was too much shadow there on the hotel porch for me to see who the man was. Poe didn't tarry long, and I was glad of that. I wanted to get the next few minutes over with.

I was still standing in the doorway when Poe swung off his horse.

"You see who that was I spoke to just now?" he asked.

I said, "No," and waited for him to tell me, but he didn't. He pushed past me and tossed his hat at a deer-head hanging on the wall and watched it settle accurately on one of the prongs. He nodded and walked over and sat down in the swivel chair behind the desk. Spain was lighting his cigarette now, still perched on the corner of Poe's desk, and Poe scowled at him.

"So Angel Spain is dead, is he?" Poe said.

Spain nodded.

"I heard different." Poe jerked a cigar out of his vest and bit the end off it, still eyeing Spain. "Just who the hell is Jorgensen?" he snapped.

"He's the man who killed my dad," Spain said. "I said that once before, if you'll remember."

"Which still don't make it true," Poe told him. "I've been thinkin' some since you mentioned that name. Check me if I'm wrong. Jorgensen was the man the A.C. Cattle Company sent to buy your dad's ranch. Right?"

Spain nodded.

"A man named Riley made an offer, too. Your dad accepted both offers, demandin' cash payment. Jorgensen and Riley took the cash money out to your dad's ranch, neither of them knowin' about the other one, and your dad killed the two of 'em and took both the bankrolls and dumped the bodies in a hole somewhere, and sloped. That's the story the way I heard it."

"Which don't make it true," Spain said.

Poe scowled at that impertinence, then grinned. "All right. Suppose you tell it, then?"

"You ever know a gun-fighter?" Spain asked.

It was a little like asking a jockey if he'd ever seen a horse. Poe grunted. "Well, I know Mac there. He'll do till a better one comes along. And I know Zimmerman. Yeah, now you mention it, I've met a few."

Spain shot a quick look at me, sort of waist-high, and I knew that what Poe had said had surprised him. He hadn't thought of me as a gunman. Most people didn't. I wore my gun where it didn't show. I had a Colt .45 with a five-inch barrel, with the front sight knocked off and a slip-hammer in place of the high-spurred one that came on the gun and with some interior alterations of my own, that I carried inside the waistband of my pants, against my belly. I wore a coat, now that I was a town man, and that hid the gun.

Understand, I'm not going to start any argument by claiming that a man can draw faster from that position than he can from the shoulder, or from a holster on his hip. I'm not going to admit anything to the contrary, either. It just happens that that's the way I like to carry a gun.

SPAIN looked at Poe again.

"Then you know," he said, "how cranky a gunman can be and mostly is, about his guns—about letting them get out of his reach, or letting other people handle them, or about using any other guns than his own himself."

Poe nodded.

"My dad was like that," Spain said. "A town dad cleaned up once gave him a presentation pair of Smith & Wesson Schofields; pretty guns, all gold-inlaid, with pearl butt-plates and everything. Dad loved those guns. The nearest he ever came to whipping me was once when I swiped one of 'em while he was asleep and took it out to see if it'd shoot as straight as my old Colt."

Spain took a long deep drag at his cigarette before he went on.

"Dad was a six-footer. So was Jorgensen. Ed Riley, the other man interested in buying dad's ranch, was a one-legged man. Of the two skeletons they

found, one was Riley's. There was no mistaking it. The other was a big hombre with a one-gun harness around his middle and a Colt gun in the holster. The gun was Jorgensen's. So the name they cut on the head-board was Jorgensen."

"Sounds reasonable," Poe said.

Spain paid no attention to the interruption. "They proved murder by the hole in Riley's skull and the bullet they found lodged against the big man's ribs. I've got that second bullet here."

He reached into his pocket then and laid something on the desk. Poe picked it up and I walked over behind him to look at it. It was a slug out of a forty-five caliber gun, considerably battered at the point but still recognizable. On half of the length of the lead—the rear half, of course—you could see the grooves cut by the rifling in the barrel of the gun that had fired it.

"That tell you anything?" Spain asked.

The minute I looked at it I knew what Spain was driving at. Guns have been my business and my hobby since I was a kid, and it would be strange if I didn't know something about them.

Spain leaned forward. He had a pencil in his hand now and he laid the point of it on a narrow groove running from the butt of the slug forward until it disappeared under the mushroomed point. "See that? That's the mark of the rifling in the gun that fired this slug. If you'll turn the slug around you'll see six grooves like that. That means there were six lands—six hills and six valleys—in the gun-barrel. Notice the size of 'em. The groves are just about the width of a pencil-mark. The distance between the grooves is much greater than their width—nearly a quarter of an inch. And notice this: Looking from the rear end of the slug forward along its length you see that the grooves slant from right to left. See that?"

Poe nodded.

"Okay. That's the signature of a Colt. A Colt barrel has six narrow lands and six wide grooves that spiral down the length of the bore. Those lands start the bullet to spinning as it goes out of the barrel. In a Colt, that spin is counter-clockwise. That's the slug they found in the big man's body. Now look at this."

He reached into his pocket again and produced another slug. This one wasn't mushroomed and I knew it had been fired into something soft, maybe a bundle of rags, to save it. He laid this slug beside the other one in Poe's hand. One slug had killed a man, the other hadn't. "Here's a slug fired out of a Smith & Wesson Schofield. Look at *those* grooves. Wide and flat, aren't they? The grooves are as wide as the distance between the grooves. Turn the slug and you'll see that there's only five grooves this time; not six. And, looking along the length of the slug the same way you did with the other one, you see that these grooves slant from left to right—opposite to the way they did on the other slug. That's the Schofield signature: five lands and five grooves, equal width, clockwise. If you wanted to carry it down to fine points I could show you other differences. The Colt slug, measured with a micrometer, is about .455 at the butt. The Schofield is smaller, about .448. The Colt slug weighs about 255 grains against the Schofield's 230 grains. See what I'm driving at?"

"You're hintin' that there's a difference between a slug fired out of a Colt gun and one fired out of a Smith & Wesson Schofield," Poe said dryly.

"Exactly! And the slug that killed the big man—the one they said was Jorgensen—was fired from a Colt. Dad carried Smith & Wesson Schofields. What d'you think? That dad borrowed a gun to shoot those two men with?"

"He might've, at that," Poe said.

"But it's reasonable to suppose that he didn't," Spain said. "Therefore, it's

also reasonable to suppose that the dead man wasn't Jorgensen at all, but dad. Angel Spain, killed by a slug from Jorgensen's Colt."

POE scowled. "Then how d'you account for so many people seein' Angel Spain since them bodies were found? How d'you account for all the crimes—"

"Nobody *has* seen him!" Spain was eager now. "I've spent nine months out of ten months elapsed since those bodies were found proving that nobody has seen dad. I've investigated those crimes. Most of them were just silly, so far as dad's having done them is concerned. No evidence at all. Somebody couldn't solve a mystery so he just blamed it on dad and let it go at that. Two or three of the others may have been done by men who deliberately tried to make folks think they were dad. There were several reports of men riding sorrels with white spots. In one such case, I found out that the spot was on the sorrel's right hip instead of the left. In another, the spot as described by the witnesses was much too big. So I didn't waste much time on them. I didn't find a single crime that really seemed to fit —dad—until I heard about this holdup of the Nugget mine, near here."

Spain was in dead earnest now, driving his points home.

"Here, for the first time, I got a description of a horse that really fitted the sorrel dad used to ride. And here was the first accurate description I'd got so far of dad's guns."

"So you figure your dad's here," Poe said slowly.

"No! I figure the man that killed my dad is here! If it was dad's body that was found as I think it was, it must have been Jorgensen that killed him. In that case, Jorgensen would have dad's guns, because Jorgensen's gun was found on the body. Jorgensen may even have dad's horse. At least, he'd know which hip the white spot was on, and how big it was.

"So I came to Comanche," Spain said. "If I'm wrong and the man behind the hood here is my dad, then he's crazy and it's my job to jerk him out of it. If I'm right—if the man is Jorgensen—"

He stopped, and the sudden pause was startling. I looked at him. One look was enough to tell me what the rest of his sentence would have been. He wasn't a forgiving soul, this Dallas Spain.

But I saw more than that. I saw, behind the seething hatred there, a dark uncertainty. Spain wasn't sure. Maybe Angel Spain *had* used some other gun. Maybe the man behind the hood *was* the Angel. That possibility was Dal's own private hell. I saw that, too.

George Poe stood up. His face was lined with weariness and I remembered that he had been up all night, playing poker with Brick Zimmerman. I knew, too, that this was one of the times when George Poe didn't like the job he held.

He turned away from us and stood looking out the window. "So you're lookin' for a big fellow, a six-footer, who might be Jorgensen or might be the Angel. For your sake, I hope it's Jorgensen. I'm lookin' for a big man, too—The Hood. He's a six-footer. The trouble is, there's too damn many six-footers in this country. Bein' a medium-sized jasper myself. I've noticed that. Mac's one, for instance. *You* ain't this guy we call The Hood are you, Mac?"

The way he said it startled me a little.

I said, "I couldn't very well have shot Manning Doran, George. I was standing right beside you when that happened. Not to mention the fact that Manning is one of my best friends."

He nodded, and I knew his mind was busy on other things. "It seems funny, me standin' here and doin' nothing. Manning was—is—my friend, too. Best friend I ever had, I reckon. Only there don't seem to be much point in doin' anything. How many men you reckon

knew that Swede Olsen paid Manning better than four thousand dollars, cash money, last night?"

I shook my head.

"I asked Paula that same question," Poe said slowly. "Link Morgan knew it. And Swede Olsen. Nobody else. And here's a thing to think about: Olsen and Morgan are both six-footers."

I stared at him. "But Link Morgan wouldn't—Hell, you must be joking, Poe. Link couldn't have done it. And Olsen—you'd have to prove that Olsen was here in town when the thing happened, in the first place, and he ain't. Livin' closer to Lyman Junction than to Comanche, the way he does, he does his tradin' there. And his drinking."

Poe grinned, but it was a grin without any mirth in it.

"The only fault with that argument," he said, "is this: it's wrong. You didn't see who it was I stopped to talk to a while ago, did you? It was Olsen."

He nodded. "Funny how things work out, ain't it? I was just thinkin' about what Paula told me and thinkin' that if Olsen was in town, he'd be a number-one suspect; and I happened to glance at the door of the Brill House and there's Olsen comin' out of it. I asked Swede what brought him to town. He said that after he'd paid Doran for them cows he got to thinkin' how he could get drunk and play some poker without runnin' any risk of losin' the money he'd saved up to buy them cows with, and he had a bottle in his saddlebags for a starter, and so—"

Poe shrugged.

"Swede says he started to go to Lyman Junction and then remembered he hadn't been to Comanche for quite a spell, so he turned around and came here. He says he was drunker when he got here than he'd figured on bein', so he found an empty room in the hotel and went to bed. I said, 'Swede, you didn't get up awhile ago and shoot a man did you?' And Swede grinned and says, 'Mebbe so, Sheriff. I ban purty damn dronk!' The damn fool thought I was jokin'."

POE frowned again. "So that makes three of 'em. There's Zimmerman. Spain, here, came pretty close to accusin' Brick, so we've got to consider him. Brick claims he was in his room. He was, when we saw him. But in the time Morgan took to get to the Paystreak, and the time it took us to get started, Brick could've got from the livery stable to where we saw him, all right. So that ain't what you'd call a first-class alibi. There's another argument in Brick's favor, though—one he didn't think of himself. It's this: He didn't know Doran was carryin' that money. Next, there's Olsen. Olsen may've known Doran had the money; might've seen him start to town with it, and followed him. And Olsen lacks an alibi. And—there's Morgan. Link knew Manning had the money, and he was on the spot to do the job."

He looked at me. "You said Link couldn't have done it. Listen. Link says this jasper in the hood shot at him and cut his arm and made him drop his gun and he couldn't find it again. *I* found it. It wasn't very hard to find, either. It was layin' on top of the straw there in the stall, right where a man'd expect it to be. There's two empty shells in the cylinder. Of course, Link explained one o' them empties by sayin' his gun exploded when he dropped it. But he didn't explain the second empty."

"Maybe he carries his gun with the hammer down on an empty cartridge," Spain suggested. "Lots of fellows do."

"Maybe," Poe said skeptically. "How many shots did you hear, Mac?"

"Two—" I said it slowly, trying to remember.

"How many, Spain?"

"Why, two—"

Poe frowned.

"Seems like to me that I heard three," he said. "The first two were so close together they sounded almost like one. And another one, a couple of seconds later."

Now that I came to think of it I wasn't sure he wasn't right. I remembered the blurred sound of that first shot: *P-pow!* It might have been two shots.

"Or it might've been a shot and a quick echo," Poe said, finishing my thought for me. "Look. Link said himself that Manning was facin' down the street. What was to keep Link from sneakin' up behind Manning, having put on his black mask while he was back there in the stall? Maybe he figured to stick Manning up, lift the money, and then make Manning walk away from him, so he'd have time to ditch the hood and the money. Link could've fired that shot back toward the stall in order to give himself an alibi in Manning's mind. Only Manning spoils it all by goin' for his gun, so Link has to shoot him. After which, Link could've tossed the gun back where I found it, figurin' it'd help prove that he was where he said he was. It *could've* happened that way, couldn't it? Link's got ideas about takin' himself a wife. Four thousand dollars might come in handy to him."

"Link ain't a murderer," I said.

Poe grunted. "Any man in a tight enough spot is a murderer if things break right for it. I don't say Link meant to shoot Manning. Say he didn't. But if he was crowded—"

The hell of it was, I knew Poe was right. Link wouldn't have intended to kill, but if Manning went for his gun and Link got rattled—

"Besides," Poe reached for his pocket and pulled out the telegram Isaacson had handed him. "Here's somethin' else."

He read aloud:

". . . WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE BANDIT CUT HIS ARM ON GLASS WHEN HE BROKE WINDOW LOOK FOR MAN WITH CUT ON RIGHT FOREARM."

Poe looked at me.

"Link's arm was bleeding when he came into the Paystreak," he said slowly. "Which makes it look like he'd just been cut. But if he'd cut his arm maybe six hours earlier, and bandaged it, and then ripped the bandage off just after shootin' Doran, the cut wouldn't have had time to heal much. It'd bleed, I reckon, the same as if it was fresh."

Poe struck a match with vicious force across his hip and chewed at his cigar while the flame flared up and steadied.

"I wish to God I'd stuck to cattle!" he said plaintively. "This doggone job is ruinin' my faith in human nature. I'm gettin' where, if I caught my own grandma eatin' peppermint candy I'd suspect that she'd been drinkin' and felt the need of killin' her breath! That's how damn suspicious I am."

*(to be continued)*

*There was a glint of steel. . . .*

# THE BACK TRAIL

## A novelette by H. BEDFORD JONES

THE old man who came ashore from the island steamer was rather a queer piece. And you saw some queer ones in Balikan these days, what with the oil boom and everything.

Watch his eyes, as he walked along the river front to the rickety hotel, perched on its stilts over the mangrove roots and the pigs. What he looked at, what he passed over, might tell a story. He had no eyes for the Dutch officer and the brown sepoys, or the Arab and Chinese bazars, nor even for the Red Hot, which was comfortably filled with drinkers at this cool of the afternoon.

He did look at the oil men, stalwart Americans, Australians, Dutch. He gaped at the oil tanker along the new wharf, and the shining oil tanks ashore. His glance touched here and there, reflectively, as though mildly amazed by the looks of things. But—and this was significant—while he took no interest in the natives, he did look twice, and even again, at a Malay who came along with a kris tucked into his *sarong*. Not one man in a hundred, here, would see anything odd about the Malay or his kris, except that he was an old sort of chap. The one man would know that the weapon was a "kris of honor," as the Malays call it, carried only by a chief. There were not many Malays here in Balikan,

or around the new Celebes oil field.

The old man went on to the hotel. Only when you looked him in the face did the impression of age come. Otherwise, his whites fell about a straight-backed figure, and his step had a spring. The face, with its gray mustache, its gray hair under the sun-helmet, was lined and drawn and gnarled, and oddly white. Only the eyes were young and alive.

At the hotel desk, he paid the native who had brought his bag from the steamer and registered his name: John Schmidt. He seemed in no haste to seek his room, but looked at the sleek Dutch hotel clerk and spoke amiably.

"Twelve years has made a lot of changes in Balikan, eh?"

"Yes, *Mynheer,*" said the clerk. "That, and the oil discovery. You're interested in the oil fields, perhaps?"

"No," said Schmidt, with a slight smile. "Did you ever hear of a man named Voorhis, who used to be a trader here, when Balikan was only a settlement?"

"You must mean Mynheer Piet Voorhis," said the clerk. "Yes, he is a wealthy man now, with a fine tobacco plantation. It is next to the plantation of Mynheer Hoorn. Two days up-river."

"So? Jan Hoorn is still alive, eh?" Schmidt lifted his shaggy gray brows. "There was an English planter here in the old days. What was his name—yes, I have it. Ferguson! I suppose you never heard of him?"

"Ferguson?" The Dutch clerk mouthed the name and nodded. "Oh, yes! Mynheer Voorhis has his plantation now. The Englishman died or went away. I forget the story. I think he was sent to prison for illegal trading. His wife died; his son is still around here. Someone was talking about him only the other day. He'll come to no good end, they say. A wastrel who's gone up in the Dyak country most of the time, and spends his days here hanging around the Red Hot with these Americans. Yes, I remember now. It was an oil man talking about him. The fellow was in jail yesterday for being drunk."

"So?" said Schmidt. "When do we dine—oh, at eight-thirty? Thank you."

He went to his room. The ramshackle hotel was a rickety structure, the flooring laid over ironwood poles, the partitions thin. Even with the windows closed, one could hear the talking trees outside, so thin were the walls and full of chinks.

Schmidt changed into fresh whites, slicked back his iron-gray hair, looked at himself in the broken mirror and smiled grimly. Nobody who had known him twelve years ago would know him now, he told himself. This old man's face was security against any recognition. Old and bitter, even sinister, with that puckering scar on the cheek. It changed him completely.

He dressed with care and went out, heading for the little old town along the river. The newer town, with fine bungalows and beautiful compounds, stretched farther back; but here between the hotel and the Red Hot sprawled the little old huddled streets of bazars and huts and trading posts, their godowns extending along the wharves, with the walled compound of the Dutch Residency just beyond.

Under the lordly flame-trees thronged Chinese and natives, seamen and Arabs, oil men and sepoys. Schmidt threaded his way among them and turned in at the bazar of Lim Toy—Lim the "talented," who did a general trading and banking business. He spoke to a clerk in the bazar, and presently was taken to the office in the rear. Here sat Lim Toy with an accountant who nimbly fingered an abacus. Lim was a fat old yellow man, who wore his hair in a queue like his ancestors and affected the coral-buttoned cap of a mandarin, to which he had no right whatever. He was a

Straits Chinese and not from China itself.

Lim glanced up at his visitor, then heaved out of his chair and extended a plump hand. His fat countenance was wreathed in smiles.

"Oh, this is joyful!" he said in English. "I am glad to see you again. Be seated, and this ineffective gosling who tries to learn the business will serve us tea."

Schmidt, who had not uttered a word, sat down and lit a whitish Borneo cheroot. The clerk scuttled out. Lim turned to his visitor, his face creased in anxious lines.

"It is all right?" he inquired.

"Quite," Schmidt said dryly. "I've served my time. I'm surprised you knew me."

"The eyes and the thumb-prints never change. I keep the one in my memory, my records keep the other."

"I'm using the name of John Schmidt, for my own reasons. Have you the money I deposited with you years ago?"

"And the interest. It has grown to a large sum," said Lim Toy.

"Didn't my wife or my son need it?"

"No. Your wife died. Mynheer Voorhis claimed she had sold him the plantation and had a paper to prove it. He gave the boy some money, and the boy went up-country with your servant Ali. Since then he has done very well, trading. I buy much from him. He is here in town now."

Schmidt nodded reflectively. "Ali was always a wise man and true. Where is my wife buried? Here in town?"

"No. I think she was buried on the plantation. When he made money, the boy had me send to Batavia for a tombstone, I remember."

The clerk came in, bringing tea things, and arranged a table. Lim Toy lit a sleeve pipe, puffed out its brief life, laid it down again. Schmidt sat smoking, his grim face relaxed into lines of meditation. Then Lim spoke again.

"You will want some money."

"Yes. A thousand guilders, if you have it handy. But I don't want to sign for it. I can trust you, of course; we were once friends."

"We are still friends. A thumb-print signature is all I require," said Lim. "Let me give you tea; it is very poor stuff and unworthy of you, I regret to say."

A polite man, Lim Toy. The tea service was of Canton enamel, very fine and old and delicate. The two sipped tea and spoke of the old days before Dutch rule had been pushed so far up-river, before the oilfields had civilized everything.

"You have plans for the future?" asked Lim Toy blandly. Schmidt gave him a look; the old face hardened, the glittering eyes grew sharper.

"No—for the present," he said harshly. "I've waited twelve years for this day, Lim. Now I'm going to get the man, or men, who framed me. Understand?" A savage ferocity edged his voice suddenly. "Get them! That's why I'm here."

His gnarled brown fingers tightened on the empty cup, as he spoke. It gave way. It fell on the table, a crushed mass of thin copper and enamel.

"Oh! I'm sorry," he exclaimed, in dismay.

"It is nothing," said Lim blandly, but for a moment his eyes were mournful as they touched on the crushed ruin. "It is nothing. There is something much more important, my friend. Haste is the destroyer of cherished dreams."

"True. I know that, Lim; I've learned it. Cherished dreams—well, that's one word for it, anyhow! There's one man I aim to put in hell."

From former days, Schmidt remembered the tea ceremony well. Presently he himself pressed for the third cup of tea, which meant dismissal. Lim Toy sighed and agreed. Schmidt pocketed his money, made his thumb mark on the receipt and took his departure.

AS he emerged from the bazar entrance, a low voice halted him.

"*Tuan-ki!* I am here."

Schmidt looked down at the brown figure, squatting respectfully yet proudly. It was the same Malay whom he had seen in the street, wearing a scarlet sarong with a *kris melala* thrust in it, a kris of ceremony. An old and wrinkled face like his own, a strong, springy body like his own.

"You have made a mistake," Schmidt said in Malay. The squatting man showed his betel-blackened teeth in a grin.

"*Tuan*, I saw you when you came from the ship."

"You have another master. I do not know you," and Schmidt turned away.

"May fire be upon my head, but not shame!" drifted the soft voice after him. He paused, glancing back at the Malay with his twisted smile.

"Neither fire nor shame, Ali, but wisdom," he said, and went his way.

His course took him to the Red Hot.

Here he found the air blue with smoke and oaths and loud talk. Oil men were ranged along the bar; the gambling rooms would not be open until the evening. Men blethered of Sydney and Texas and Oklahoma. Two machinery salesmen from Singapore talked women with a Dutch commercial traveler. The officers from the steamer were drinking steadily, and the American bartender was kept busy with his native helpers.

Schmidt gained a place at the bar, ordered gin and ginger beer, and looked into the the big fly-specked mirror. On his right, a young fellow stood discussing freight rates with the steamer's supercargo; a young man, brown, hawk-nosed, unsmiling. Schmidt's gaze gripped the hard, alive face, and his own thoughts rioted.

They bridged the gap of twelve years, the gap of emptiness. They went back to the first tobacco plantation in these parts, two days up-river. He had carved it out of the jungle himself, when the Dutch did not have so much as a fort up there. His thoughts toyed with those days of budding prosperity and golden future, before Piet Voorhis came to Balikan. They touched on the smiling woman—and shrank away. She was gone now. Only the twelve-year gap remained, and Voorhis, and this young man with the brown hard face—his son, but a stranger.

Then Schmidt forced everything back and down, came into the present again and here remained. One day at a time; thus had run the orders of his brain. Thus it must still be. One day at a time. Life held nothing more than this.

"Him? Oh, young Ferguson. Quite a lad, they say. Been here most of his life. His old man was sent up for illegal trading and murder, a long time ago. Can't get a better man than Ferguson to handle anything up-country."

Schmidt heard the words subconsciously. He was thinking of the twelve-year gap, with no letters, no word, no communication. Across the island seas and buried. No one here would even know that he was pardoned and free and out. No one would care, except possibly Hoorn or Piet Voorhis. Then, wakening to the words, he looked for the speaker but could not locate him. Just a chance remark. Sent up for illegal trading and murder, eh? True enough. Tried and convicted and plucked out of life into a living hell. And for nothing that he had done.

A smart fellow, Piet Voorhis. Claimed he had bought the plantation, and had a paper to prove it. Yes, he would. Hoorn would have helped him with that. Hoorn had helped him years ago, when he wanted Ferguson out of his way. Well, well, the talented Lim was quite right about it all. Only the young should be in a hurry.

There was a fight down the room, a hammering, thudding battle of cursing

oil men. Schmidt watched the crowd eddy and uncoil again, his bright eyes uninterested. The line-up shifted at the bar and brought young Ferguson next to him.

"No, I won't take the job," Ferguson said to someone behind. "Thanks all the same. I can send you a good native guide, if that'll do you. I'm heading up-river in the morning on business of my own."

"Give my love to the Voorhis girl," hiccuped an oil man. "Some day I'll take her out—"

Ferguson whipped around in a blaze, silent and deadly; he struck without warning, and the oil man went staggering. Somebody else chipped in and clipped Ferguson under the ear. He caught at the bar for support. In the shifting vortex of action, another oil man hit out with a bottle for Ferguson's head. Schmidt caught the arm in midair, and something happened; the oil man screamed and went down, writhing. A beer mug hit Ferguson squarely and laid him out. Schmidt, holding the bottle he had seized, smashed it on the edge of the mahogany and swung around, with a six-inch sliver of glass in his fist.

"Come and get it," he said, not loudly. The circle of faces fell back in a hurry. From somewhere slid up a lithe brown man with naked steel in his hand, the flame-shaped blade glittering. A roar of fury started up, then checked itself uneasily. Schmidt's scarred face twisted in a smile.

"Nobody want it? Then clear the way," he said, and turned to the Malay. "Put up that kris *melala* before the soldiers come. Take his feet."

Ali slid his weapon out of sight and lifted Ferguson's feet. Schmidt caught him under the arms and helped carry him into the gambling room, which was empty. Behind them, a voice broke out in undisguised relief.

"By God, that old bearcat had murder in his face! Did you see him hit Melish?"

SCHMIDT closed the rear door and shut out the tumultuous voices. He looked at Ali, across the senseless figure of Ferguson. The Malay was grinning.

"You're a fool," said Schmidt.

"Yes, *tuan*," Ali rejoined meekly. "Allah be praised! You will tell him?"

"I have nothing to tell him. Why do you go up-river tomorrow?"

"Everything is stored at the plantation, *tuan*. Everything we have brought out of the hills in six months past. We are selling some stuff to Lim Toy, and shipping more on the steamer; we wanted to be sure the steamer was here."

"Stored? At the plantation? What plantation?"

"That of Tuan Voorhis. He is very friendly to Tuan Jack."

"Get me some water."

Presently Jack Ferguson sat up and grunted, and met the keen gaze of Schmidt.

"Oh, hello! I remember now—you took a hand. Thanks. What happened?"

"A beer-mug," Schmidt said laconically. "I knew your father a long time back."

Ferguson stared up, feeling his head. "Eh? You knew him? Know where he is now?"

"Jail."

"Yes." Ferguson uttered a harsh laugh. "For life. Some damned stinking Dutch jail over in Java. Buried alive. And you know why? Murder and illegal trading; lost his head and got caught at it."

"That's what you think," said Schmidt calmly. "You were only twelve then. Twenty-four now. Come on, get on your feet and move, will you? Have dinner with me at the hotel. Who's this native?"

"The best friend I ever had." Ferguson came erect. "I'm having dinner with this man, Ali. He knew my father. Meet me at the boat at sunrise; have the men on hand."

"Yes, Tuan Jack," said Ali.

They went out, the old man and the young, and on to the hotel together in the fading daylight. A wash in Schmidt's room, a drink at the bar, and they went in to dinner. When their order was given, Ferguson squared away and surveyed the older man critically.

"You knew him well, Schmidt? Tell me about him."

"Nothing to tell, much," said Schmidt. "Your mother didn't believe he was guilty?"

"No. She died soon afterward. I was sick then, too—fever." Ferguson frowned. "I don't remember much about it all."

*'Come and get it!"*

"Your father left some stuff buried in his house. Did your mother get it?"

"I think not; she never mentioned it that I recall." Ferguson eyed the other, puzzled by his words. Schmidt enjoyed his bewilderment.

So the stuff was still there! Not likely that Voorhis had found it, either. That would be bad news for Hoorn, too.

"You must have known him pretty well, Schmidt."

"I did, sure. I hear Voorhis has his plantation now. The same house?"

"Yes."

"Still got that big hearth with the blue tiles in front of the fireplace?"

"Yes. I remember when dad built that, too."

Schmidt laughed a little. "Right. Tell me about yourself. Are you going upriver in the morning? Why the rush?"

"I've got a tremendous lot of stuff waiting there: camphor, a little gold, native truck of all kinds," Ferguson replied. "I've been trading for the past six months and sent everything down to the Voorhis place. He has a couple of go-downs I'm using now. Out of the tobacco season, you know. I want to get some of the stuff on this steamer. She's going to be here three days, so I can just make it nicely."

"You and Voorhis are friends, eh?"

Ferguson hesitated. "I pay him, of course."

Schmidt changed the subject. They talked on general matters during dinner. When the coffee came in, Ferguson brought up what lingered in his mind.

"You spoke of something my father had hidden in the house. Do you know where it is?"

Schmidt nodded. "What about taking me with you in the morning?"

"Can do, sure," assented Ferguson

cheerfully. "Glad to have you along. And—"

"Must you talk about it?"

Ferguson looked into the glittering eyes and smiled abruptly.

"I get you. Do you know Voorhis?"

Schmidt shrugged. "Did it ever occur to you that your father might have been —shall we say framed?"

He spoke almost casually. The question evoked a startling response; not in words, not in any emotion, but in the way Ferguson seemed to stop dead-still, to freeze in every nerve and muscle, even in thought, as a wild beast or a savage hunter may do, but seldom a white man.

For a moment, Ferguson looked into Schmidt's face, then silently got out his watch, pried open the case, and from within it took a small round-cut photograph. He passed it over.

"If," he said quietly, "you think such a man as this can be sent to jail, and his son not think there's something queer about it—well, that's your answer. Unfortunately, I was too young to know much then. And it's been a long time."

"A long time," Schmidt echoed.

He looked at the photograph. His own face—as it had been, not as it was now. He could scarcely believe he had really looked like this at thirty-five. A smooth, hard, brown face, like that of young Ferguson. Now, with his thinned hair, his scarred and lined features, the down-drawn line of his curving lips, he was a different person entirely.

A smile twitched at his mouth. Hoorn would know him, yes; Jan Hoorn had been his clerk and assistant. Lim Toy had known him, and Ali; Ferguson simply did not know him. Hoorn was a sharp 'un, and would recognize him, having a mind for petty detail. Piet Voorhis would not, would not have been thinking or wondering about him. Voorhis had more important affairs and always had been breezy, superficial, even careless.

He handed back the photograph with a nod. Desire clutched at his heart, momentary madness and longing; he crushed it back. Twelve years had trained him in a hard school. No, Tuan Jack must not know now, perhaps ever.

"Let's see. Voorhis married a Frenchwoman, didn't he?"

"She died last year," Ferguson said. "His daughter Aline runs the place; came back from school in Batavia when her mother passed away. A fine girl, Aline—woman, rather."

"Must be a hard life for a woman up there."

"Not for her kind of a woman."

"I see. Then, do we start together in the morning?"

"You bet." Ferguson leaned forward, intent. "What did you mean—about framing?"

"That," said Schmidt, "depends on what we find at the plantation. Just a notion I had in the back of my mind."

"I think," Ferguson said slowly, "you're a damned liar."

"You're right." The older man chuckled. "Let's leave it like that."

## CHAPTER II

### THE MAN FROM NOWHERE

SIX men rowed the boat. Ali steered, squatting like a monkey in the stern. The craft was wide, of shallow draft, with a shelter amidships where the two white men rode.

The first day passed with little incident. Schmidt was calm, unhurried, satisfied. He had Ferguson's liking. What was more, he had the younger man's respect; not alone for his taciturn evidences of knowing the river and the country, but for something apparently trivial yet of huge significance.

Ferguson broached it when they had hauled up for the night and made camp.

"Funny," he observed. "Twice I've

heard Ali address you as *tuan-ki*. He never calls me that. In fact, he never uses the suffix except to a chief."

Schmidt shrugged lightly. "Malay custom. You don't run up against Malays of the old stripe in this country. He probably appreciates my handling his lingo."

"No. I know Ali. He must think you're tops."

"Eh?" Schmidt frowned. "What does that mean?"

"Oh, that's slang; I picked it up off the radio," and Ferguson laughed. Then he frowned. "I suppose you never met Jan Hoorn? He used to be with my father."

"Once or twice. He was pretty young then."

"Oh, he's well over thirty now. Getting on rapidly," Ferguson said. Schmidt stifled a smile. Getting on, eh? To this young hill trader, a man of forty-seven, who looked nearly sixty in the face, must be a doddering old relic.

"Is he married?"

"No. Kept a native woman or two, I understand." Ferguson's brows came down into a dark bar, as at some disturbing thought. "Hoorn," he said slowly, "is a bad one."

"Hm! Heard you were in jail yourself the other day."

Ferguson grunted. "Drunk. Complete, too. Just in from the hills; it feels good then."

"Depends on what's a-crawl in your brain."

"You know a lot," and Ferguson flushed half-angrily.

"Yes, I do."

Something wrong, Schmidt thought. Something about Hoorn. Was that pallid devil up to tricks with the boy? But Ferguson could not be pried into talking about it. He, too, could be reticent. Getting nowhere with his probing, Schmidt turned the subject.

"Does Voorhis do well with his tobacco?"

"Last year was poor; he's looking for a big cleanup this year, with prices booming. He's got a tremendous big clearing, now. There used to be swamps north of the plantation. He's drained 'em and expects big crops there. Then there's a whole village of natives, a couple of miles from the house, who work for him and Hoorn. Doing things in a big way all around. A regular patroon, Voorhis is."

"He always was. Too bad if he ever lost the place."

"Never fear. Voorhis is careful with his money."

Not his, thought Schmidt; mine. Well, money isn't everything after all. He smiled his twisted smile, then realized that Ferguson was addressing him sharply.

"If you know anything, if your hints about my father having been framed have any fact basis, I'd like to know it, Schmidt. Yes or no?"

"I talked to your father when he was in jail," Schmidt replied placidly. "It was quite true, he said, about the illegal trading and the killing of a native, an Achinese in Dutch service. Quite true—but he hadn't done it. He didn't know who had, either. He merely suspected."

"Whom did he suspect?" Ferguson asked in a low voice.

"I'm not fool enough to say until I learn something definite. That's why I came. I know where to find the man if I want him."

"You're damned mysterious."

"No. Just playing safe."

"Then why wait all these years?" exploded Ferguson hotly. "If you've known this, if he suspected something, why the devil didn't you come here straight off?"

Schmidt regarded him for a moment.

"Just suspicion, that's all. And I've had to work. What about yourself, playing around here while your old man rotted in jail all these years? You never went near him, did you?"

"No. That took money. I had none—

worse than none," Ferguson said bitterly. "I grew up with the notion, and I've held to it. I knew I'd find him somewhere. I had debts. They hung over me. Two years ago I had nearly enough to start out for Java and find him; then a fire wiped out the warehouses where my stuff was stored. I had to begin all over. Now I'm back to that point. The stuff I'm shipping now will let me go, as soon as I settle one or two things upriver. Money! You can't turn around without money. No letters from him, no word, no message until you brought it now—damnation! D'ye think I haven't been in hell myself? I've written blind, in care of the colonial authorities, and the letters came back. I'll have to go to Batavia to learn where he's imprisoned. Those damned Dutchmen love to turn up their noses at other nations, at a convict's son—"

With an oath, Ferguson got up and walked off along the river bank.

Schmidt sat smoking in silence, his heart expanding. So the boy had not just drifted at all! He had worked and slaved, he had grown up with the one fixed idea, he had been beaten down and back, but had clung to it.

And he had grown well and true, thought Schmidt. The boy he had once known was vanished, but his probing had revealed a man after his own heart. Tell the truth about himself? No, not yet. Perhaps not at all. He held to his taciturn ways, the ways of prison life.

Morever, Schmidt began to entertain a gnawing fear that he might have exchanged one prison for another, less tangible yet more terrible, which would hold him with unseen bars and prevent him from ever revealing himself to this son of his. Later that night, he became more sure of it. After Ferguson had turned in, he lingered for a word with Ali.

"Is Tuan Jack in love with this girl at the Voorhis place?"

"Only God knows the truth, *tuan-ki*," rejoined the old Malay. "He is not the only one, if he loves her. But it is in my mind that if the thoughts of this woman could be turned to Tuan Hoorn, then both these plantations would become one great property."

Schmidt knew there was shrewd observation behind this statement. Something must be afoot, yes. Hoorn and Voorhis were once more in cahoots, and once more a Ferguson would suffer. He turned in with an uneasy heart, finding himself blocked at all points. Bad enough for the story about Ferguson's father to be circulated, but worse if he were to resume his own identity. A mere wandering ex-convict was nothing to be proud of.

The best plan, he resolved, was to get that wallet concealed in the fireplace of the house. Then he would have a weapon. This damned girl! She changed everything; rather, the fact that Ferguson was in love with her. This, Schmidt no longer doubted.

MORNING found them on their way anew. They passed Jan Hoorn, bound down to Balikan, passed his big, fine, polished craft with a hail and a wave of the arm, no more. A little later, also without pause, they passed Fort Rynsdam, the old trading post, now the center of up-country administration.

Before the fort, at the wharf, lay a long and handsome launch, all glittering brass and mahogany, with an ornate canopy. Schmidt was curious about it. The launch of the Resident from Balikan, said Ferguson; the Resident must be here at the fort on a visit.

Noon came and passed. They went on up the river reaches in the hot sunlight. Here and there were plantations, but not many, for the hills were drawing down closer to the horizon. The jungle had given place to uplands.

In mid-afternoon they came into the wide, fertile valley that lay entirely in

the hands of Hoorn and Voorhis. The trees along the river masked all that lay behind; all except where the native village of workmen and their families had upgrown. They went past this and headed on.

Journey's end at last. A long wharf on the left bank, with godowns looming amid the trees and boats drawn up. Nobody was in sight. The plantation, the house, the curing sheds, all of this lay well back from the river and invisible.

"My father built near a spring of good water, rather than use the river supply," said Ferguson in explanation. "But you know that, of course."

"Yes, I know it," Schmidt assented gravely. "I should like to visit the place where your mother lies, if you'll permit me."

Ferguson nodded.

They landed, left Ali to take care of the boat, and Ferguson led the other man away. Not by the well-traveled road through the trees to the house, but by an overgrown path branching to one side. Suddenly Ferguson turned, halted, and looked Schmidt in the eyes.

"Because you were my father's friend," he said slowly, "and because I like you, I've given you a good deal, Schmidt. More than any other man. But it may be a mistake to keep your tongue too close between your teeth. When you spoke of visiting her grave, just now, your voice revealed a good deal. You were an intimate friend, then?"

"I loved your mother, if you must know. I always loved her," said Schmidt calmly. "And your father knew it. And we were friends."

Ferguson's countenance cleared. He clapped Schmidt on the arm, then with a jerk of his head went on. They came to a little clump of flame trees, overlooking the river, Schmidt saw a little cleared space, and a plain stone marker. He knelt and bared his head.

When Ferguson rose from his own tribute, Schmidt was standing, immobile, no trace of emotion in his face except that it was more deeply lined and drawn than usual.

"We'd better go up to the house and find Voorhis," said Ferguson. "If he's got the boats and men ready, I'll have to load tonight and get 'em off."

The house broke upon them presently, nestled among the casuarina trees the Fergusons had planted; now they were broad, heavy trees. Schmidt's gaze drank in everything very hungrily, from the house to the far fields of tobacco plants.

"The lumber came from the sawmill at Fort Rynsdam," he observed. "Your mother loved the rustle of these talking trees, I remember. That's why they were planted thick. No sign of Voorhis about, eh? I see he's put up stables and other buildings, back yonder. Ah! Is this the daughter?"

"Yes."

She was coming out to meet them, gayly, swiftly. A lovely woman, Schmidt admitted grudgingly; deep-breasted and strong, her head proudly set, her radiant features framed in two massive braids of flaxen hair that fell to her knees. She came with both hands extended and glad welcoming on her lips.

"Jack! I thought you'd be back today. All well?"

"All," said Ferguson. For an instant he was a different man as he met her eyes and gripped her hands; a man joyous and warm and unconcealed. Then he turned. "Aline, this is Mynheer Schmidt. He came along to see the country. You can put him up?"

"Of course, of course," said the girl eagerly. "Come along in. Father's off riding, inspecting the fences. He'll be back soon. Is Ali with you? He'll have your luggage brought up, of course. Is this your first visit up-country, *Mynheer*?"

"The first in a long time," said Schmidt.

"I told Ali to wait until he heard from us," Ferguson said. "You'd better send someone to tell him it's all right. I

brought your mail along. It's in my bag."

They went into the house. Aline summoned a servant, a dish-faced native, and sent him to the wharf, then turned laughingly.

"Excuse me, if you will. Make our visitor at home, Jack, while I see about the sheets and the other spare room. Oh! Is anything wrong?"

Schmidt had come into the big room, glancing around quickly. A queer little sound, like a whimpering groan, had come from him. He turned, one hand to his jaw.

"A bad tooth," he said. "Now it will swell. *Ach!* At this, of all times! We must get a bandage ready, Ferguson, and—"

"I'll get everything," exclaimed the girl. "We have some penetrating oil for that very thing. I know how it must hurt; wait a few minutes and we'll fix you up."

She disappeared.

"Go help her," said Schmidt quickly. "Keep her occupied—give me three minutes."

Ferguson glowered at him briefly, then turned and followed Aline.

Schmidt whipped out a big knife and went to the fireplace. This was surrounded by huge blue tiles of Delft ware; it was a massive hearth, and above it was set the enlarged photograph of a woman. The pictures and other things left by the Fergusons were still here. Schmidt looked at the woman's picture. His features twisted, as though wrenched by inner hurt; then he leaned down and tapped at one of the blue tiles.

His knife-blade touched its edge and sank in. The tile, placed in putty instead of cement, came away to his hand. From the cavity thus disclosed, Schmidt snatched out a wallet. He thrust it into his pocket, replaced the tile, and was standing by the window when Ferguson and Aline came back into the room.

The bandage about his jaw gave him a grotesque appearance, which he coveted. At the last minute, it had seemed impossible that Voorhis would not recognize him.

Aline departed again, to get the rooms ready. Ferguson came to Schmidt.

"If you got it, give it to me," he said.

Schmidt produced the wallet. He opened it, ignoring the demand, and brought to light a wad of banknotes and a number of papers. From these last he took one, shoving the rest into Ferguson's hand. He opened the one, and his eyes glittered on it.

"What's that one?" demanded Ferguson. Schmidt laughed harshly.

"This? A letter Jan Hoorn wrote to Piet Voorhis, long ago. Of no interest to you, but much to me. By the way, she said that Hoorn had been here yesterday, I think."

"Yes." Ferguson, pocketing the wallet, was looking over the money and papers.

"And do you happen to know just how your father was proven to have done illegal trading, in contraband goods?"

Ferguson's gaze shot up. "I've heard, yes. He was caught with the goods."

"Precisely. Like you, he had stored up a lot of stuff to take down-river. Like you, he left it under lock and key in a godown; perhaps the same godown your stuff is piled in at this moment. And Jan Hoorn was his clerk."

Ferguson began to breathe heavily.

"By God, Schmidt! Just what do you mean?"

"It was curious," said Schmidt quite calmly. "The *controleur* of the district was at Fort Rynsdam, just as the Resident is there now. And Jan Hoorn went downriver, just as he has gone now. The officials came unexpectedly and examined the godown—as they might arrive in the morning. And there the stuff was found; stuff that your father had never placed there himself, nor brought from the hills. Just as—"

Ferguson started to his feet.

"You're—you're absurd!" he said hoarsely. "Why, Voorhis has taken care of all that stuff of mine. And Hoorn—nonsense! Come out with it if you've anything to say!"

Schmidt shook his head. "No reason, eh? You don't know why Hoorn, and perhaps Piet Voorhis, might want you out of the way? Well, go ask the girl. She was so damned glad to see you arrive! Voorhis would sooner marry her to Hoorn than to you, maybe. Wouldn't hurt you to inspect your stuff in the godown before the Resident comes to do it. Hard camphor, bird of paradise skins, perhaps some diamonds or other stones—"

A horse clumped up to the verandah steps. The voices of natives rang out, pierced by a sharper, deeper voice. Piet Voorhis had come home.

## CHAPTER III

### THE VOICE OF THE TREES

TWELVE years had touched Voorhis lightly, pleasantly. A handsome, florid, fair man who thought well of himself, as the short upper lip testified. Plenty of strength in his face, and a bluff, overmastering manner. Hearty, some would call it.

"Here's the inventory of your goods," and he passed Ferguson several closely-written pages. "I checked over everything carefully as it arrived. Everything's in the north godown and secure. But I couldn't get the men and boats until tomorrow."

"The devil!" exclaimed Ferguson in dismay. "To late then for the steamer! Well, let it pass. Thanks for your trouble, Voorhis. It's good of you."

Voorhis waved his hand and poured another drink. Sunset was approaching. He asked if Schmidt, who had said little, would be interested in looking over the place.

"Very," replied Schmidt dryly. "I'm sorry it is difficult for me to talk—"

"I've had bad teeth myself. Had 'em jerked out," and Voorhis laughed. "Will you come, Ferguson?"

"No," said the latter. "I've a present for Aline in my boat, and left it there. I must go down and rout it out."

"And I'm going with you," said the girl, laughing. They swung off and were gone. Piet Voorhis looked after them with a smile, but his eyes did not smile.

"A fine pair for you!" he exclaimed, lifting his glass. Schmidt grunted.

"Has he money?"

"No. That is, not to mention," and Voorhis lost his smile. "Besides, his father is a criminal, a convict. There are better men for such a woman."

"Undoubtedly." Schmidt rose and adjusted his bandage. "Shall we go?"

They left the house and the group of talking trees, looking across the broad acres of tobacco plants. "Another day or two and the work of cutting and curing would begin," said Voorhis, explaining the business affably. Schmidt plied him with questions, and they went farther and farther from the house, until Voorhis could point to the swamplands he had drained and planted.

"Mynheer Hoorn has a plantation close by, I think?" said Schmidt. "We met and talked a little with him. He was going to Balikan. We are old friends.

"Oh!" said Voorhis in surprise. "Then you know him!"

"I used to deal with him years ago." Schmidt laughed. "A long time ago, when he was factor for some Englishman who had a plantation. I remember Mynheer Hoorn sent me by mistake a letter he had written to somebody else."

Voorhis turned.

"A strange thing for Hoorn to do," he commented. He lingered upon silence for an instant, as though framing words he shrank from uttering. Then: "To whom was it addressed?"

"Oh, I have forgotten," said Schmidt. "I haven't looked at it in years. So you have no trouble with labor, eh? You're lucky, *Mynheer.*"

Voorhis was looking troubled. "Eh? Labor? Oh, yes," he said rather absently. "Young Ferguson helps me there; he has lots of influence with these natives."

Schmidt laughed to himself, and wiped his gray mustache. He knew well that this influence came not from Ferguson alone, but from the old Malay, an alien who had won deep respect from these brown folk of the upper country.

They went back. The sun was down, the dusk was gathering, as they came to the clump of casuarina trees and the house. Schmidt looked up at the rustling trees.

"My wife loved these talking trees," he said softly. "She was a good woman, God rest her!"

Schmidt went on, a little in advance. He heard a sudden sharp query from Voorhis, and swung around in surprise.

"What did you say?" Voorhis demanded. "Do you speak French?"

"French? No. I said nothing. What was it?"

Voorhis looked up at the trees overhead, bending a little in the breeze of evening, the leaves talking away like the voices of a distant crowd. His florid features lost their ruddy hue. A voice lingered as though from among the leaves, a soft, whispering voice that uttered French words.

"Forgery, Piet!" it seemed to say. "No luck with forgery. The deed of sale—"

His eyes starting out, Voorhis looked at Schmidt, who was adjusting his bandage.

"There! Did you hear it?"

"Hear what?" growled Schmidt in astonishment. Voorhis collected himself.

"Nothing, nothing. I fancied—it was these trees—I thought I heard something." He passed a hand across his forehead. "Time for another drink, eh? Come along Aline! The lamps—"

ALINE and Ferguson were there. A house servant came and lit the lamps. Schmidt gave Ferguson a look of inquiry, and the younger man nodded. While Voorhis was preparing a drink, they went to their rooms to look after their belongings. Once behind a closed door, Ferguson spoke quietly.

"You were right, Schmidt. Good God, I can't believe it even now! Sealed packages, all marked with my marks. All forbidden stuff. Paradise skins, a lot of them; two bales of hard camphor. And something else. The smoked head of a Hollander. He was up-country with me three years ago and was killed by the Dyaks. This was his head, dried and cured. I don't understand it."

"You're not the only man trading with the hills," Schmidt said significantly. "Where is that stuff now?"

"In the river," said Ferguson savagely. "That is, most of it. Not all. Don't worry about it. I didn't want her to know, of course."

Schmidt went on downstairs. Presently Ferguson came. The drinks were good, and Piet Voorhis a jovial host. Aline was seeing to the dinner.

"By the way, Ferguson," said Voorhis, at the second drink, "I gave you two copies of those invoices. Initial one and give it back to me, after you've made sure your stuff is all in the godown."

"I'll look over it first thing in the morning," Ferguson replied. His voice shook a little. "No need to check it over, though; I'll glance over the invoices instead, and that'll be sufficient."

He pulled out the papers, glanced over the closely written sheets, separated the duplicates, and initialed them. Voorhis pocketed them with a nod. Schmidt looked on grimly. In that close writing could be tucked away what no hasty eye would catch, a list of the sealed

*"Give me three minutes. . . ."*

packages. The documentary evidence, at least, was complete.

The dinner was magnificent, thanks to Aline. Proud and flushed and radiant, she presided over the table while the house servants padded about. Ali, in a new yellow *sarong*, stood behind the chair of Ferguson, stately and officious. The dinner was half over when Aline suddenly remembered the mail that Ferguson had brought up from Balikan, and mentioned it. Her father barked at a servant, who brought a number of letters from the front room.

With a word of apology, Voorhis glanced over the letters, picked one out, and tore at the envelope. He opened a folded sheet and stared at it with distending eyes.

"What is it?" demanded Aline in swift alarm. "Bad news?"

"No." Voorhis lowered the paper, and color rushed into his cheeks. "It is from Holland. From the Hague. I— We— thunders of heaven! My old aunt is dead at last. We are millionaires, my dear, millionaires! It is ended here; everything is ended. We must leave at once, in the morning. We must catch that steamer, do you understand?"

He came to his feet, then dropped back into his chair, flushed and excited, babbling in a fury of emotion, forgetful of everything except the agitation that tore at him.

"Ended!" he almost shouted, and his fist pounded on the table. "The months, the years, the struggles—oh, my God! All of it, ended! The times when a guilder was a fortune, the petty strivings, the bickering, the long hard fight—ended!"

"You seem to appreciate money," said Schmidt dryly. Voorhis wiped his lips,

composed himself a trifle, then thumped the table again, exultantly.

"Champagne! There are six bottles left; get them!" he cried, excitement blazing up anew in him. "Oh, my friends, it is wonderful! Europe, Aline, and a great inheritance! We must catch that steamer at all costs. And never to see this accursed land again, never; leave this place to be sold—"

"Yes?" said Schmidt. "I might buy it from you, *Mynheer*."

Voorhis stared at him blankly. "Buy it? You?"

"Why not?" Schmidt asked calmly. "I suppose you can give a clear title."

"Clear? Of course, of course. Admirable!" Voorhis exclaimed, kindling afresh. "We'll talk price later. Yes, an excellent idea! The title is quite clear. You can ask the Resident when he comes in the morning—"

He checked himself abruptly.

"Why, father! The Resident? Coming here?" broke out Aline. "You never told me!"

"I just learned of it this evening," Voorhis said confusedly. "A native from the village told me. He—he had heard of it. Never mind; it's nothing. What's the Resident to me? A poor devil of a colonial administrator. We shan't see him in the morning; we must be on our way early. Hurry up with that champagne!"

Schmidt looked across the table. He met the eyes of Ferguson. They were startled, questing, probing at him. Voorhis had given himself away here. For the first time, suspicion of the full truth was wrenching at Ferguson. That Hoorn might have planted all that illegal trade, he had understood; he had not dreamed that Voorhis could actually be a party to it. He had not credited the words of Schmidt.

All this showed in his gaze, in his face that was slowly draining of blood. The champagne was arrived, corks were popping, Aline was hastily getting glasses. Schmidt caught the eye of Ali, and made a slight gesture. The Malay came around the table to him and leaned over.

"Yes, *tuan-ki*?"

"A cheroot. And later, I want you."

Only Ali caught the last words. Ferguson still sat there like a graven image, growing paler and paler, his gaze still on Schmidt. The latter smiled his twisted smile and lifted his champagne glass.

"Come, *Mynheer!*" He broke in upon Voorhis' rambling talk, which still continued. "A health to—what shall we say? To an end of it all, here, for you."

His gaze went to Ferguson, commanded him with glittering fixity, and Ferguson slowly lifted his glass and sipped the toast. Voorhis waxed more hearty and delighted with each moment; he read the letter again, gave it to Aline, and commanded more champagne. But there was no more. The six bottles had not gone very far.

"Well, well, another time, then!" he said jovially. "Come, Mynheer Schmidt! Were you in earnest about talking of buying the place? Come into the library, then. Ah, what a night! What a night! It is cool, too; a splendid breeze. All works well, now that I am leaving. The luck is all my way."

SCHMIDT accompanied him in grim silence. The library was a room off to itself, with many books. Most of them had been Ferguson's in the old days. Voorhis opened a box of cheroots and a cabinet of liqueurs.

It is odd you should have remarked about the title," he observed. "All land titles are registered at Makassar; there is no doubt about them."

"On the contrary," said Schmidt. "Our boat stopped there for a day. There was something of a scandal being discussed, about titles up this way. I believe some forgery had been discovered. I paid little attention to it, except that it warned me."

"Forgery?" said Voorhis sharply, looking at him. Schmidt waved his cheroot.

"Yes. I paid little attention. Someone had bought a big place from an Englishwoman, as I recall, but the bill of sale or deed had just been found to be a forgery. Too bad there are no cables out this way. News travels slowly, I imagine. What price do you set upon this property, *Mynheer?*"

Voorhis seemed not to hear the question. He tugged at his collar, opened and closed his mouth spasmodically, then gulped at his liqueur. The eyes of Schmidt, above the gray mustache and the grotesque bandage, rested on him with a cruel glitter. Through the open screened windows came a grateful breeze, with the continuous, multitudinous rustle of the talking trees outside.

Voorhis sank into a chair, picked up a cheroot, and forgot to light it. He sat with unseeing eyes, staring at nothing. His florid features, pallid now, were a prey to contesting emotions. Suddenly Schmidt broke the silence.

"Strange! I could have sworn there was a voice outside, a whisper! Did you hear it? Like a woman whispering something." He laughed. "Queer fancies come at night, eh? But we were talking of the price, I think."

Voorhis shot tormented eyes at the windows, where gorgeous moths fluttered against the screen. The breeze brought a scent of mangrove mud from the river.

"I am sorry." The man turned, drew a hand across his brow, opened his shirt at the throat. "I must think, *Mynheer.* I can decide nothing hastily. I feel a little ill—it is the champagne, perhaps. Will you leave me for a little while?"

Schmidt nodded, rose, and left the room. Outside, in the dim hallway, a shadow moved slightly.

"I am here, *tuan,*" murmured the voice of Ali.

"Go down to the river," said Schmidt in Malay. "Cast loose every boat, unless you can hide them. Go to the village and tell those natives that a curse has fallen upon this place and a devil is in it. By morning, they must be gone to the hills. Every one."

A low gasp escaped Ali; his breath quivered and shook.

"Oh, *tuan!*" he said slowly. "*Tuan-ki!* Then, as Allah liveth, what I suspected was the truth. It was this man who did it, long ago."

"You heard my orders," said Schmidt. Like a shadow, Ali was gone, and Schmidt passed on into the living room. Here in a far corner Ferguson and Aline were sitting.

"Don't move," and Schmidt waved his cheroot. "I'm going out for a breath of air. Be back shortly."

He went out, and passed part way around the house to where shafts of light fell from the open library windows.

He could guess what agony held Piet Voorhis at this moment. With millions in his grasp for the taking, that intelligence about the forgery must have been appalling. He could not know that it was entirely false. On the contrary, it had been phrased that he must apply it to himself alone. No other plantation in this district could have been bought from an Englishwoman. And, even before dinner, that talk about a letter Hoorn had sent astray! Hoorn had done exactly that thing, a bit over twelve years ago. A letter broaching a scheme for forging trading permits—the one letter that should not have gone astray, of course. Not that it would inculpate Voorhis in anything, but it would look bad now. It would be bad for Hoorn, of course.

Schmidt, standing back from the ligthed area, looked into the library where Voorhis sat with head in hands. The man lifted his head, moved it from side to side as though in agony, and broke into a groan.

"*Gott! Gott!*" he ejaculated. "At this time, of all others! It is incredible. The devil himself must be in it. Perhaps this

fellow was wrong, mistaken—but no. There could be no mistake. That makes it all the more horrible."

"No mistake, Piet." A thin, whispery voice came through the window in French, as the trees rustled. "No mistake. No mistake."

A hoarse cry broke from Voorhis. He leaped to his feet, and with an oath flung himself at the windows and closed them. There were no blinds. He poured himself a drink and emptied the little glass at one gulp. Then he made one sharp, abrupt gesture. With a quick stride he crossed the room and tugged the door open.

"Ferguson!" His voice came through the closed windows to the man outside. "Where are you, Ferguson! Come here. You and Aline both, in here. I want to talk to you."

Schmidt frowned, put his cheroot between his teeth, and puffed at it. The red glowing point marked him in the darkness. He frowned, wondering what Voorhis meant to say, to do.

Suddenly he swung around, at a pad-pad of feet close by; only to relax.

"*Tuan-ki!* It is I." The voice of Ali was hoarse and panting.

Well?" demanded Schmidt. "What are you doing here?"

"I ran to tell you, *tuan*. There is a boat coming up-river. It is coming to the landing here; it carries a light. It is the boat of Tuan Hoorn, for I heard his voice giving orders."

"Hoorn!" For an instant Schmidt stood stupified. "Hoorn! But he was on his way to Balikan—Ali! Was his boat alone? There was no launch, the launch of the Resident?"

"No, *tuan*. Just his boat."

Schmidt's hand went out. His fingers clamped on the thin brown shoulder.

"All right. Run back to the wharf. Never mind about the boats. Meet Tuan Hoorn and talk with him, delay him. Tell him the man who came up with Tuan Jack is sick, that it is plague—tell him anything, anything! But delay him do you understand?"

"Yes, *tuan*. And then?"

"Join me and be ready for anything."

Ali slipped away. Schmidt strode around the house again, at a quick, springy pace. He was in a hurry now. A powerful curiosity had him gripped. More than anything else in the world, just now, he wanted to know what Piet Voorhis was doing. As he went, he took off the bandage that was about his jaw.

## CHAPTER IV

### "HERE IS MY ANSWER—"

IN THE hall, outside the library door, Schmidt stood looking and listening. The door was partly ajar. Through the crack, he could see Ferguson standing there. The other two were invisible to him.

Voorhis was speaking, his voice agitated, shaken, but resolute.

"That's what she asked, Ferguson, and that's what I did. I gave her the money she wanted, and promised at the end of ten years I'd turn back the whole place to you, free. That was the bargain she made with me. When you were a man grown, you were to have it. And when the time came I—well, I couldn't do it."

His voice trailed off.

"Father!" exclaimed the girl softly. Schmidt could imagine the loveliness of her in this moment.

"I'd worked for this place, Ferguson." Voorhis went on, gathering strength, his tone more composed. His confession was over; the worst was past. "All these years I'd worked and planned here. When the time came, I couldn't give it back to you. I thought you might come and ask about it, and demand the property. Didn't you know of the agreement?"

"No," said Ferguson. The one word hurt, it was so blunt and ugly.

"Oh, I suppose I can excuse myself, in

a way," Voorhis went on hurriedly. "You see, she thought that I'd profit largely during these years; but your mother didn't realize the fact. Poor crops, land to be drained—I got no more than a living out of it. But now the time's come, and I've got to clear myself, Ferguson."

Ferguson was looking down. There was a silence.

"What's that you're writing?" Ferguson asked suddenly.

"A bill of sale of this property. It belongs to you. This will be legal enough; here, Aline, sign as a witness."

Ferguson stood unmoving, silent, waiting, his brows drawn down in a dark bar. Schmidt chuckled a little, admiringly. He sensed that this young man was gathering forces for an explosion.

A good lie, a good way out of it all. Voorhis was covering his tracks, and doing it cleverly too. Now, if the forgery were actually detected, it could scarcely be a proven matter, and he was making everything right one jump ahead of the law. Yes, Voorhis was clever.

"There you are!" Relief unutterable was in the man's voice. Ferguson reached out and took the paper handed him. "There; the place is yours now—"

"Damn the place," said Ferguson slowly. "Tell me something, Voorhis. Where were you when my father was arrested?"

"I? Up-country, of course. If I'd been here things might have been different."

"I'm not so sure," Ferguson said. "Hoorn was mixed in it. My father was framed; the stuff they found was planted by Hoorn. I'm pretty certain of that now."

"Good Lord!" Voorhis gasped. "Well, one never knows! I'd not put anything past Jan Hoorn, myself; never trusted him. Why, my boy, you never thought that I had anything to do with it?"

"If I were sure," said Ferguson, "I'd —well, I don't know. Are you planning to go to Europe?"

"Yes. At once. Aline and I—"

"No. Aline stays here."

"What?" Voorhis came out of his chair, came where Schmidt could glimpse him. He was startled, scowling at Ferguson, chewing at a cheroot. "Are you out of your head?"

"No. I'm marrying Aline. She's staying with me. Tell him, Aline!"

"It's so, father," said the girl's voice. "You'll not mind?"

Voorhis stood for a space in silence, looking from one to the other. Then he took the cheroot from between his lips and looked down at it.

"No," he said at length. "No. I'll not mind. Suppose we let this go until tomorrow, and settle everything then. Talk it over calmly. Just now, the main thing is to right the wrong I've done you these two years, Ferguson. I'll account to you for every cent the place has made, these two years. Will you accept this reparation?"

Schmidt had said nothing definite against Aline's father; he had, in fact, known nothing definite. It was true that Voorhis had been away when the arrest came. And this confession of his, this outrageous lie, had been well spoken. Even so, the gaze of Ferguson was stony, undecided, hostile—until the girl's voice spoke.

"Please, Jack! Can't you see how terribly it has hurt him to say all this, to humiliate himself, to confess the truth? It's hurt me, too. And—"

Ferguson folded and pocketed the paper. He put out his hand, and his face changed. His eyes warmed.

"Let's say no more about it, Voorhis. By God, it must have hurt! You've come clean; it's forgotten. And to think she—my mother—planned it all out—"

Schmidt went back into the big living room. Even he was wondering a little whether that yarn had any truth in it. No! it was a lie pure and simple. Voorhis had thought it up on the spur of the moment. Easy enough to realize this. A clever fellow, Voorhis!

VOICES outside, a lantern glimmering, a flashlight darting. Schmidt slipped aside to the sofa in the dark corner and stretched out there, just as Hoorn's hail sounded. A tramp of feet on the verandah. Then the others came hastily from the library, as Jan Hoorn stepped into the living room, with Ali slipping off to one side.

There were amazed and delighted greetings. Schmidt wondered how Ali had delayed the visitor; Hoorn made no mention of it, however. Probably Ali had told some fancy lie.

"But I thought you were at Balikan?" exclaimed Voorhis. "Why, Ferguson here met you on the river this morning—"

Hoorn glanced at Ferguson, who looked at him with glittering eyes from a face of stone, and wiped his forehead. He was a slim, dark man with a perpetually pallid face and a long nose.

"Well, I got some newspapers at Fort Rynsdam, papers from Batavia," he said. "I got some news and it upset me. Piet, I'll have to see you—"

Voorhis intervened hastily.

"Come into the library, Jan," he said. "You'll excuse us, Aline? We'll join you presently."

The two men vanished together, and the library door slammed.

"Confound it!" Ferguson stirred into motion. "I want a word with Hoorn myself—"

"Wait, please!" The girl checked him. "Nothing matters so much just now, as our own future, dear. After what father has just said, I don't know what to say or do; I'm ashamed and—"

Ferguson slipped his arm around her.

"Come along; we'll walk down to the river and talk it over sensibly—Ali! What the devil are you doing here?"

Schmidt moved and sat up.

"Oh, hello!" he exclaimed. "I must have dropped off to sleep. Ali, get me a drink of water. Going out, Ferguson?"

"Yes," said Ferguson. "I want to see you, too; but not now. You'd better wake up. Hoorn just came, unexpectedly. I've got more important things to settle, so don't spill any trouble. He's in the library. Leave him to me, you understand?"

"Gladly," said Schmidt. "It's your affair, not mine."

"Right. See that you remember it." And with this admonition, Ferguson followed Aline outside.

The Malay came with a glass of water, and grinned at Schmidt. The latter drank slowly, and looked at Ali.

"His business, not mine, Ali. He knows too much; he's too young. We're wiser, you and I. It's nothing for a kris or a bullet to settle."

Ali dissented with a gesture and a silent snarl. Schmidt chuckled harshly.

"My business; not his or yours. Never mind about the boats or the natives; now we deal with Tuan Hoorn. How? I don't know."

The library door opened.

"Hold on a minute," came the voice of Hoorn. "Where are you going?"

"To find Ferguson, damn him!" Voorhis was excited, almost incoherent. "This changes everything. If Ferguson's been pardoned, then he'll be back here—"

"Don't be hasty," Hoorn said. "Young Ferguson will be out of the way tomorrow; the Resident will be here in the morning. You'll have to wait for the next steamer. You can't run away, Voorhis. None of that, with me."

"But I tell you, if the forgery has been discovered, if—"

"Where's this man Schmidt? Let me talk with him, feel him out a bit. You say he has that letter? Go slow, then. Don't think you're going to run out on me, just because you've come into money. Understand?"

The threat in Hoorn's voice was ugly.

"All right, all right," said Voorhis. "Come on and find Schmidt. I'll talk with young Ferguson and give him the good news about his father—damn him!"

"I never heard of this Schmidt,"

Hoorn grumbled. "Certainly I never sent him that letter. I always suspected that the elder Ferguson had got hold of it. Let's find this fellow. Something queer about it, I tell you—"

They were coming. Schmidt made a quick gesture, and Ali slipped into the shadows at the side of the room and crouched, waiting.

The two came into the big room and stopped short.

"So! Mynheer Schmidt, this is my friend Mynheer Hoorn," said Voorhis.

Schmidt turned, and the light struck his face. Hoorn stared at him with an awful incredulity of recognition, tried to speak, and stood moving soundless lips.

"Yes. We are old friends," said Schmidt. Then Hoorn broke the spell.

"Oh, you fool, you fool! Piet, you damned fool—and you never knew him!" he burst out frantically. "Look at him! The man himself—the man—"

Schmidt laughed as he surveyed the two of them. Voorhis took a step backward, eyes bulging; but Jan Hoorn seemed frozen by an access of horror and realization. He licked his lips, made a convulsive, futile gesture, and became immobile and frozen again.

"Oh, yes; that letter of yours, Jan," said Schmidt calmly. "I have it here. The Resident will be interested in it. Old, of course, and may not hurt you much; but one never can tell. So you didn't know me, Piet! Well, that was your mistake."

Voorhis roused himself, with a low, tense oath.

"You lied to me!" he exclaimed. "You lied. About everything."

"Yes, about everything," Schmidt mocked him, then straightened up. "And you swallowed it all. You wormed your way out of it, as you thought, by giving the boy that deed of sale. Well, I'm back, gentlemen. What's to be done about these twelve years, eh? Framing and forgery and treachery—eh?"

Voorhis perceived the pit into which he had stumbled and swore again. But Jan Hoorn drew back; the stroke had passed him by, now. The horrified comprehension died out of his long, pallid features. His eyes flickered. He tensed, poised, gathered himself. Piet Voorhis, with a ghastly expression in his face, knowing that lies were utterly useless, flung out one hand in appeal.

"What—what do you want?" he said frantically. "Come on, tell us! What?"

"Nothing," Schmidt replied composedly. His glittering eyes shifted from one to the other. "You're both in hell this minute. I'll keep you there. That's enough. Don't think about Europe, Piet. You're not going to Europe. Not for a long while."

Hoorn drew back a little farther, against the wall by the door. He, in turn, asked a question, the same question; but his nasal voice was quite steady.

Well, *Mynheer*, what do you intend? Is it money you want?"

"No, Jan." Schmidt spoke as though relishing the words. "No, I have money. My son has this plantation. Perhaps we'll still look into who forged that deed from my wife to Voorhis. Your letter about forging the trading permits will be interesting. Perhaps we'll look into other matters—how you obtained the illegal goods you planted on me, and the ones you planted among my son's things in the godowns yesterday."

Hoorn started slightly. Voorhis moved as though to speak, but a snarl broke from Hoorn and silenced him.

"Shut up, you fool!" The nasal voice took on an edged and sinister accent. "Mynheer Ferguson, listen to me. Don't think you can do all this and not suffer. We can make you suffer, if you want war. It's much better and wiser to have peace. Name your terms and we may be able to meet them."

Schmidt laughed, a harsh and mocking laugh. His reply was deliberate and slow.

"Now that Piet has millions, you'd like to spend them in buying me off, eh? No, Jan. No compromise. No peace. No terms except what I've stated."

Even as he spoke, he was conscious of the electric silence, of the tension in the air, the hushed and ominous concentration of the pallid man against the wall. Then Hoorn moved a little, and in his hand was the dull shimmer of blued steel.

"All right. That's your answer, *Mynheer*. Here's mine—"

Everything broke into energy, into flowing motion and swift action. There was a flashing glint of steel across the lamplight. Voorhis flung himself forward with a wild cry of expostulation. Then the pistol exploded, and Voorhis pitched over on his face and lay still.

Hoorn fell back against the wall. His finger had pressed the trigger blindly, convulsively; the pistol had fallen to the floor. His arm was outspread against the wooden panel; outspread, held firmly against it, pinned solidly to it by a flame-bladed kris flung with terrific force. Blood was running down his wrist and dripping from his fingertips to the floor.

But Piet Voorhis was dead.

OUT on the dark verandah, Schmidt and Ferguson stood in talk. Everything had quieted down now, except for the sobbing of Aline from somewhere in the house.

"It's simple," said Schmidt calmly. "Hoorn gets turned over to the Resident in the morning; after all, he did murder Voorhis, you know. That's all we need. It means a life sentence at the least. Never mind what he was trying to do; it's what he did that counts."

"Yes," said Ferguson savagely. "Damn it, didn't I tell you to wait for me?"

"Time waits for no one," Schmidt replied in a gentle voice. "There was nothing you had to do—"

"There was everything!" Ferguson turned on him fiercely. "I was the one to do it, understand? I meant to attend to it. I wanted to show you that I could do something, that I wasn't just playing around. I wanted you to know that I could do something for you—"

He checked himself. Schmidt flung away his cheroot.

"Lord!" he ejaculated slowly. "You —you wanted to show—to show me? Then there's nothing I can tell you—"

"Not a damned thing," said Ferguson, and laughed a little. "D'you take me for a fool? I've suspected all along, from the first time Ali called you *tuan-ki*. He always used to call my father that. But you wouldn't talk; so neither would I. D'you want to talk now, father?"

"By God, I do," said Schmidt, and their hands gripped in the darkness, and the talking trees whispered joyously from outside.

*". . . having taken shelter behind rocks, opened fire at short range."*

# BORN TO FIGHT

A NOVELETTE

by GEORGES SURDEZ

"ONE of us has to go. I'll kill him."

Forester looked at his comrade. Peterschen sat on the cot in the small room he occupied alone, as senior-sergeant, in the non-commissioned officers' quarters of the barracks at Dar-Oukil, Saharan Territories. He seemed very calm and spoke of murdering a superior in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice. A gigantic man, with red hair and clear blue eyes, his face was that of a handsome, sullen boy.

But it was wise to remember that he was nearing thirty, had served with the French Foreign Legion a long time, knew the meaning of the word *kill*.

"You'll kill him," the American sergeant conceded. "That should be easy. Then what?"

He was not a youngster himself, but a large, muscular, sun-seasoned professional soldier. He had served in two other armies, had knocked about the globe for years, and had gathered a knowledge of men. So that he did not dismiss his friend's threat lightly.

"Then what?" Peterschen repeated, surprised by the question: "Then it will be settled, over. Think I can go on like this? He just slapped two days confinement to quarters on me to keep me here tonight. You know that."

"That's probable." Forester puffed at his cigarette, smiled faintly. His voice changed to a sort of solemn chant: "The time has come, Peterschen. Have courage. A glass of rum? A cigarette?"

As Peterschen looked at him, Forester imitated a dirge-like muffled beating of drums. And the big fellow identified that gloomy throbbing, remembered that the statement, the

questions, were addressed to men about to be executed.

"What do I care?" he tried to grin carelessly. "We all have to take the hop some time."

"Military degradation, the firing-squad," Forester continued. "By that time, the lieutenant will have been dead for months. But you'll have lived long enough to find out that your girl was keeping company with some new guy. You'll not only be shot, but you'll feel like an ass when you are shot. That may hurt."

Peterschen's enormous fists balled up; he glared at Forester. But he did not strike out. He was eager to vent his rage on some one, but he knew that underneath the sarcastic, bantering tone there was genuine concern. The two had been close friends for years.

"We love each other, Nick. You can't understand—"

"No. I'm too old, or too young, or something," the American shrugged. "I couldn't understand about that girl in the cigarette factory in Oran, about that jane in a Meknes dance hall. Cheer up, you'll love the next one just as much."

"It's different with this one. We're going to get married."

"Not if you kill Doberon you won't!" Forester pointed out.

Peterschen rose and paced about the small room. His long, thick fingers reached for the butt of a thirty-eight automatic pistol protruding from a holster hung from a peg in the white-washed wall. His whole body quivered with helpless fury. Finally, he threw himself face down on the cot.

Forester lighted a fresh cigarette and settled in a chair.

He appeared casual, but he was alert, ready to step between his friend and the door. He had known Peterschen to go from fits of depression and despair into a blind, incoherent, killing rage. If he reached a certain pitch of temper, the senior-sergeant was quite likely to locate the lieutenant and to empty a magazine into his body without further argument.

IT HAD started three months before. Their battalion of Legion had marched into the town of Dar-Oukil, a long triple column of khaki swinging behind blaring bugles and pounding drums, glamorous warriors in the sunlit dust. Not an important center commercially, with its two avenues, eight streets and three hundred European civilians. Dar-Oukil was a tactical position for the control of the region.

The battalion detached small detachments to the blockhouses and military posts of the vicinity, and was ordered to keep one of its remaining companies ready to answer a radio alarm and start in pursuit of Berber raiders.

Aside from the Hotel de France, frequented by the officers, there were three cafés catering to the troops. The largest of these was *Le Mazagran*, owned by Monsieur Metayer, a round, short, middle-aged man whose nose proved that he sampled his merchandise. His wife did the cooking for those customers who wished a meal; his brother and his son tended bar. There was a fifth member in that industrious family who appeared to have no definite occupation in life beyond fascinating the soldiery.

In that remote Saharan hamlet, Josephine Metayer was as incongruous, as startling as a grand piano in a stable. She was nineteen, had returned recently from a fashionable school in France. She was a tall, slender, dark girl, who could be called beautiful rather than pretty. Her firm body seemed to have been turned out on a lathe by an inspired artisan, so well-proportioned were her curves, so graceful her bearing.

Josephine never entered the public rooms of the café. But she was seen around town, wearing flimsy, bright col-

ored, dainty frocks from Paris, each one of which undoubtedly represented the alcoholic consumption of a Legion company for several days.

Naturally, there was an immediate scramble for her attention. The competition was limited to the non-commissioned men at first; the Metayers, who kept a bar, did not move in the highest social sphere—in that heaven where reigned the administrator, the collector of taxes, the major and their ladies. It must be understood that the Metayers dealt in liquor not as manufacturers nor even as wholesalers, but as retailers.

Peterschen, who had a justified reputation as a ladies' man, set to work and made rapid progress. He was conspicuous because of his size and handsome face, looked splendid in a white uniform stiff with starch, ornamented by gold chevrons, gold buttons and the impressive array of seven decorations. Before the battalion had been in town a fortnight he was dining with the Metayer family, in the private room near the kitchen.

This could not last, naturally! Word spread among the bachelor and unattached officers that there was "a classy dame" at *Le Mazagran*. Most grew discouraged after a short space, but Lieutenant Doberon was persistent.

He was a blond, tall young man, very good-looking, just over twenty-five, and reputed to be due for promotion to captain in the near future, consequently for a fine career in the service. His uniforms were admired by the troopers, copied by the sergeants, envied by his colleagues.

At first all though that courting Josephine was an amusement for him; then it was learned that he had asked for her hand from Metayer. Josephine, consulted, revealed that she had allowed Peterschen to hope, on condition that he kept sober for a year and obtained promotion. The sergeant, a hard-drinker for years, dutifully kept to wines and soft drinks. It took a brand of heroism for a man with his reputation to be seen toying with a glass of seltzer and grenadine.

A feud started between the lieutenant and the sergeant, watched by several hundred interested, gossipy spectators. The Legionnaires of the battalion held Doberon in high esteem, would have followed him through hell. But they conceded that he took the old saying that all is fair in love and war somewhat too literally. Shamelessly, he started to "ride" Peterschen. He remained soft-spoken and polite, but lost no chance to punish him. It became increasingly difficult for the senior-sergeant to leave the barracks.

Peterschen would be waiting eagerly for the bugle, expecting to spend the evening with Josephine, chaperoned by her mother. The lieutenant would speak suddenly.

"Sergeant, there's an error in your ledger. Better stick on the job tonight and find it. One should never be too absorbed in outside activities, you know."

"Some people manage to get away with it, Lieutenant."

"I'd be inclined to permit that remark to pass," Doberon would continue with a bored air. "Unfortunately, I am an officer and must exact respect for my stripes. Sergeant, put yourself down for two days confinement to quarters, with the motive: 'Insolence'."

And while his rival fretted in his room, Doberon would don his newest uniform, parade across the yard, acknowledging the sentry's salute with a cheerful wave of the riding-crop clasped in a white-gloved hand. He was calling on the Metayers!

There he would eat an excellent dinner, drenched by many glasses of vintage wines, continue his courtship with brilliant little compliments, respectful glances of admiration.

"We haven't seen Mr. Peterschen today, Mr. Doberon," Madame Metayer

would be sure to ask, with deliberate want of tact. "I do hope he is not sick."

Doberon would speak without looking up from his plate, as if grieved by what he had to say.

"He is punished. Minor lapse in his duties." The young officer would shake his head sadly: "A marvelous character, that Peterschen! Extravagantly brave, but wild and not very dependable. But we never judge our Legionnaires: We never know what happened in their past to motivate their erratic behavior."

Although Doberon failed to make marked progress with Josephine, he conquered the rest of the family. The thought that their daughter might become the wife of this prosperous, well-connected young officer surpassed their fondest expectations. It was rumored, even, that provided a cousin passed away, Doberon's spouse would some day be able to have a coronet engraved on her visiting-card!

Before long Metayer made it clear to Peterschen that he was no longer a privileged guest and that his place was with the cash customers in the public rooms. This hurt the sergeant not merely in his love for Josephine but in his personal pride. Something was being put over on him, and he could do nothing about it! That is, nothing sane, nothing safe!

Forester knew that he had had an appointment with Josephine for this very evening. The lieutenant, probably informed by her parents, had punished Peterschen again, using a defective piece of mechanism in one of the section's automatic rifles as a pretext. It was the clearest abuse of his authority thus far.

PETERSCHEN chewed his rage for a long time, then rose from the cot to challenge Forester.

"All right! What would you do in my place?"

"Get a transfer—"

"Quit cold? Leave him a clear field?"

"If she loves you she'll follow you."

"I suggested that, but she won't," Peterschen gestured widely. "She's not the kind that runs away from home. She's a good girl—not a dancer in a dump. And she's a little afraid, because her people have been after her to drop me, told her a lot of stories. They like Doberon because he's French, a gentleman, an officer, because he had some dough of his own. Me? I'm just a roughneck sergeant of Legion, without money and without future!"

Forester hesitated, then decided to cut deeply. Peterschen might as well face facts.

"They're right! We're transient soldiers, offer no security—we're the kind of men that are the terror of good mammas everywhere. Even when we do get married, we're called away to die somewhere. We're a rotten risk for a good woman. Doberon is playing dirty with you because he is in love and sort of crazy about it. But as men go he is very decent. And his job is secure. You may lose yours overnight: You've been demoted for drunkenness a couple of times."

"I had no reason to keep sober then!" Peterschen exploded: "Drink? Her people shouldn't object to drink. They've made their money sousing Legionnaires, peddling booze."

"Just the same," Forester insisted, "they worked hard to make a lady out of her, even sacrificing the boy—she does nothing and he tends bar! They think that in the long run she'd be happier with Doberon than with you. Maybe you'll tell me they're wrong?"

"Quitting me, too, eh?" Peterschen grumbled.

"Don't be a fool," Forester smiled grimly. "What I said of you goes for me too. Neither of us would be here if he was a family man. Sure, it hurts when you find out you can't live your own way and change when you want to. I've been through it myself."

Peterschen's face set. He buckled on

the garrison belt bearing the holster. "I'm going to have it out with him right now. I go out tonight, or—"

Forester stood before the door. He had grown pale, because his comrade loomed very large and menacing at that moment. The slightest incident could pull the trigger and start Peterschen on a mad scrape. The American said softly, almost in a whisper:

"A glass of rum? A cigarette?"

It was not a joke. There was every chance that if Peterschen argued with the lieutenant he would lose his head and shoot him down, for he had murder in his heart. Then he would have small chance before a court-martial.

"A glass of rum? A cigarette?"

Peterschen had seen that scene himself, could picture the quivering man at dawn, the offer of spirits and tobacco—he could picture the squad of white-faced soldiers, waiting with grounded rifles, the nervous non-com in charge of them.

He sank on the cot once more, and seemed about to break into tears.

"Nick, what am I going to do?"

"Sit tight."

"I can't bear it much longer. She's expecting me."

"She might as well learn now that an army man belongs to his job first." Then Forester saw his comrade so hurt, so broken in spirits that he relented. It took some courage to interfere, for he knew well that the meddler received all the blame. "Listen, promise you'll stay here and do nothing until I come back. I'll talk to Doberon and try to have him let you go. If he won't, I'll go around and explain things to your girl. Promise?"

"Legionnaire's word," Peterschen said, earnestly.

FORESTER closed the door, walked through the hallway into the yard, crossed the esplanade drenched by the slanting rays of the late afternoon sun. He entered the company's office and found Doberon there.

"Hello, Forester!" It was hard to dislike Doberon, with his quick smile and manly bearing. "Want to speak to me? Right with you, old man!" He took the sergeant aside, beyond the possibility of being overheard by the curious clerks: "What is it?"

"I want to explain about Senior-Sergeant Peterschen, Lieutenant." Forester launched into confused technical details about the defective rifle: "Asked me to report to the captain, and it slipped my mind. It was my fault, really."

Doberon laughed.

"That's a fine story, Forester! But it's in a good cause, eh? A pal's a pal. Listen, I know what you're thinking: that I am a bit of a dog with your friend. You're right. Yet, suppose you loved a girl, would you want her depending on Peterschen for happiness and security? Wouldn't you stretch a point, or ten points, knowing that he is a restless chap who'd be sick and tired of domestic life inside three months and wouldn't have any sense of responsibility? You are his pal—remember what he can be to a woman when he's fed up!"

Forester was puzzled. Doberon was right. Older, wiser, tougher women than Josephine had been crucified by the handsome sergeant's indifference and mistreatment when his fancy had passed and his interest was elsewhere.

"But it isn't fair, Lieutenant. He's taking it very hard—"

"It's his character to be very intense for a short time," Doberon retorted.

"I must tell you, Lieutenant, it's serious."

"I'll handle him if needed." Doberon smiled recklessly. He was an officer, a steadier character than Peterschen, but he was a true Legionnaire in his passion for danger. "Don't worry about me."

There was no use insisting. Forester saluted and walked away. He reached *Le Mazagran* at sunset. The civilian

crowd already occupied the tables on the big terrace. The sergeant had an anisette at the bar and casually asked the reedy young man waiting on him where he might locate his sister.

"Did Peterschen send you?" the fellow challenged.

"Many thanks," Forester said. He had fulfilled the dictates of courtesy by asking, and walked straight into the spacious living room behind the bar. Had Madame Metayer's eyes been pistols, he would have dropped dead as he entered. She knew him to be the closest friend of the dismissed suitor. Fortunately, Josephine was there, a vision in white and red.

"You have news from Karl?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss. He'll be on duty tonight and sends his regrets—"

"On duty, on duty!" Madame Metayer jeered: "He's punished again, that's what he is! He's no good for anything except drinking and fighting. I know his kind—"

"You should, Madame," Forester assured her simply: "You've been serving drinks to Legionnaires for twenty-five years!"

Josephine picked up her hat and took his arm, led him through a back door into the street: "Monsieur Forester, may I speak to you frankly?"

"Yes."

"Let's walk." Josephine started off briskly. She spoke with amazing self-confidence: "Let there be no misunderstanding. I am not sure I love Karl. But I do think he is a fine man, and that his main trouble has been that no one saw through his bad habits. He's been a very lonely man. I did tell him that I'd consider marrying him if he stopped drinking. I made no promise. Nevertheless, I think it would be cowardly of me to break with him just now. Has he kept his promise? Fine. Now, I wish to know whether he is detained on regular duty or punished."

"Punished, Miss. Oh, nothing much—two days confinement."

"That's five times this month. Previously." Josephine said angrily, "he was never punished. Did Lieutenant Doberon inflict the punishment?

There was no evading this very direct question.

"Yes, Miss."

"Was it justifiable from a military point of view, or was I mixed up in it? You understand what I mean, Monsieur Forester, so don't play with words.

"Well," Forester reddened, embarrassed: "That's hard to tell! In the service, a superior can always find something wrong if he looks for it. But no one save himself really knows why he acted."

Josephine halted, turned her large, dark eyes on him full strength. She was very beautiful, very alive, pulsing with indignation.

"For instance, would the captain have punished Karl for the same thing?"

"Maybe—" Forester felt disloyal to his friend and corrected himself: "No, I don't believe so."

"That's all I wished to know! Thank you so much, Monsieur Forester!"

Her small, firm hand gripped the sergeant's briefly; she turned and strode away. There was a menacing decision in her walk. Forester strolled back to the barracks.

Peterschen rose as he entered the room.

"You've been gone an hour! Well?"

"Nothing doing with the Lieutenant. But you're solid with the girl. This last trick of the Lieutenant may backfire!" Forester laughed: "As long as you ask my advice, let her take charge! She doesn't have to snap to attention when he gives orders. She's so mad at him that she'll bawl him out."

"That'll make matters worse," Peterschen muttered.

"Not much! She'll fix it so he can't abuse you much longer—she's smart, that kid!" Forester stripped off his tunic, placed it on the cot: "I have nothing to do. So I'll have my meal sent in with yours, and we can play cards."

Peterschen rested a massive hand on his shoulder.

"You're a good friend, Nick," he said slowly.

Bugle calls tolled off the passing hours. There was a confused rumor, when the nine o'clock leave men returned. One or two rows occurred some time later, as patrols brought in belated Legionnaires not as sober as they might have been. Then the night grew still, so still that the blare of a remote radio in town came into the room with soft, thin persistence.

"Ten for the ace, four for the king, and five points for the last trick; nineteen and fifty four—" Forester swept up the cards, grinned. "That's another five francs you owe me."

"You're a professional," Peterschen protested. "Ten francs on the next one, but I'll cut twice!"

Forester shuffled, gave out the cards three at a time. He had won all evening. The game continued. They heard other sergeants coming in, entering the common room. There was much talking, some laughter. Then the door of the room opened, but neither player looked up.

"Nothing to drink here," Forester announced, taking up a trick. He thought that a comrade had come in. "You ought to know Karl's gone dry!"

Then he saw Peterschen glance upward, his expression change as he rose hastily and came to attention. Forester imitated him, spun on his heels and froze, hands on the seams of the trousers, shoulders squared, chin high: Lieutenant Doberon was standing nearby.

Forester had seen him under fire several times, once during a bitter hand-to-hand struggle against Anti-Atlas tribesmen. His clothing had been lacerated by the blades of knives. Yet he had never seen him so tense, so pale. The flesh was like putty applied over the bones, the steely eyes blazed fiercely. Forester could see his jaw quivering.

"Forester!"

"*Mon lieutenant?*"

"You've done what you started to do. Now get out of this room."

"Will the Lieutenant explain, please?"

"Your gossip has made trouble. Go."

Forester bristled at the tone.

"I didn't start out to do anything save avoid trouble." His own voice sounded harsh and strained in his ears, but he felt that he could not leave the two together. There would be a fight, a scandal. "If you maintain your order to leave, Lieutenant, I shall report at once to the captain."

Doberon gestured in annoyance.

"Sorry, Forester. Didn't mean to reproach you." He fought visibly for self-control: "You had a right to tell the truth." He resumed: "Peterschen, you believe you have a grievance against me, that I have not treated you like a man?"

For a second, Peterschen seemed awed. Respect for gold braid, instilled into him by seven long years of Legion training, was hard to shake off. Then the dancing little flecks of fury kindled in his pupils as he looked at his chief.

"You've acted like a pig, Lieutenant."

"Do you believe I am afraid of you, Peterschen?"

"Yes. If you were not, you'd have given me a fair chance. You wouldn't have hidden behind your official rank. This is a matter outside duty, to be played out man against man."

Doberon nodded.

"I've realized that, Peterschen. I apologize for being unjust. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Consider your present punishment lifted. If you wish it, I shall inform the captain that your other punishments were not properly motivated."

"That won't be necessary, Lieutenant."

Forester heaved a grunt of relief. Peterschen could not explain; the officer had done things handsomely. But Doberon took three steps across the room.

"Now, I'm going to bash your face in, you overgrown, clumsy lout—" the lieutenant tossed his képi on the cot, stepped forward. Peterschen grinned and lifted his hands: He had dreamed of this moment for many weeks!

FORESTER stepped between the two.

"You can't fight here—that's inviting the whole battalion and the entire town. That means scandal." He thought of the only argument that would penetrate their excited brains. "You don't want Mademoiselle Metayer's name dragged into this, do you?"

"Correct!" Peterschen admitted at once, dropping his fists and retreating to the wall. The lieutenant hesitated, halted. Forester saw that he was almost sobbing with nervous rage.

"Forester, this must be settled at once, tonight!"

"As you wish, Lieutenant. But, believe me, better get hold of a friend of your own rank as a witness. I'll bring another man along, and we'll be covered."

"I'll leave you the choice of weapons," Doberon added.

"These will do—" Peterschen laughed, holding up his fists. "I don't need a fancy duel!"

When Lieutenant Doberon had left, the big man laughed at Forester: "Talk about luck! I've wanted to get my hands on him for a couple of months! I won't hurt him—much!"

Forester looked at him coldly.

"You won't handle him as you do some raw recruit with twice his weight. If the fight had started a moment ago, he might have licked you. He's crazy with rage. I hear he was pretty good in the combat boxing class at Joinville."

Peterschen patted him on the shoulder.

"He may be a good little guy, Nick. But I am a very good big guy. So don't fret."

A few minutes later, there was a knock at the door and a sub-lieutenant of the Camel Corps, in white uniform, wearing Saharan sandals, entered the room. The two sergeants saluted, but the young man motioned impatiently for them to drop formality.

"My name's Canivet," he introduced himself. "Sergeant Forester? Can we talk privately?" he lowered his voice when they reached the yard: "I don't suppose we can stop this foolishness. Doberon seems determined to go through with it. It seems that a young lady accused him of taking a cowardly advantage of a man he was afraid to meet openly! In his mental condition, I presume we would react in the same way.

"Doberon has agreed to fight with fists only, and we'd better decide on that. I am aware that it places your man at a disadvantage—he's said to be an expert bruiser, but he has fifty pounds in weight. Moreover, there would be danger of a fatal beating if feet were used, and a death could not be hushed up. Neither you nor your humble servant care to be demoted or forced to resign. As it is, we may have some trouble. Better bring an extra witness, and I shall bring a doctor—Medical Lieutenant Uzanne, a very sporting young chap who'll be of assistance, perhaps, and can be counted on to keep it quiet."

"Agreed," Forester said. "When and where?"

"In an hour," Canivet said, after glancing at his watch. "You know where the police building is? Well, you remember an alley opening near the bus station? You pass through the alley, turn to the right. There's a fine place

*"It came suddenly."*

there, used as a parking place for the cars. It's private, well-lighted and—" the sub-lieutenant smiled—"only two hundred yards from the hospital!"

"We'll be there," Forester promised. "Say, Lieutenant, do you think Doberon has a chance?"

"Surely. Why?" Canivet smiled. "A bet?"

"Five hundred francs, Lieutenant?"

"Let's put it this way: Half a month's pay of mine against half a month's pay of yours. That's fairer."

"You should get odds, Lieutenant."

"Nonsense. You don't know Doberon. See you later."

## CHAPTER II

### TRIAL BY FISTS

FORESTER picked up Sergeant Sierck, who belonged in another company, a stolid, honest chap, whom he swore to secrecy. The three walked through the town, now completely still.

They found the three officers already waiting at the meeting place. Canivet explained briefly that he had bribed the native watchman to switch on the big light overhead and to take a long walk.

There was plenty of room, as the parked trucks, covered with canvas, left an oblong thirty by fifty feet between their hubs and the blank wall on the opposite side. The footing was flat, firm, hard-packed sand. Doberon was stripping already. Canivet beckoned to Forester.

"Doberon proposes that the loser agrees to keep away from *Le Mazagran* until the winner gives him permission to call. Ask your chap if that goes with him."

Peterschen listened, smiled.

"I get it. The loser is to keep away from Josephine, completely. No writing, no explanations, no interviews. That's better than I asked for. Agreed."

Military Surgeon Uzanne, a dapper, youngish little chap with glasses, came

up to watch Peterschen strip. He spoke fluent German, and conversed in a friendly tone.

"You're a Pomeranian?"

"No, Herr Dokter. I'm from the Rhineland."

"They don't breed runts out your way, eh, my lad?"

"I had a brother in the Guards, two inches taller," Peterschen boasted. Killed as an ensign on the Somme, in fifteen. But my uncle—there was a big man for you." Peterschen flexed his arms, twisted his big torso from the waist to limber up. He was no longer baffled; this was familiar business. He was irked a bit by the preliminary ceremonies, that was all.

"Ready—"Canivet called for his man.

"Karl, no kicking, eh? Ready," Forester echoed.

Peterschen stepped forward with a chuckle of pleasure.

WHEN the two faced each other, it could be seen that Doberon's head did not rise much higher than Peterschen's chin. He appeared small by contrast, although he was not a small man. But the nude, tanned torso was overlaid with muscles, and his movements showed self-confidence, a poised, dynamic energy.

The big sergeant was not a fool, and estimated his opponent at his worth. He did not rush in to invite a well-placed blow, but held his arms to cover his stomach and chest, his fist bunched before his chin. In physique and actions, he reminded Forester of pictures of old time prize-fighters.

He knew that the brain guiding that huge body was not dull, that Peterschen could be crafty and patient. Doberon appeared somewhat puzzled when the larger man did not instantly seek to crush him. A swift flash of worry crossed his serious, set face.

Five seconds passed, five more. The boots made no sound on the sand. Doberon was maneuvering. His tactics were not exactly those of a boxer, revealing something of fencing, and in a remote fashion, of the cautious approach of a toreador. Sierck grumbled under his breath: "Too much fooling around. What's the matter with Karl?"

Doberon attacked.

He did not try for the face, but swung for Peterschen's body, at the waist line. The blow resounded like a stick brought down against a tight cloth. As the big man's arms lashed out, Doberon dodged under the flying fists, came up on Peterschen's right side and smashed both hands to the stomach. Then he sprang backward, out of reach.

The lieutenant knew where to aim, and could hit hard. Peterschen's mouth opened. His sides were reddened.

Forester understood the officer's plan. Doberon probably felt that he must seek victory slowly, to make use of his invisible physical advantages: cleaner living, abstinence from drink. Forester watched his face, saw that the eyes were again blazing. With the first contact, his anger, his hatred, had flamed again.

In a smaller place, Peterschen would have been better off. He could not corner his man to take advantage of his weight, of his superior strength. And he was afraid to punch out at the elusive target before him, remembering that the lieutenant had been trained to take advantage of such openings. His self-control was praiseworthy, for he was by taste a headlong, bruising fighter.

He crept forward with short steps, his arms close to his body, trying to back Doberon against the wall, against the trucks. If he could hold him still for ten seconds, all would be over. All knew it, Doberon even better than the others. His leaps were swift and sure; he performed like an acrobat. And, time after time, his knuckles sank into the softening flesh above the big chap's trousers.

Peterschen tried to defend himself by

shooting his arms out straight. Then, as his calm dwindled, he hooked, swung. Doberon dodged, and clubbed him over the kidneys.

Ten, fifteen steps toward the wall, and Doberon would dart aside, bobbing into the open. Ten, fifteen steps toward the trucks and he would repeat the same amazingly agile, quick escape. There was no chance that his legs would tire. He owned the crossed-swords of the expert fencer, his limbs were sheaves of smooth, tireless muscles. And his eyes, accustomed to guiding a thin point of steel through the least opening left by the guarding blade, enabled him to slide swift blows between Peterschen's arms.

"He's cutting Karl in half," Forester growled. He did not like to see a friend licked, and he regretted losing half a month's pay.

Peterschen, hurt by the blows, felt ridiculous, was losing patience. Doberon coaxed him to swing, evading the sweeping fist by shifting his body from the waist. Those watching could see that he was repeating this with a purpose in mind. His apparent hesitation, which started the sergeant's desperate effort to knock the head from his shoulders, was too well timed, too precise to be accidental.

Forester wanted to warn his man. But the others watched in silence, and he felt obligated to do the same.

It came suddenly. Peterschen had missed, and the officer threw his fist, as one flings a baseball. Eye, arm, hand, all worked together. Struck on the side of the jaw, Peterschen sank on all fours, waddled aimlessly, slid forward on his face. For an instant, Forester believed it was finished.

It might have been, had the fight been conducted according to ordinary boxing rules, when ten seconds spell the end. But it was to continue until one was completely unconscious or admitted defeat. Peterschen floundered on the sand for what seemed endless minutes, hoisted himself to his haunches.

Doberon struck him again, as he had a right to do: Peterschen was rising. This time, the big fellow went down buttocks first, his head snapped back and he sprawled face upward.

Despite his chagrin, Forester smiled. The rule made to protect Doberon was working against him. A kick at this time would have ended the combat. But then no one had expected Peterschen to go down first.

The sergeant rolled over, strong instinct asserting itself—always, when he had been on the floor, he had been kicked, and now what remained of his consciousness urged him to move away. This worked to his advantage, for when he scrambled to his feet, weak and reeling, Doberon was several yards away, unable to follow the squirming progress of his fallen adversary.

"Now!"

Forester heard the call, but never knew who had uttered it. Perhaps Canivet, perhaps Doberon. In any case, the lieutenant rushed forward, right hand cocked, his whole body swinging with the punch.

Peterschen saw him coming, lost his head and brought down his fist as if striking with a mallet. The officer checked himself, bobbed his head back. But he had miscalculated in his excitement, and the mass of flesh and bone scraped his forehead, caught him on the bridge of the nose, rasped over his mouth and chin. The sergeant's whole strength had been behind the blow.

It was luck, sheer luck, that it had landed.

DOBERON staggered back and another punch dropped on the side of his neck. In the bluish glare of the electric light, a faint, pinkish mist surrounded his head for a flittering second, like a halo. And when he saw his face, Forester took hope. Doberon was bleeding from the nostrils and lips; his eyebrow was cut.

What was even better, Peterschen had come out of his diffident mood. He had been humiliated, hurt, and he had forgotten he was fighting an officer.

He was no longer seeking to guard himself, to match his skill against that of a better trained man. He had forgotten his swollen, bruised belly, and was flinging about in great, slashing swings. These blows were more like slaps than punches with snap to them, but the sheer weight of his hands drove Doberon about the open space, dazed him.

He made the fatal mistake of seeking to clinch with the sergeant. Peterschen merely seemed to shrug him off, yet literally lifted him off his feet and slapped him to the wall. The big man was talking now, as was his habit, muttering curses, spitting out insults. He was neither graceful nor gentlemanly, but he was formidably efficient.

"How do you like this?" he panted. "And this? And this?"

Whether the blow missed or struck, he gloated in the physical joy of the struggle. Doberon slithered to the ground, arched his body to gain his feet.

The doctor ran forward, saying something about injuries, serious consequences. Forester forgot military discipline, clasped him in his arms: "Keep out of it. He hasn't quit yet!"

Sherck, thinking that the fight was spreading to the witnesses, edged in toward Canivet. But the sub-lieutenant waved him aside and grasped the doctor.

"He'd be sore if you stopped it, Doc. There's a woman in it."

"Oh—" the young surgeon stepped back. "In that case, it's an alienist he needs."

Doberon courageously tried to keep fighting, but his strength was gone. He was, as Peterschen had predicted, a good little guy against a very good big guy.

The sergeant, trained in a hard school, was not squeamish about striking him. His accumulated, concentrated resentment of weeks found an escape in vicious blows.

Doberon had changed from a young athlete into a bloody silhouette as loosely connected as a rag doll. He was out of his feet, ceased even his futile pawing of instinctive defense. Then he collapsed, kneeling with his head against the hub of a truck, his hands feebly clutching the spokes.

"Enough?" Peterschen asked.

Doberon peered about with swollen puffs where his eyes lurked, hoisted himself upright in a foolish parade of nerve. Peterschen started to laugh, and slapped him down with a careless sweep of his hand. The officer crept on the sand, groping for the wheel. He grasped the spokes. His shoulders rose slowly, slowly. But he lacked the strength to haul his weight up again, and he was still, as if he had fallen asleep suddenly.

"Guess I win," Peterschen announced. "You brought towels, Nick?" He wiped himself dry, balled the towel and tossed it aside. Reaching for his undershirt, he commented, "He's a lot tougher than you'd think." Buckling the belt over his tunic, a moment later, he looked down at Doberon. His good-nature had returned, and he appeared sick of the whole business. "Hope I didn't hurt him too much, Doctor."

"Broke his nose," the medical man explained. "Lacerations of the face, serious contusions of the body. But not permanently injured, unless he's suffered a concussion. He looked up: "Beg pardon—do you need attention?"

Peterschen threw his head back, laughed.

"Me? A bottle of liniment and a good sleep. And, if you'll order it, a good stiff swig of brandy.

FORESTER was startled when an acquaintance pressed him for details of the fight the next morning. He was as sure of the others' discretion as of his own. But everyone he met appeared to know

the various phases of the meeting—for instance, that Peterschen had been knocked down a couple of times.

He was puzzled at first. Then he discovered that neither he nor his companions had realized that the blank wall rose to a terrace which employees of the garage and bus company used as an out-of-doors dormitory! They had been awakened by the disturbance. Further, the orderlies at the hospital had related that Doberon had been brought in cut and bruised, his face swollen like a pumpkin, with some silly story that he had been riding in the moonlight and had been thrown by his horse.

The incident created a sensation. Everywhere in town, in the barracks, at the hotel, in the cafés, people discussed nothing else.

The military commander at Dar-Oukil, the battalion chief, the captain, were reluctant to acknowledge the matter officially. That would have forced them to an investigation, an officers' council, endless washing of dirty linen in public. But their displeasure was made manifest by a series of events.

Sub-Lieutenant Canivet was ordered to go forth and command the camel-pasture guards; Doctor Uzanne was dispatched to vaccinate tribesmen. In the Legion, the entire company to which Doberon was attached was forbidden town liberty for three days—This to keep individual members from getting into other fights when discussing the matter with civilians and non-Legionnaires. Sergeants Forester and Sierck received eight days' confinement to quarters for "bad spirit and inattention to duty."

As for Peterschen, the triumphant warrior, he was ordered to pack up and leave immediately for the Macheb blockhouse, the worst, most desolate outpost of the region, a cube of masonry simmering on a waterless ridge. A garrison of sixteen Legionnaires was kept there. And when men returned after a few months in that enchanting sojourn, they cursed whenever the dump was mentioned.

Forester did not blame his superiors for seeking to hush up the scandal by scattering the principal actors for a while. It is not good for general discipline to have a sergeant prove himself better than an officer, even physically. It was rumored that Doberon had followed custom and applied for transfer to another regiment.

Because he was nominally undergoing punishment, Forester spent his leisure hours in the sergeants' rooms. But colleagues in other companies, who were allowed in town, eagerly gleaned fresh information, brought him the latest gossip from the cafés.

To start with, Peterschen had disregarded his orders to start at once in an effort to see Josephine. But he had been refused admittance to the house by the father, uncle and brother. He had stormed and cursed, called all three vile names, but in the end had been dragged away by the non-com in charge of the supply convoy with which he was to travel to his new post.

Some time later, Madame Metayer and her beautiful daughter, carrying parcels, had called at the hospital and asked to see Doberon. The lieutenant had sent out word that he would not speak to them, and had returned the gifts they had left, bottles of fine wine from the private cellar. Josephine had called again, alone, without better success.

Forester was one of the few who understood why: Doberon had given his word not to see or communicate with Josephine in case he lost. He was inclined to inform the girl and spare her humiliation, but he was cured of mixing into other people's business for a while.

Several days passed, and he received a latter from Peterschen. It was written in pencil, and the senior-sergeant's spelling of French words was abominable.

Dear and True Friend and Comrade: You should see this dump. Nothing but the walls and the rocks. Everyone here is crazy. The corporal has fits. He claims epilepsy. I don't believe him. He is faking to get away. I don't blame him. But it makes things harder. The men just laugh when he gives an order. They ask him if he is having another fit. So little happens that two days after I came, the bunch here got excited because somebody found a green pebble in the sand. I am very lonely at night. There is no place to go. The jackals yell. There is no booze to be had for love or money. And the wine has turned sour. You can hardly drink it.

I am writing you to ask a favor. I wrote Josephine the day I left. Got an answer, three lines on a double sheet of paper. Says that after what I called her folks I should consider our engagement finished. She does not even say she is sorry. Her father added more: He says I proved myself a bum, as he thought I was all the time. But he hopes that I am enough of a gentleman not to embarrass them further. I don't see why he can't understand that I pushed him in the mug only because I was excited, that I meant nothing by it.

Josephine always said you were a gentleman and probably came from a good family, no matter what you had done to become a Legionnaire. She will listen to you. You know what to say.

I am going crazy here, what with the sun, and the corporal and a couple of other cranks. So don't fail me. I am your devoted Friend and Comrade, Karl Peterschen, Senior-Sergeant in the Foreign Legion, at the Outpost of Macheb, Sahara."

Forester did his best, as he was asked. But the Metayers grew menacing when he asked to see Josephine: "We'll complain to your captain if you come around here. There's been enough bad talk."

He waited for the girl in the street, but she cut him dead before a dozen people.

Forester had served in lonely blockhouses, and pitied Peterschen. The sun, the loneliness, the poor food, the bad water, the company of discontented men deprived of any pleasure, were hard to bear even normally. It must be torture for a man suffering from love and jealousy. It would be like Peterschen to risk court-martial in returning to Dar-Oukil without authorization. But Forester could do no more.

DOBERON was back on duty in a few days. Some of his cuts were still taped. Fortunately, the slight alteration of his features had worked to his advantage. He somewhow appeared more rugged, tougher. His transfer was pending and he had applied for leave.

The orderlies spread reports of his interview with the captain. The older man pointed out that transfer at that time meant the loss of promotion. But it was awkward for Doberon to remain in town: Josephine was making desperate efforts to see him, forgetting all proper reserve.

Sergeant Sierck, who had to turn her away at the barracks gate on one occasion, told Forester: "She looks so sad and beautiful—you know, I think she is madly in love with the Lieutenant now. How do you explain that? She was sore at him because he was riding her boyfriend, she bawled him out and made him pick a fight. He gets licked, and you'd expect to see her fall into the arms of her strong sweetheart. But what happens? She picks the loser!"

Forester understood. By a rather usual twist of feminine psychology, Josephine had come to feel responsible for Doberon's misfortune. It was her words that had driven him to challenge a man much larger, much stronger than himself. He had fought gallantly, had suffered a terrific beating, to redeem himself in her eyes. He was her knight, doubly to be cherished because he was hurt and humiliated.

How long could Doberon hold out? How long before he broke his word and saw Josephine?

The American thought of arranging matters. He could write to Peterschen, outlining the situation, begging him to release Doberon from a promise which no longer had a purpose. That would be the sporting course to take. But there

was a chance that the big sergeant, finding out that his cause was lost, would get to brooding and end by firing a bullet into his palate, Legion style. When Peterschen loved, he was not wholly sane.

Forester learned that Doberon was seeking to hasten his transfer. The strain of being within a short distance of the girl without the right to speak to her was increasing, that was evident. Forester had an impression that trouble was only beginning, that what had preceded would seem a mere prelude.

Unexpectedly, there was an inspection of the battalion, much more thorough than usual. The men grew nervous and tense, for it was plain that something important was p e n d i n g. Officers streamed to the major's office constantly. Then a typewritten notice was posted on the bulletin board outside the administrative building.

Due to unusual activities of numerous bands of raiders in the region, particularly to the southwest, the troops must be ready to move at short notice; consequently, all applications for transfers, for leaves, were cancelled!

The general commanding the troops in the Saharan Territories had asked the Battalion of Legion to supply two detachments for special duty. Volunteers were to give their names to their section commanders. Only men with good conduct records could be considered—which meant that there would be fighting!

It meant also that Doberon could not depart. Regardless of his personal problems, a young officer could not decently insist upon leaving when fighting was in prospect. Furthermore, he was due for a turn of field duty, according to routine schedule.

Forester volunteered. He was turned down. So he asked to see the captain, who reminded him that he was on the punished list. He pointed out that save for eight days' confinement for a very trifling motive, his record had been clean for months. Sergeants with much more serious charges against them, for drunkenness and indiscipline, were accepted. He added, with a stubborn expression, that he would feel dishonored if he were not taken.

"I understand all that," the captain conceded. "But Lieutenant Doberon's platoon is the only one with a vacancy. Would you like to serve under him in the field?"

"I'd be proud to."

"And what would he think of it, eh?"

"Lieutenant Doberon would not deny me a chance to see action, Captain. Ask him."

"Good idea," the captain granted." Orderly, ask Lieutenant Doberon to come here." When the young officer arrived, his chief indicated Forester, standing at attention six feet away: "The sergeant has volunteered to serve in your platoon. For one reason or another, which I need not make clearer, I thought it best to consult you in his presence."

Doberon looked at Forester, with an odd expression. The sergeant noticed the obvious restlessness of the young officer, and waited, shaking with anxiety. No man likes to have a constant reminder of defeat nearby. But the lieutenant was not an ordinary man.

"Had I been granted the privilege of selecting my subordinates instead of waiting for volunteers," he said slowly, "I would have asked for Sergeant Forester. I hold him in high esteem."

"Request granted," the captain concluded.

## CHAPTER III

### DESTINY TRAIL

ON the blazing afternoon a fortnight later when Senior-Sergeant Peterschen, with ten men from the Macheb block-

house, joined Lieutenant Doberon's platoon in the open desert, it seemed to Forester that he had known from the beginning that this meeting would take place. The destinies of these two men were connected by some bizarre link, a strange force other than human will or mere chance was bringing them face to face.

Life for those two weeks had not been a sinecure for the detachment led by young Doberon. The platoon had marched and countermarched, covering thirty kilometers at maximum speed to reach a spot in the void of the dunes, only to turn about and retrace the path back to the starting point at the same rapid gait. Occasionally a scouting plane from Bou-Denib or Dechar flew overhead, dropped messages, and twice a day the signalmen would communicate with regional headquarters by radio.

Doberon was borne up by some understanding of what he was doing. His men were not. They forgot that they had volunteered knowing what to expect, and cursed their lot, cursed the Legion. Their boots were wearing out, their garments shredding; sunburn peeled the surface skin from their noses, chins and hands. Not a few suffered from dysentery, contracted by drinking water bailed out of the soft mire at the bottom of drying wells.

Human beings proved more enduring than animals. A third of the pack mules had died, and part of their loads had been distributed among the men.

It is unlikely, nevertheless, that any one of the eighty-seven privates and non-commissioned officers would have quit if given the opportunity. For the scent of danger was strong in the air, and all were braced by the hope that, of all the detachments seeking the Ait-Senushen raiders, theirs would be the lucky one.

Their faith was rewarded. Definite information came that the phantom band was but a day's march westward. From various indications, Doberon had estimated their strength at three hundred and fifty men, escorting herds of captured animals, camels, horses and mules.

He knew that they would be armed with modern, rapid fire rifles, for the days of the flintlocks and percussion guns belonged in the past. And he was aware that they would be well led. A man accepted by his tribesmen as a raiding chieftain was experienced, brave and cunning.

Doberon called his non-coms together, unfolded a map. He marked the location of the enemy with a black cross. Then the tip of his pencil traced small circles to represent French detachments hemming the natives in a desolate, almost waterless zone: To the north, there was a mounted company of Legion, come from across the Moroccan Border; a squadron of cavalry out of Gourrama, a powerful column of infantry and riders out of Midelt. To the south, a section of armored cars equipped with machine guns, and the other Legion Platoon from Dar-Oukil. Doberon and his men were due east.

He reported to headquarters, announcing his intention to close in without further delay and attack. If he waited, the raiders might vanish again into the immense desert. He was instructed to proceed to an appointed spot, to pick up reinforcements from the nearby blockhouse of Macheb. This would bring his men up to a full hundred rifles. The lieutenant acknowledged the message without protest.

But some time later, walking beside Forester, he voiced annoyance: "Radio is a great help, but not an unmixed blessing. Ten or twelve men more or less won't make much difference. You know how these scraps are—decided in the first ten minutes!"

It was evident that he was not pleased to have Peterschen as a collaborator.

Perhaps he was self-conscious before the men when he thought of giving orders to a man who had licked him. Forester had noted that Doberon made a point of treating him as he did the others, but sensed a definite reserve under the surface friendliness.

PETERSCHEN and his Legionnaires were waiting for the platoon at the appointed place. The sergeant was dressed as carefully as in town, wore all his medals. The terrific heat did not seem to have effect on his powerful frame, although his face glistened with sweat as if it had been lacquered. He halted six paces from Doberon, saluted, reported himself and his detachment.

It was a tense instant, for Peterschen's eyes scanned the officer's face for the marks of the fight, and a faint smile showed on his broad face. Doberon omitted to shake hands, and replied in a few banal words.

"Let's get going," he suggested at once. And the march was resumed. Everywhere could be discerned traces of the raiders' passage. They were suffering considerably from lack of water, and the carcasses of dead animals grew more numerous every mile.

Peterschen sought Forester at the first chance.

"Did you see Josephine?"

"From a distance," the American related his efforts. But he was silent concerning the girl's manifest interest in Doberon. "You know, Karl, he kept his word. Never went near the place."

"I didn't even ask you," Peterschen reminded him: "He's a slob in some ways, but he's a man." He nodded as if in answer to a question. "But he's going to lose out. There's something wrong—but as soon as I can get to speak to her, it will be straightened out. Her family's been talking."

"I know it's no use," Forester said. "But here goes anyway. I'd drop it now, if I were you."

"Why?"

Forester could have explained that the matter had been decided by the girl herself. That Josephine was now pursuing Doberon. But he feared an outburst of jealousy, and explained, "You're stuck in an isolated dump now, where no woman could be with you. After you're married you may draw just such assignments again, or be transferred to the Tonkino."

"I can leave the Legion—"

"Then what? Enter business with her old man? You don't get along, and then you'd be your own best customer. Try a civilian job? Small salary—and she'd get to feeling sorry that she had not married somebody who appreciated antique furniture and fancy curtains?"

Peterschen scowled at the prospect, but he shook his head stubbornly. "Others manage. We can, too. Hell, I won't be the only married sergeant in the Legion."

At dusk, the detachment halted for a long rest. Doberon gave orders that no fires were to be lighted, no unnecessary noises made. The men ate, stretched out and fell asleep. During his turn of guard, from midnight to two, Forester noticed that the lieutenant had not sought his blankets, but prowled restlessly about the encampment.

"Better get some rest," the American suggested when the officer stopped to exchange a few words. "You'll be worn out by morning."

"Too nervous," Doberon confessed frankly. "I'll be all right." He was silent for a long time, then resumed in a tense voice: "Hard to know what to do at times, eh, Forester? An idea gets a hold of you, fills your brain, and you can't shake it off. Perhaps it would be as well if I were hit tomorrow—this morning."

"Nerves, Lieutenant," Forester assured him. He laughed. "You won't be hit."

"I hope you're right. If I went now—" Doberon lowered his voice, "I'd feel rot-

ten if I were, because I have left something undone. If—" but he broke off sharply. "You're right, I'd better try to sleep."

LONG before dawn, the detachment was on the move by moonlight. The shadows lengthened, grotesque and gigantic against the sand that glittered like snow. At five-thirty, Doberon called a last conference. The second in command, Adjutant Collin, Peterschen, Forester and a half-dozen other non-coms surrounded the officer, who assigned various tasks, this one to command the mule-guards, another to be in charge of ammunition.

Peterschen and the Legionnaires from Macheb would take the lead; the main body under the lieutenant would follow. In the first surprise, the Berbers would reveal their positions by firing upon the first line, and the detachment would know where to strike. At first Peterschen looked at Doberon with a sort of shamed gratitude, because he was being given a conspicuous role. Then he smiled, as another thought struck him.

"I was afraid I might be detailed to guard the mules," he said. "Instead, I'll take the van. Thanks, Lieutenant."

Doberon eyed him coldly. "Do you wish to be replaced?"

"Oh, no, Lieutenant." Peterschen's grin became perceptibly scornful. "I like excitement."

Gray light seeped through the dark night, floated over the ground uncertainly. Dawn. A light green flush was showing in the sky, along the horizon line.

"Come on, forward—"

Peterschen and his men gained ground, spreading widely, ghostly silhouettes in the semi-darkness. For long minutes, nothing was heard save the beating of boots on the uneven ground, the light, sharp clicking of loose equipment. Forester's movements had become mechanical, like those of a man marching toward the scaffold. Attack at dawn, attack at dawn!

Then fire flashed out ahead, swept for some distance like a flame before the wind, in a sharp, crackling fusillade. The first missiles hummed near, there were impacts on the sand. While the lieutenant halted his men, Peterschen's form leaped onward, and his resounding voice called out.

"Come on, Legion!"

He and his men lured fire, and it was determined that the raiders line formed a crescent opening toward the attackers, center closing the entrance into a wide gully, the tips lengthening along the flanks and braced on low sand crests. When he had covered an additional hundred yards, Peterschen signaled to his men to drop to cover.

"Open fire!" Doberon ordered.

He knelt behind the prone line of skirmishers, and participated in the firing with a carbine. Forester was surprised, because he had expected the order to rush at once, before the sun rose much higher. It would be stupid for the Legionnaires to remain in one place and exchange shots at long range, when the known purpose of the natives would be to give time to the prize animals and booty to be taken away.

Forester had hoped that the engagement would be over before the heat grew intense. Carrying rifle, bayonet, pack and two hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition was hard enough on the march, but became torment when a man was forced into cramped positions.

Peterschen, perhaps two hundred meters ahead, seemed to have a better understanding of the actual need. He had brought but one automatic rifle from Macheb, but the gunner was an expert. And he was firing not at the first line of the raiders but, at extreme range, into the confused huddle of men and animals in the distance.

The big German was standing to di-

rect fire, and even at that distance, Forester saw the sand spurting about his feet. Peterschen was conspicuous, in his light uniform, with the broad chevrons gleaming on his cuffs.

"Reckless fool, show-off," Forester grumbled, grinning. He was not concerned about his friend, had as much faith in his comrade's luck as Peterschen had himself. "He has the right idea, too. If those at the rear start to crack, those near us will beat it all the faster. And once we get them moving, we'll—"

It would have been time for a vigorous demonstration with the bayonet. But the lieutenant assigned targets for the automatics, as if he intended to remain at this spot a while, and he used his carbine at intervals, firing two or three shots in quick succession.

The men were growing impatient. The enemy's fire was taking effect; there were several wounded already. And the Legion would achieve nothing if it did not move.

Peterschen turned, looked back to see why he was not supported. All saw him make a derisive gesture, then deliberately stretch out on the ground, taking cover. And all understood his meaning: He believed he was being exposed purposely!

Doberon appeared to have lost his head, to be in a daze. He was brave, exposed himself recklessly, but mere courage does not win a combat in the dunes. Forester saw Adjutant Collin trot toward the officer. Collin was an inconspicuous, taciturn fellow everywhere except under fire. He grasped the lieutenant by the arm, shouted in his ear. Then Doberon started sharply, and started to shout:

"Bayonet! Fix bayonets! Rise at the signal, oblique left to clear your comrades!" When the blades were adjusted, he lifted the whistle to his lips and the Legionnaires leaped forward.

The glitter of the long blade had its usual effect. The natives did not wait for the Legionnaires to arrive.

But after a first panic, they heeded the calls of their tribal chieftains, whose shrill vociferations shamed them into further resistance. "Sons of Nothing! Cowards, will you let the Christians rob you of your booty? Allah, Allah—"

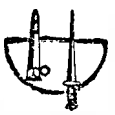
They made no attempt to reform a continuous line, but having taken shelter against the sand, behind rocks, opened fire at short range. This scattered fusillade was not as impressive as the volleys that had preceded it, but it proved more murderous.

*"The shadows lengthened against the sand."*

"Collin, hold those slobs," Doberon called. "The rest, follow me—"

He had recovered his senses and saw that the natives were seeking to lure his soldiers into a series of minor skirmishes while the animals and loot were taken away. He had been identified as the leader and was the target for many rifles. Bullets whispered near him. The Legionnaire on his right dropped with a smashed thigh, one behind him was killed outright.

Then he was at the first objective: piles of merchandise, bundles of print-cloth, bags of sugar and salt, of flour and rice, boxes of tea. The natives who had been loading the stuff on the camels made a desperate stand.



THE lieutenant was swept down by a swarm of furious men, and Forester obliqued with his group to clear him. He jabbed at random, reversed and used the butt. Then a swinging club crashed against his cheekbone, his skull seemed to explode. When his head cleared somewhat, he was amazed to find himself on his feet, still fighting, with the taste of blood in his throat. He was aware of what occurred only in a dim, uncertain fashion.

He ran here and there, shouted orders. Occasionally, he tried to fire his gun, and the pressure on the trigger would bring only a metallic click. Then he would insert a fresh magazine.

The Legion detachment had spread like a load of buckshot along the caravan, cutting out groups of camels from the mass, breaking orderly progress at twenty different points. The groups left in reserve with the pack-mules and ammunition charged over the crest and came galloping down with a great shout. Their appearance melted the last resistance, and the natives were in full flight.

Some one grasped Forester by the arm: "Eh, there, you caught a pip, didn't you?" It was Adjutant Collin. His hard fingers probed the bruised cheek, pressed hard on the teeth. The American winced, as his head cleared. "You're lucky. No bone fractured, not even a tooth knocked out!"

Some distance away, a brace of automatic rifles reopened fire, in a leisurely chuckling cadence. Nearer, Legionnaires trotted by in the dazzling sunlight. A canteen was pushed into Forester's hands, and he drank warm water laced with *raki*. Slowly, events, people, place, came into focus; he knew where he was, what he had been doing. But his head throbbed like a decayed molar, as he blinked his eyes in the fierce light.

"Where's the lieutenant?" he asked. He remembered that he had seen Doberon go down.

"Over there—" Collin indicated Doberon, and Forester saw that the officer was conversing with Peterschen. "He's got a gash in the shoulder, and they hit him with clubs. Couple of ribs stoved in, I guess. Good thing you cleared him, though!"

"Why aren't we pursuing?" Forester wondered.

"Say," Collin laughed as he replied, "we'll be lucky if they don't come back! Those swine can fight: In less than an hour, we count thirty-four casualties! No, we mustn't be hogs. Better leave some of them for the Gourrama cavalry that's waiting for them at the next well. Sergeant Porti—" the adjutant beckoned to a non-com. "How did we make out, so far?"

"Well, we got seventy-two sound camels, seven mules, four asses and a couple of oxen. All their unwounded horses got away. Probably fifty camel-loads of stuff scattered around. Located eighteen of their stiffs so far, but there's a lot more in the dunes. We'll get around to them later—"

The words battered in Forester's brain like drops of fire. Instinctively, his eyes were on Doberon and Peterschen. The officer seemed very weak, backed against a bale of merchandise. The sergeant, cool and confident as ever, loomed before him, gesturing. Some one must separate them—the heat of combat was still in them, and they oozed hate for each other.

The American walked nearer, heard a few words.

"Not as long as I live," Peterschen was saying: "A bargain's a bargain! No. I don't want to read what she wrote you

to show me. I don't—"

"For the last time, Peterschen—" Doberon's voice was desperate, pleading. Forester understood he was begging to be freed of his promise.

Peterschen laughed and turned around. He walked a few steps, passed Forester without a sign of recognition. His eyes blazed, and his chin and jaws were edged with gleaming beads of perspiration. The American went toward the lieutenant, who had pushed himself up and away from the bale, reeled uncertainly.

"Peterschen, turn around—"

Doberon's voice had risen in a scream. He held an automatic in his right hand, aimed at the sergeant. Forester stepped out of the line of fire, too bewildered to think for the moment. And he saw Peterschen whirl, spot the pistol menacing him. He saw the German's teeth show in a rapid, almost happy grin as his hand found his own weapon.

"Don't shoot!" Forester called. He stepped back between the two, facing Doberon, his shoulder blades to Peterschen. And he ran up to the lieutenant.

"Get out of the way, Nick," he heard his friend shout: "He wants it that way and it has to happen—"

Forester grasped Doberon's wrist, felt a jar, heard the shot. For a moment, the officer struggled. Then he went limp and collapsed against the bale.

But, twenty feet away, Peterschen had fallen headlong. His fabulous luck had petered out. A Legionnaire's bullet had dropped him!

PETERSCHEN was suffering, and his breathing resembled a prolonged moan. His tormented face seemed to reflect the greenish hue of the sunset sky from which the golden flood of the sun had melted. Forester sat at his side, behind the canvas lean-to that separated him from the other wounded.

"I'm telling you the truth, Karl; You've got a good chance of coming through. I don't think the lungs are touched." The American wiped a cloth over his comrade's lips, showed it to him: "See, almost no blood. Sure, you feel pretty sick—what do you expect? The ambulance plane will be here in the morning. You'll be in a good hospital by noon, and you're due for convalescence leave in the North."

"Sure, convalescence leave—" Peterschen laughed feebly. "I'm glad you got in the way, Nick. Don't feel badly." His feverish hand, rubbery and hot, clasped Forester's wrist: "Even if I croak. It's better this way. I'm not scared, you know. You told Collin what I said?"

"Yes. Everybody'll keep quiet, Karl."

"I'd like to settle things."

"What things?"

"About Josephine and the lieutenant."

"Wait until you get well."

"Suppose I don't? Let me talk to him, will you?"

"I'll see how he is—" Forester agreed. He located Doberon, who was with Collin. The officer's torso was swathed in bandages. He reeked of disinfectant. The adjutant was lighting a cigarette for him, and he peered up at Forester with an embarrassed expression.

"He isn't—?"

"No. He's asking for you. Lieutenant."

With Collins supporting him, he went toward the shelter where the senior-sergeant rested. He eased himself down to a sitting position, grunting with the pain of his wounds. Collin and Forester started to leave, but Peterschen recalled them. "Eh, you'll be needed to make this official!"

When the three were gathered close, the wounded man asked for a drink, then started to talk.

"It's agreed nothing of this goes in the report, eh, Lieutenant? I want it the way you'd have wished it if it had been you instead of me. I want to ex-

plain something to you, Lieutenant. It's hard to talk about, but I'll do my best. Women are foolish about some things, and if I died, maybe Jo—Miss Metayer—would get a sort of foolish notion about me and spoil her life on my account.

"I'm no idiot, Lieutenant. I knew all along that you would be better for her than I could. You are a gentleman with a fine future. And that's what worried me. You have a family that's pretty stuck on itself. They'll kick about you marrying the kid of a café-keeper. They'll make trouble. But you've got to show guts and stick with her.

"Tell her, even if I get over this, that I said for you two to go ahead. And so she won't keep blaming you for having sort of made things tough for me, you can tell her this, too, which Forester can swear is the truth. I'm bad at heart, Lieutenant, and I planned to murder you! At first, I was going to do it openly; then Nick made me realize that I'd be tried and executed for it. Then, when I was alone, I started to figure out how I could get you, without being caught. I thought of an accident at the shooting range. I also thought of the fine chance I'd have if we were called out to fight. I don't know if I'd have actually done it, but I did think of it a lot.

"It's when you're like this," Peterschen's voice grew weak, "and likely to kick off, that you see how stupid it all is. All this love, all this jealously, and hating a guy because he has the same taste as yourself!"

Night had fallen completely, and the first stars resembled glittering crystal against dark blue silk. The strong smell of boiling coffee, the smoke of camel-dung fires, drifted on the night wind. The calls of the sentries to each other punctuated the passing minutes.

"Cigarette?" Doberon asked.

Collin placed a cigarette in his mouth, held up a lighter. In the flame's light, Forester saw the officer's face, drawn and white, with an odd twist of self-derision at the corner of the lips. Two or three puffs melted into space.

"You're a man, Peterschen!" There was silence again, a long silence. Then the lieutenant said again: "You're a man. And I'll try to be one. Somebody called me a coward, not long ago, and I sought to prove otherwise. This is harder to do. I thought of murder, too. But not openly, courageously, as you did. I was hoping the *bicos* would do the job. I gave them all the chances I could. And I am not sure that when I fired at you I did so accidentally. I knew that you couldn't fire for fear of hitting your friend, knew you wouldn't. And I knew I must not shoot—yet I did. Even I can't tell what passed through my mind in those seconds, when I was protected by Forester's body and you stood in plain sight."

After a pause, Peterschen said: "That's all right. Forget it."

Doberon laughed softly.

"Hard to forget. You must live, Peterschen. Because, if you die, I'll have to report myself and take the consequences. You can't go about killing people and forgetting about it."

"I'll live," Peterschen assured him. "And that's just what I was trying to say. You loved her enough to do what I would have done. Nobody can understand what that means better than I can, you see! So you love her enough to buck your folks when needed. Don't blame yourself for this, either—I lost her weeks ago. She'd written me that."

"I know," the officer admitted.

Doberon and Peterschen, different in races, backgrounds, education, but both Legionnaires, with the passions and the immense generosity of fighting men, of warriors! Men living outside the code of other people, men who refused to abide by its rules or to evoke it, for protection or vengeance!

There had been scores of witnesses, but they were men of the trade, soldiers.

Silence could be taken for granted, for all were of the Legion. A person l

affair had been adjusted, that was all.

"Thirsty—" Peterschen said, much later.

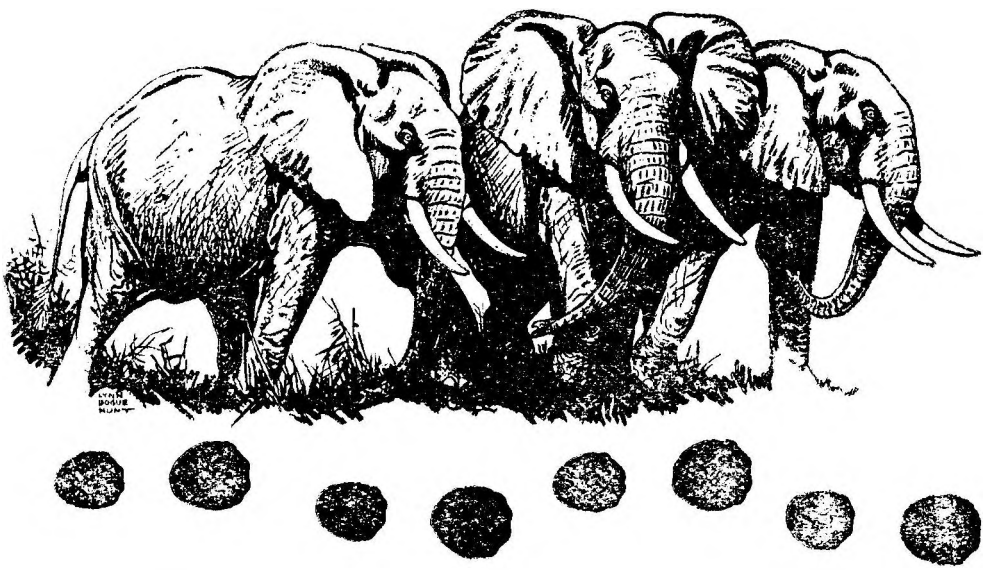
Doberon and Collin had left. The American held a cup to the wounded man's lips. Peterschen grunted with satisfaction.

"Three months in the hospital," he said softly," and a couple of months of convalescence in Oran. You remember the jane in the gloveshop next to the hotel? I got a postal card from her ten days ago. The lieutenant couldn't understand it, so I didn't try to tell him. But I don't care any more. You know the way I am. Two or three months, and it's all over!" he chuckled in the darkness, and repeated: "All over."

"Better lie still," Forester advised. "You're feverish."

His hand reached for his comrade's forehead. Although the skin was dry and hot to the touch, there was moisture on his cheeks. Forester dried his fingers mechanically by rubbing them on his trousers. He laughed cheerfully.

"Sure, Karl, that's the way it goes. One lost, and along comes another. They're all alike to you, eh? What do you care!"

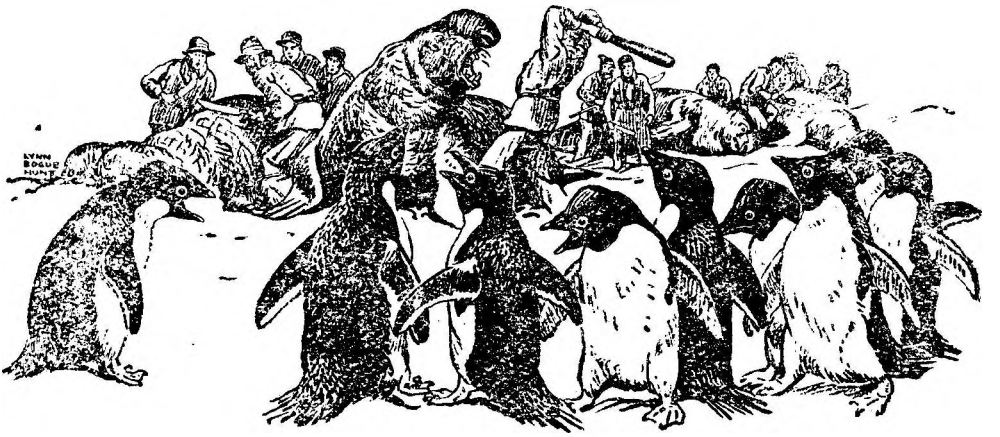


The African elephant is the biggest and grandest mammal that walks the earth in this age. Before the extensive settlement of parts of Africa, it was found throughout the Continent—except in desert regions—and still exists in great numbers in the remoter parts. The African elephant is a highly intelligent creature, and can be a terrible foe—not only because of its size and power, but because it can be exceedingly clever in stalking the hunter and taking him unaware. This grand animal has been hunted through the ages for the ivory of its tusks, which are worn, in this species, by both sexes. The finest ivory comes from the cows. One bull was killed on Mount Kenya, within two years, whose tusks weighed nearly 270 pounds for the pair. This is the elephant it is supposed that Hannibal employed for war against the Romans, but with that exception it has been regarded as untamable until, within recent years, the Belgian Government has succeeded in domesticating it in the Congo. The walk is the shuffling pace which the African elephant increases merely to a greater speed when it wishes to make time.

*Lynn Bogue Hunt.*

# E M P

## by PAUL ANNIXTER



*"There wasn't a man but seen hisself as he really looked."*

WELL, then, I'll tell you about about the Emp. I'll tell you the truth about him, all exceptin' how we originally come to be down in his God-forsaken end of the world. which'd have to be told by another man in some foreign clime where extradition is a lost hope. Only let's get the hell out of here and go in to the bar. Every time that dam' dog comes snufflin' around it drives me nuts, after what he done. They let that mungol slobber 'round me one more time and I'll heave him overboard.

Well, there we was, me and the Crumb —Crummie Catlin, that was, my little old Welsh waddie I'm always tellin' about. Down there in lower Tasmania, like I say, in July, middle of July, and colder than a banker's smile, 'cause summer's bally winter down there at the butt end of the Southern Ocean. If there's anything worse than snowballs coming down the wind in July, I don't know about it. And us without a decent coat between us, as I'm saying, and hardly a sou in pewter in our pants. marooned among blinkin' foreigners— Limeys and red-necked "roos" from Queensland, Auckland, and the like— when along comes this blighter Klegg with his proposition.

Overhauled us in a pub. he did, on a stormy day, with a noggin of cheap grog under our ribs and ready to beg, mooch or muscle another noggin as a bulwark to windward, you might say. Sure, we took him up, and so would you, by God. I guess we'd of signed up with him for a thin flask of rum that day.

Klegg was a sealer, so he said—and it wasn't long after we'd shipped with him that we wished to hell he was. seamy a game as sealing is. No, it wasn't seal Klegg was after; it was a lot filthier game. Sea elephant. The *Albatross*, he called his old tub, a two-master with an auxiliary with its rings gone, that could drive her along at seven knots in fair weather, though there wasn't never any fair weather thereabouts. We found time to cuss the day we'd ever left solid ground. Mister, that *Albatross* was old as the ark and wasn't never meant to put out in. She gurgled with the dead sea water in her hold and she stank like a fox's gut. her decks rank with oil, blubber and dried blood. And strike me straight if I ever see such a crew. Eleven of 'em all told, all the cross-bred, ingrowed whelps of fortune that ever broke a mother's heart.

We hove to one afternoon off a God-

awful coastline of jagged black rocks, glacier fields and tallow-colored sand. Fredericksland, they called it, and the guy can sure have it. I'll tell you the kind of place it was, and I can't even feel them drinks we had: It was the furthest south of any land on any map, and no tree or bush or blade of grass had ever growed there. Everything there had a hell of a shape, even the rocks and skyline, if you get me. The sun never shone there. It would show up a few minutes at midday, away to the north, like it swum in mustard; then the clouds would clamp over it like a bun over a hot dog, and the rest was mostly storm and shadow. It made a man feel like he'd been wanderin' around there dead for years, tryin' to find rest; like he'd been goin' nuts for a long time and hadn't been able to make the grade. That gives you some idea of it. A bit of the idea . . .

The sea and wind thereabouts was like they'd been married too long. They bellowed at each other night and day. The waves would come roarin' in from one direction and the wind would clip the tops off 'em and send 'em whistlin' in the opposite direction. But the sea birds liked it. All day long they swung low over the shore, yelpin' and mewin' pitiful, "like blessed kittens with ribbons on 'em," as Crummie said. Murres and gulls and kittiwakes and albatrosses with six-foot wings. They'll tell you a raven or a owl is the bird of ill omen, but don't you believe it. It's an albatross. Ask any sailing man. All you got to do is see one of them, dirty brown like a piece of storm cloud, and looking older than God, sail low over you, turning his head to look, like he knew the end was near.

BUT nuts with all that. I ain't doing this to tell you about that damn country, which all I want is to forget I ever seen it. It's what we found down there, as you'll see when I get around to it.

Old Klegg, he put us ashore there, eleven of us and the mate's dog, heavin' some duffle bags after us, some jerked pemmican, tack and other truck, and a hundred heavy bilabong clubs with knots in 'em.

Shake a leg up among the rocks, says he, and keep an eye bloody well peeled for what he was payin' us for, 'cause times was stricken hard. He'd be back, he says, in two-three weeks, when there was something to come after, and that something better be more than us.

Yeah, you got the idea. We was to hang out there without no shelter but the rocks and a big strip of sail cloth in that awful weather, waitin' for sea elephants to come ashore, all for some rotten chuck and about three bob a day —less'n you paid for them drinks. By cripes, what men'll do at times! I tell you if there was some oil or pearls or valuable mineral truck at the gates of hell, there'd be some one like Klegg to throw a gang in there and bring it out in shifts . . . . Sure, I'll have another with you. Straight for mine.

Four, five days went by, the bunch of us huddled out of the wind and waitin', and nothing showed up. We had to catch our sleep in threes and fours any time we could—there wasn't cover enough to go round. We'd catch two-three hours each and then be kicked awake to make room for some other bloke. We put in most of our time battlin' back and forth, workin' the hell out of our systems that way. Some bird had brought a bottle of rum along, and we broke the bottle first off fighting over it, and that started things popping. We all got to hatin' each other's guts, and not a man but tried to kill some other punk in the outfit with his bare hands. And then there was four-five of them tried to kill Sloper, old Klegg's mate, and there was one whoppin' free-for-all when the rest of us went in to save him, and I guess it was too bad we done it, too.

One morning we heard some almighty booming and roaring from somewhere down the shore, like six or eight of them big white-maned combers had hit the beach in too big a hurry and was tearing hell out of each other. And next second there was Sloper stompin' on us and kickin' our backsides.

"Come out of it, you lugs," he yells. "Every man grab a couple of clubs. They're here!"

We shagged him down the shore at a dead run, sneaked out along a line of rocks that run down pretty near to the water and there we saw them. Sea elephant—a herd of about sixty of them, a hundred yards up the shore. They looked like a bunch of the biggest slugs you ever seen in any nightmare, laying there in rows on the sand, shakin' like bags of jelly when they moved. The biggest bulls weighed up to four thousand pounds, the cows around half of that. They had round, empty lookin' pans, a lot like walrus, with bleached whiskers hangin' down like these rube comedians you see in music halls, and eyes like an old Schnauzer dog.

Right on top of their beezers was the dangedest lookin' bulges, big around as footballs and lookin' like they'd been pumped full of air. Them bulges was six or seven foot from the ground too, brother, and it looked like plain suicide tacklin' giants like that with nothin' but a club, but Sloper talks to us behind the rocks.

"All you got to do is hit 'em hard just back of them bulges," says he, "where the neck begins. Everybody yell like hell and head 'em off from the water; they'll start inland and then we got 'em."

WELL, we rushed 'em, whoopin' and yellin' like mad tikes, drivin' 'em up the shore like so many cattle. Sloper, he showed us how to jump in the air and come down with our clubs with a whang on the back of their heads. One whack would do the trick if you got 'em just right, and down they'd go, quiverin' like they'd run onto a live wire. The more we downed, the nuttier we got over seein' 'em fall. They roared till the ground shook, but they was helpless again us—only you had to watch out sharp for them big blunt teeth of theirs. Two-three times I see a big bull take up a mouthful of stones, some as big as goose eggs, and crack 'em up and swallow 'em, same as I or you'd eat nuts, Jeepers!

We all got seein' red, I guess, and went leapin' from one critter to another till the beach was strewed with 'em. I mistrust if more than six or eight of that herd got away. It was fair awful; but later it was worse still—days of working in blood and fat while we salvaged the hides and oil.

We was right in the middle of all that stink and muck when some punk yells out sudden, "Holy cripes and the apostles, look a' that!" We did and there was the dangedest sight a man ever looked at. A crowd of penguins, about thirty all told, was marching down from the rocks higher up the shore, single-footin' it same as men. They looked like a crowd of aldermen come down to welcome us, with black hats and long top coats on, and white eyeglasses, their chests slung out almighty pompous and important.

About twenty feet off they all stopped and give us a couple of bows, quick and solemn like Japanese admirals. Then they come on and stopped and done it over again. I never see anything friendlier than the way they done it. The lot of us stood there mazed, 'cause some of them birds was around three feet high and there was somethin' genteel and human about it all that fair caught you in your tracks.

They marched up within six foot of us, bowin' once more; then the biggest penguin out in front, turns to the right, puttin' out his short flipper like a drum major puts out his arm, and the bunch

of 'em swung right in close formation and marched off twenty foot and slewed round to watch us.

Well, I guess there wasn't a man among us but seen hisself like he really looked there, all smeared with blood and about as low as white men get. There was something so almighty fine about them little suckers compared to us, we was all a mite shamed and sore, like you'll get when you're caught in a trick so dirty that a decent man hasn't words for it. I still can't get over the low feeling they give to me . . .

"Crimus!" says somebody. "I never knew them birds got big as that."

"Them's emperor penguins," says Sloper. "Now bend your backs, you bums."

"Emperors," says the Crumb. "And that's the old Emp hisself," pointin' to the big one. Yes, it was Crummie that put a name to him.

Just then Sloper's dog come running up from down the shore. Right at the penguins he comes blustering and swearing, and they're just as friendly to him as to us, spreading out in a half circle and bowing right regal from the hips, you might say. The cur jumps in and tries for a throat or two, when the Crumb runs out and grabs him by the neck and throws him ten foot.

"You keep that mungol off 'em or I'll brain him," yells the Crumb, and he stands there breathin' black and savage, with a big chunk of slag in his hand. Man, but my partner was a raw red fightin' cock at times!

For a minute things looked black enough, with Sloper standing nuzzling a big club in his paw for a better grip. But there was them penguin lined up hard by, holdin' nothin' again the dog or us, still bowin' and beamin', though some of 'em has blood smeared on their white chests where the dog has ripped 'em. Jeepers, you can see it, can't you? Them things wasn't only birds; they was the only decent things we'd seen in that whole godolphin country, includin' men. Includin' ourselves. Yessir, special and particular, includin' every stinkin' one of us. The boys all seen that. An' I guess Sloper seen it. He'd been saved once from slaughter, see, and it wasn't half likely he would be again.

So he give in, and after that the mungol was tied up every time them penguins come down to pay us a call, which they done regular twice a day, like a delegation of politicians in full evenin' dress might come payin' their respects to some almighty important foreigners stoppin' in their country.

We figured at first they was maybe mortal lonesome, for it was a place where a man might of cried at sight of a flea to bear him company, and treated him like a long lost brother. But we seen quick enough the thing run a sight deeper than that. Them little suckers was born bluebloods from hat to coat-tails, as the Crumb points out to us, 'cause it was always just the same when some of our crowd went over to their camp.

They had sentinels always watchin' and when they seen us comin' they'd call out all hands and the whole of 'em would come forward, solemn as be damned, bowin' and holdin' up them short arms of theirs like they was brung up to shake hands, but would let it pass. And they'd show us around the place. What I mean, *show* us around, walkin' right along side of us and tickled to death we'd dropped in. And by God, it was great for us havin' another camp like that hard by.

LONESOME? Hell. Them birds had just come up from spendin' six months down near the South Pole, and this place was like a heavy traffic zone to them. It was pairing time for them and they'd come to nest along that shore, because of the nice mild weather we was havin' there! Only them birds don't know noth-

ing about buildin' nests. They're too dang human for that sort of thing. All they do is scoop out a hollow among the rocks and lay their eggs in that.

Say, I'll tell you a thing or two about 'em that'd make a man go get his eyes examined; 'cause I and Crummie and them associated continuous the two months we was there—all the time we wasn't skinnin' out them sea elephants or crackin' 'em on the conk. Them birds can't fly. They'd walked—three-four hundred miles—over snow and ice country to get to this nestin' place. Get it? Walked all the way on them waddlin', fat, stumpy legs of theirs no longer than a cigarette. They'd et nothing all that time, mind you, and wouldn't till pairing time was over. And they done that every year at the same time. Every day we'd see a new bunch of them comin' in to make camp somewhere nearby, all walkin', in long files as far as you could see, like a bunch of hefty gents with their hands in their coat pockets. And then the pairin' time begun and that's one of the reasons I'm telling all this.

Ever seen a pair of English bulldogs matched in a pit? Ever spent an evening watchin' cock fights? You think you know what guts is then, but I tell you you've not seen anything. Your chickens and your bulldogs will battle two-three hours, maybe half a day, but penguins, Billy, will battle for weeks. Yessir, weeks. Them birds have cities and laws, same as men, and there's good ones and bad ones, thieves and heels and regular guys among 'em, like there is among us. And that's the day we come to see the Emp for what he was. Every penguin I ever seen is a darb. But the Emp wasn't only a penguin. There never was another penguin like him.

Like I said, them birds kept comin' in and comin' in from every direction till there was thousands of 'em all along the shore. The rocks inland was covered with 'em, and still they kept comin'. Each new gang that come in was under one or two big cocks. They'd sort of stake out a claim alongside the others and settle down and camp on it. It was a heap like it was up in Dawson City, Alaska, back in the gold days.

Pretty soon the whole place was a nut house for fair. It was a lot like a seal rockery in pairin' time, only there was fine rules and technicalities to the game with these little suckers. They never ganged up, for instance, and mobbed one of the fighters. Whiles a couple of rivals would be fightin' it out, hammer and tongs, the other cock birds would line up on the side like they was watchin' it all for fair play, and not till one of the battlers went under—and what I mean *under*, with eyes jabbed out and a busted neck, too gone to even move—would one of the rivals on the side-lines take up the fight. I tell you, Billy, the country that ever takes and uses one of them birds for their national emblem will be the king country of the whole blinkin' world. They'll never be whipped.

Mostly them scraps would start over the stone-gatherin', which is part of a penguin's courtin' tacticks. When a cock-bird gets a real mash on some hen penguin he'll come up bowin' clean to the ground, and lay a nice round stone or two in front of her, like you'd bring a bouquet to your best gal. If the hen didn't touch it, that was givin' him the air, but if she picked it up she was as good as goaled at the altar and that stone become the first one in the buildin' of their nest. The two of 'em would sashay down to the beach real honey-like to gather more stones.

But always there was some lugs waitin' to make their nests easy by liftin' the stones already gathered by the honest citizens and tax-payers, them being too honest and straight-shootin' to know why it took 'em so many days to build a nest. Yessir, like in the human family, there was the easy marks that didn't even suspect that half the world was heels and Chinamen. See what I mean?

And them heels was so almighty slick about it that even when they was caught red-handed they'd pull off a act, fumblin' with the stone they'd stole, makin' believe they'd slung it down there to rest a minute. And them square-shooters, like the Emp, they'd let it pass, bein' too honest to even believe in crime when they seen it perpicated right in front of 'em.

Times there'd be a bit of a mix-up when two-three sheiks would lay their stones down in front of the same flapper penguin. She'd maybe fumble with both stones and then there'd be hell poppin' for fair. Like the way the Emp got into his first big fight. That was a battle the like of which nobody ever seen before or since, and that's a fact.

Three or four of us just happened onto that affair, catchin' it all right from the start. It was Crummie that recognized our man first off, by a black splotch he had on one side of his white waistcoat just above the right leg. We'd likely have passed right on, 'cause them fights was a pretty common sight by now, except for the Crumb.

"Look at that there," says he, grabbing my arm. "It's the Emp she wants. That was his stone she picked up."

"We'd ought to drive that other blighter off," says I.

"Hold hard," says Crummie. "The Emp can bloomin' well take care of hisself."

WELL sir, they was at it hammer and tongs before a feller could move. The two of 'em squared off and slung their chests up again each other and begun spearin' with their beaks and whangin' each other with them short flippers of theirs. Them blows was steady and fast as machine-gun fire. They put all they had into it and you'd never of thought any critters their size or twice their size could of stood up under it. The feathers flew and blood begun runnin' down their white chests. We figured the thing would soon be over, but a couple hours went by and they was still at it, the two of 'em so close matched there wasn't hardly no edge at all on either side.

There's only one end to that kind of scrap, 'cause death hisself is the referee. We seen that pretty quick. Two, three times both battlers pitched clean over on their chins and laid there, plumb slug-nutty and too groggy to move. Then they'd stagger up and slam into it again, till finally, along in the second hour, the Emp sort of wound hisself up and let loose with a rattle of haymakers that sent the other man for the daisies. For a spell we thought the Emp was done too. He looked like he's steam-rolled for fair, layin' there on his chest with his bill stretched out in the sand. But after a long wait his head comes up slow and jerky, he flicks the blood out of his face and gets to his feet.

"By Gawd, the sucker don't quit even when he's dead," says Ned Ollin.

Well, you'd a thought the thing would end there, wouldn't you? But that was nothin' but a start. Slow and staggery the Emp moves over to where that flapper penguin is still sittin' on her tail and bows to her again. And the other two cock penguins, that has only been waitin' on the sidelines to see the set of the breeze, standin' there like a coupla bums on a wintry day with their hands stuck deep in their long coat pockets—they come to life now. One of 'em comes waddlin' for'ard and drops another stone in front of the hen, and like it was a signal there's another battle on before you could drop a hat. The Emp, he rallied at sight of that stone and slung hisself in to do the whole thing over again.

You'd never a' thought he'd been down for the count only five minutes before. He showed up real champ blood by puttin' his back up again a rock and leadin' the other man out. It was one of the prettiest cover-ups I ever see. The rock kep' him from fallin', see, while he

gets back his strength. Half the time that other battler was sluggin' the rock and his own chin. Fact. By the time dark come on, by jeepers, the Emp was leadin' out every now and again with the dirtiest kind of uppercuts and not even staggerin' in his footwork!

. . . Why squander all these words over a ruckus between birds, you say? That's what I'm trying to put over. Them penguin comin' had changed every one of us, see? We'd all quit battlin' among ourselves, for one thing. Watchin' them the way we did had took up the slack in our outfit, all the corruption that naturally come of just being in that rotten country, understand? You can hoot if you like, but you wouldn't if you'd been there . . .

Well, we hung there watchin' till it was so dark you couldn't rightly tell one battler from the other. Then the lot of us thrown our heads together in a quorum, 'cause it didn't seem right leavin' a friend like that up again them awful odds. There was that other rival still sittin' there, his bill pointed into the wind like a dead stogie, waitin' his turn accordin' to the rules of the game. Most of us was for breakin' up the battle right there to save the Emp, but Crummie would have none of it. The Emp, he says, would uncork a surprise package and make his comeback. And danged if he wasn't right. You'd a-thought he'd been trainin' that cock special for a couple years.

Maybe you won't believe this, but sometime durin' the night the Emp he got his second wind and massacreed that second rival like he had the first. When we showed up in the morning there he lay stiff and dead as be damned, and there was the Emp and that other rival —leaning into it, hell for glory, except for about half the time when the two of 'em was flat on their chins. Fancy that. After near twenty-four hours of heart-breakin' battle our bird was takin' the number of still another rival—the third, mind you—and what I mean, *takin'* it!

NO, SIR, the Emp wasn't no more blow-flied than the other man. Both of 'em had their eyes near closed and clotted with blood, and it looks like the end was close, except for a funny thing now and again when the two would get up for another go. Each time the Emp he made believe he was too goose-egged to even cover up, and the other battler would barge into the opening. But that opening wasn't his; it was the Emp's. He was just waitin' the chance to clinch to let loose with that meat-ax bill of his. And by Crimus, in the end he whittled that man down in his own blood, like he had the other two—him that had been ready to pat with a spade by the look of things when the second fight begun. It was the gamiest comeback I ever hope to see, and every man of us cut loose with a holler that lifted the sea birds off the rocks in clouds.

But what was the pay-off for that great-hearted battle? The answer to that is so doggone much like the way life is back in the rucks of the righteous, I'm ashamed to tell it. There comes the Emp crawlin' back for a third time to make his bow and take the reward that's due him, fallin' flat every foot or two and gettin' up again, and what does he find? That hen penguin wasn't even lookin' at him now. She'd been growin' restless with all that waitin'—she wasn't only a flapper in the first place, mind—and hadn't never been through a thing like that.

There she was sidlin' off among the rocks and makin' come-along signals to a big loafer of a cock penguin that had snuk up from somewheres durin' the fight —one of them unmarried murderers that never put up no battle for a wife, but go prowlin' around other camps watchin' for lost baby-penguins and young deserted wives. There he stood, the big

bruiser, fresh and untired and waitin' for our man to fall down again so he could chop him into hamburger. That was too much for any of us. We couldn't stand by and watch our man play stooge to a butcher. One of the boys drove them two traitors off and we collected the Emp and took him back to camp to save him. For two weeks the lot of us looked after him like he'd been mascot of our ball team or somethin'. We'd all gone soft, if you like, but the Emp and us had been through a thing or two that you can't explain, that's all.

He was a lot farther gone than any of us had figured. One eye was blind and one of his feet was broke so he couldn't do more than limp about. We couldn't leave him there to be mobbed by the gulls; he was real people to us. So Crummie, he took him along when we left, but I guess he shouldn't never of done it.

Sure, he liked us; and he never forgot he was a gent; he never failed to pull off his bow when I or Crummie come up. But it was plain to see that every mile we made to northward was tearin' the heart out of him. He stood on the deck there, like you seen him, two whole days, lookin' away into the south through the film that was growin' over his eyes. Pinin' for that godolphin country where the snow'd soon be three foot deep, mind, and blowin' blizzards for the rest of the year.

Like Crummie said, that lad was a born battler; he had to battle even the weather. It was pining that really killed him, and that dog—that mungol of Sloper's happenin' to be aboard—only cut it short a day or two.

# TRADITIONS OF THE DEEPWATERMEN

by WINDAS

## MIND YOUR P'S AND Q'S

This slang-term, meaning "Be on your best behavior," dates back to Colonial days, when sailors serving aboard government ships could always get credit at waterfront taverns until pay-day. As they would then pay for those drinks which were marked up on the tally-board, the tavern-keeper had to be careful that no pints or quarts had been omitted from the list.

## TAFFRAIL

The name of the rail around the stern of a vessel is a combination of three words, viz.:—The After Rail.

## SNUG HARBER

A nautical term signifying a comfortable berth in old age. When a sailor can retire from the sea with enough money to keep him in ease, he is "in Snug Harbor."

## GALLEY-WEST

An expression meaning knocked "cold" or "stiff". The thought goes back to the days when the body of a dead Viking chief would be sailed westward aboard his galley towards the setting sun.

# BLIND VOYAGE

by Richard Howells Watkins

*"Disappoint you! I'll surprise you!"*

CAPTAIN Nicholas Redruth was oppressed by the sudden loving kindness of the world. Two strangely benevolent offers had been made to him that morning.

With a restive finger he tapped his nose, a long, knife-edged and commanding beak. After some thought he strung a weighty half-inch shackle on a short but stout length of marlin.

Experimentally he twirled this highly effective weapon—no ox could withstand it—and stared with bright-eyed suspicion across the blazing bowl of St. Matthew harbor at the town. Loving kindness in the Virgin Islands, or anywhere else in the lesser West Indies, for the matter of that, was worthy of deep consideration.

"They're playing me for a mug—and I hope they're wrong," he murmured with a quick and fleeting grin.

Above him, straight and staunch as a rapier, his schooner's shining mainmast prodded the hot blue sky. Captain Redruth, as straight and nearly as lean as that bright spar, made a perfect picture of a wealthy young yachtsman in his spotless white drill tunic and trousers. But the picture lied. The shackle clinked against two dimes when he slipped it into his pocket. Freighters—dirty little cargo boats—had been restless Nick Redruth's lot at sea.

Now he went ashore. Though he rowed himself in *Starlight's* gleaming skiff, he did so with dignity and without perspiration, as if it were his whim to exercise under a sun strong enough to melt marrow and muscle. And as he swung the oars his eyes swept fondly over his diminishing schooner. He had bought *Starlight* for a pittance when, stranded in a bad spot with a gale rising to smash her, her owner had quit her rather than fight for her. Having saved her once from destruction at the

risk of his neck, Redruth now had to save her again from covetous hands.

"Blast money!" he growled. "She's still mine—and the rats won't get her yet!"

At the landing he made fast his boat with two dexterous half hitches and walked down the alley to St. Matthew's main street. This island had been Danish and now was American, but the people dawdling along remained black African, happy under the blistering sun. A few humid white men, moving faster, leavened the darkness of the crowd.

Redruth's iceberg blue eyes impinged upon a fat, white-shirted white man ducking hastily back into the door of a shop. The man was Sam Wiggins; the shop was Sam's ship chandler's establishment. The reason for his precipitate vanishing seemed to Nick Redruth to be his own appearance.

Quite as rapidly as Wiggins had moved his keg-like form Nick Redruth slipped into a warehouse. He raced unopposed through its dim expanses toward the waterfront. He came out upon a rotting quay. There, behind piled bags of flour, he halted and surveyed the yard in which Sam Wiggins stored ship fittings that were perilously close to being junk.

Within fifteen seconds there came hastily through the back door of Wiggins' shop the tall and pot-bellied figure of Hurlburt Wright, ex-owner of *Starlight*. Close behind him followed a limber Martinican young man whom Nick Redruth had christened in his own mind Coffee Half Milk. Anything may happen on the beautiful island of Martinique and in this case it had; Redruth put Coffee Half Milk down as an unsuccessful mixture of Negro, French and Spanish, with probably a dash of Carib Indian.

These two were shepherded out of the shop by agitated Sam Wiggins. As soon as they were outside Wiggins hurried back into his store.

With a jerk of his hand Hurlburt Wright headed the slim Coffee along the waterfront; he himself strode up an alley.

NICK REDRUTH pondered, decidedly perplexed.

"There must be more in this little tea party, whatever it is, than Wiggins and those two," he told himself. "It must need backbone, guts, a strong arm guy."

He retraced his steps through the warehouse and strolled out onto the street. Sam Wiggins was at his door once more and this time he welcomed Redruth at forty feet with a hearty hail of welcome.

"Come in, Captain," he invited. "Thought over my proposition?"

Redruth answered with another question. "You'll give me credit, Mr. Wiggins, for three hundred dollars' worth of food, gasoline, oil, paint and ship's gear on my face?"

"Why not?" inquired Sam Wiggins generously. "It's a good face. Yes, Captain, I will."

That offer was the first bit of loving kindness that had so soured Captain Redruth's outlook on the world.

"And all I'm asking of you, Captain, is that you shove off right away for Havana," the ship chandler said. "You're certain to find plenty of buyers or charterers there for a fine yacht like *Starlight*, and you'll send me three hundred and fifty when you can."

He escorted the young yacht owner into the store. "Nothing to sign, Captain; I'm taking your word," he added persuasively.

Nick Redruth appeared to meditate, with his hand thrust into the pocket that held the shackle. But the store was empty and remained that way; further, there was no tensity in the fat ship chandler's body.

"You couldn't include fifty dollars cash to pay wages to a hand or two if I promised to send you four hundred from Miami?" Redruth asked and leaned

with well simulated tropic langour against the counter.

Decidedly Sam Wiggins shook his head. "No, Captain, I couldn't do that. You ought to be able to scrape up a man or two without paying an advance."

"D'you know any?" Redruth's voice was still casual; he eyed a coil of three-eighths Manila. "There was a coffee-colored Martinican named Pierre—said he was a wind ship sailor—aboard this morning. He was willing to work for a month without pay because he liked her looks. Know anything about him?"

That offer to work for nothing had been the second piece of philanthropy that had so stirred Redruth's misgivings.

A long moment passed before the ship chandler answered Redruth's question. Then he shook his head.

"Never heard of him," he declared. His voice became urgent. "But I'd take him if I were you. No use lying at anchor and running up bills here till somebody libels her. Take him and my supplies and get going, Captain."

Nicholas Redruth thought hard, still leaning idly against the counter.

They wanted to get him out of the harbor. Why? This was the Caribbean, but pot-bellied Hurlburt Wright was no pirate. Pirates were scarce at sea these days mostly—he eyed fat Sam Wiggins—they were ashore and doing too well to get rough.

He would lose *Starlight* inevitably, by the mean processes of trade and law, if he remained much longer in St. Matthew harbor. He knew, also, that within a few days she must be hauled out and painted if her bottom was to be saved from the depredation of teredos. If he took her out he might lose her faster, in some mysterious way, but at least he would have a fighting chance of keeping her. A fighting chance!

"What am I hesitating about?" he asked himself. "Isn't she still worth fighting for? Hell, yes!"

He turned to the watchful ship chandler. "I'll try it," he said, wondering with a sort of sporting curiosity just what he was trying. He pulled a slip of paper from his pocket. "Here's a list of things I need."

Sam Wiggins reached for it eagerly. "Gas, bolt rope, bronze turnbuckles, sea anchor, lignum-vitae blocks, canned goods—yes, Captain, I'll have all this on board before night," he promised.

"Good!" said Nick Redruth. "Watch those sizes and the quality. I'll be looking over the stuff before I lift my hook."

He cast a glance that told him nothing at the loudly reassuring ship chandler, tapped his knife-edged nose severely and left the shop.

By no strange chance, as he reckoned it, Coffee Half Milk was now idling in the sun outside.

"Report on board tonight at eight o'clock," Redruth commanded curtly. "I'm going to give you a berth—without pay."

The Martinican's spiky face—the countenance of a man sullen by habit—was crossed by a toothy grin which did not improve it. He raised a hand almost willingly to his dingy grey cap.

Lithely, with his spirits whetted by the prospect of action, the master of *Starlight* shoved his way through the chattering swarms of Virgin Islanders to his small boat.

Hurlburt Wright happened to be on the quay, within ten feet of the ladder, inspecting the shipping with a pair of binoculars. His eyes, no more than an inch apart and deep sunken in his fleshy face, gleamed with a flash of red anger at the sight of Nick Redruth. His lips smiled politely enough.

"Captain, I'll give you six thousand for her," he said without preliminary. "That's a thous—"

"Hell, stop it!" the master of *Starlight* broke in harshly. "She was yours and you stranded her. When you thought she was due to break up your backbone caved in. So you lied to me about the weather report and sold her to me for

five thousand dirty dollars. I'd see her a hundred fathoms under before I'd let you get her again."

He waited intently, but Wright did not flare up into speech that might reveal some clue. He was not the flaring kind. He took it and managed a snarling smile as he turned away.

"All right, Captain," he said softly and a bit too confidently to improve Nick Redruth's peace of mind.

BY A line made fast to the anchor windlass and hanging over the bow of *Starlight* Nick Redruth contrived to keep his head on a level with the deck of his schooner. Though the stars blazed in the velvety black night the moon had not yet risen; he was well concealed. The drip of water from his soaked clothes was lost in the splash of harbor ripples against her sides.

With keen eyes slitted to squeeze every iota of vision out of them he stared aft. In the cockpit of the yacht was the answer to one of his most trying perplexities—where Hurlburt Wright was to get the backbone for his game—the strong arm man to handle Captain Nick Redruth for him. Redruth's new hand, Coffee Half Milk, was entertaining two surreptitious visitors—Wright and another man.

More by his flat, rasping voice than by his bulk did Redruth recognize that other man. He was Bart Slocum, ex-master mariner, ex-jailbird, beachcomber and wanderer from the Bahamas to Trinidad. A tropic tramp, if ever one existed between Cancer and Capricorn, a broad-faced, gigantic, honest-looking sailorman who could be trusted to do what he felt was good for Bart Slocum. Burglary or barratry, it was all the same to Bart.

Redruth had seen him two days before, rowing around *Starlight*, circling her like a hungry shark. A pirate out of his rightful century and finding the pickings lean in consequence, was Bart.

Unfortunately for Nick Redruth, the poor assortment in his cockpit did not bawl their projected villainy to the world; they spoke so softly that he could only distinguish their voices.

It looked to Captain Redruth as if he had had a long swim for very little. Not half an hour before, while he and Coffee Half Milk had been stowing stores in the forepeak, he had had an urgent message from Sam Wiggins to come ashore. Ashore he had gone, but only as far as the dock, for there had been for an hour a small boat under oars lying well off the schooner's port side. From a porthole in the main cabin, Redruth had studied it through night glasses and then slipped a rope end, with a bowline knotted in it, over the bow of *Starlight*. That boat, as Redruth had rowed away, had drifted closer to his schooner.

He did not fear an attempt to steal her out of the harbor; that was too raw even for the Caribbean. But, chancing a stray barracuda or shark, he had silently slipped into the water and swum back to *Starlight's* bow to join the party on her.

His feet, clad only in rope-soled espadrilles, ached in the loop of the bowline, but he hung on resolutely. And then, with startled speed, he drew his head down below the edge of the deck and flattened himself against the side.

They were coming forward, all three of them, toward the pile of gear and food as yet unstowed on the fore deck. Redruth got ready to take to the water.

But he did not need to retreat. They halted at the forward hatch, that led to forepeak and the tiny forecastle that once had housed Hurlburt Wright's crew of four men.

"You'll not disappoint me, Captain?" Wright said nervously.

"Disappoint you!" rasped Bart Slocum. "Why God bless you. I'll surprise you! What's there in it for me if I don't?"

"That's true," Wright muttered. "Very well, Captain."

Redruth lifted his eyes briefly above the rail of the schooner, for he did not seem to be interpreting aright the few small sounds he heard. But his eyes confirmed his ears. Hurlburt Wright, ex-owner of *Starlight,* was slipping down into her forecastle. The other two men remained on deck.

"You got enough stuff there to block off a big hiding hole," Bart Slocum said to the tan-colored Martinican. "Give him plenty of room but stow it solid. She'll jump around once she's clear o' the leeward coast."

Sullenly Coffee muttered a few words of swift French.

"And talk God's honest English, you," Slocum grated. His long arm fastened on Coffee's shoulder and whipped the lithe breed around to face him.

"Aye, sair," the Martinican murmured. Slocum spun him again and with a tap like the thump of a sledge hammer sent him staggering to the edge of the hatch.

"Get below and have your boss well hidden before Redruth comes back," he commanded. "Wait; d'you pack a knife?"

"Aye, sair."

"Well, use it to butter bread," Bart Slocum's voice was scandalized. "A knife! What are we comin' to? Use something heavy, that'll lay a man out cold an' polite, or a gun, that'll stop him."

"I am good with—"

"A gun with six inches of knife in him once did me in, near as nothin'. We don't want no trouble, see; we're giving trouble away. Let's have your sticker."

"But, sair—"

Bart Slocum growled and grabbed at the Martinican. Next instant the knife glinted in Slocum's hand. And then, at a bound, he was facing forward and drawing back his arm.

Nick Redruth flung himself backward into the sea. He felt the knife hum past him as he plunged under. He stayed below, swimming vigorously, for two long minutes. Then he let his head break the surface and opened his mouth in a low wail:

"Don't shoot, marstuh! Don't shoot! I don't do no harm, marstuh!"

He made out a few words of Slocum's rasping answer to a question from Hurlburt Wright. "Just a thieving coin diver on the prowl—anything not nailed down."

With noiseless haste Nick Redruth swam further away. The smooth soft water did not wash a grin of satisfaction from his lips. He had gone unrecognized; he felt sure Bart Slocum would not have flung that knife at Nick Redruth; Slocum and Wright both wanted Nick Redruth fit to take *Starlight* out of the harbor next day.

He remained in the water long enough to see Bart Slocum, alone, push off toward a high-smelling, ex-fishing open motorboat that was the big sea tramp's headquarters of the moment.

BY noon next day Nick Redruth had *Starlight* ready to go. With the foresail flapping gently in the fluky airs of the mountain sheltered harbor, Redruth received serenely the hearty good wishes of Sam Wiggins, lying alongside in his dirty boat.

Quite aware that the grinning ship chandler regarded him as a fool and might easily be right about it, Nick Redruth prepared to take his beautiful schooner blindly and shorthanded into danger. Better that than that some jackals of the law should in cold, inhuman justice tack a paper on her mainmast, put him on the beach and sell her to some blundering lubber. Or to let the worms get her for lack of the price of a coat of bottom paint.

"Good luck, Captain!" roared Wiggins as the sweating Martinican signaled that the anchor chain was up and down.

"I'll need it," Redruth murmured and

then, to Coffee: "I'll break out the anchor with the motor! Take in chain smartly on the windlass."

From below, in the forepeak, piled high with Redruth's generous provision for *Starlight's* welfare, came no sound from Hurlburt Wright, ex-owner and present stowaway. It would be hot down there; hot enough to fry the fat off Wright's paunch, Redruth reflected with approval.

They broke out the anchor and heaved it up. Then, under motor and foresail, *Starlight* slid down the harbor, her blue stem parting the water with gentle, murmurous insistence.

At two that afternoon, clear of the outlying islands, she was rushing along under full working sail, jib, staysail, foresail and main. The northeasterly trade, blowing steadily, put her down almost to her rail. But though the breeze stiffened occasionally in puffs she heeled no further, but converted the added weight of the wind into greater speed. Her mastery of wind and sea was glorious and complete. She raced the billowy trade clouds themselves.

Nick Redruth, singing at the wheel, sailed her on, hour after hour. Once in a great while he shouted an order to Coffee Half Milk to trim or ease a sheet. The Martinican's sullen, wary face was the single rift in the lute. Wright, being out of sight, was also out of mind—almost out of mind.

With the afternoon, as the tumultuous peaks of Puerto Rico rose ahead, occasional black bunches of clouds forming on the horizon hinted at wind squalls of rain. The steady trade lessened in strength; the day became sultry. The Martinican breed became fidgety. He developed a surreptitious habit of staring at the chain of islets, upstanding rocks and reefs that lay close to leeward all the way from Culebra Island to Cape San Juan, on the 'Rican mainland.

Quite as discreetly Nick Redruth kept his own watch on those isles and ledges and another watch, equally sharp, on the uncertain weather.

Finally he called Coffee to relieve him at the wheel and walked forward on the slanting deck. There, unobtrusively, he glanced at the hatch down which Hurlburt Wright had disappeared the night before. It was secured against chance boarding seas by stout rope lashings. Satisfied, he came aft and went below.

In the main cabin, out of sight of Coffee, he had a long look with his binoculars through one of the leeward portholes. He was not surprised when suddenly he picked up the outline of a squat, ugly little open motor boat nosing out between the teeth of a reef.

"Now we'll see," he told himself with cool confidence. He slipped through the main cabin and galley to the door opening into the forecastle. Quietly he locked this door, securing his stowaway, and put the key in his pocket. He paused in the galley to open a locker, rummage under the stack of canned goods and pull out a .38 revolver. Making sure it was loaded he stowed it in his side trousers pocket. Briskly he walked aft again and up the companion stairs to the cockpit. With a jerk Coffee brought his eyes back from leeward to the compass.

"Put a becket on that wheel; I want to see how well she'll steer herself," Nick Redruth commanded and watched intently as Coffee lashed the wheel. By trimming the jib and foresail a trifle he got the schooner to sail approximately on her course.

Inconspicuous against the black rocks of the reefs to leeward, the motorboat was traveling a course to intercept *Starlight*.

"Go below and see if she's making much water," Nick Redruth said suddenly to Coffee.

Scowling, the man obeyed.

Nick Redruth waited until he had the floorboard up and was bending over the bilge at the foot of the companion stairs. Then he pulled his shackle out of his

pocket and with no hesitation jumped down onto Coffee's back.

The wind went out of the lithe Martinican as Redruth's rope-soled feet landed squarely on him. He collapsed, with lungs paralyzed for the moment and starving for the air they could not pump. With no more than a perfunctory tap on the skull Redruth laid him out.

Swiftly and efficiently he trussed up Coffee with quarter inch Manila, throwing plenty of turns around arms, legs and body and making plenty of knots to deprive the captive of the stretching advantages of a long line. He finished the job by taping up his mouth. After a look on deck at the course and another, more distrustful, at the weather, he picked up Coffee and carried him to the master's stateroom, lashed him on the bunk and left him, locking that door, too.

ALL this had taken time. When he glanced toward the reefs on *Starlight's* port bow they were definitely closer than they had been. The motorboat, though still a quarter of a mile away, was almost dead ahead.

Nick Redruth altered *Starlight's* course, hardening on the wind and heading further from the line of reefs and white water. This brought his attention back to the threatening mass of clouds in the northwest.

"This must be short and sweet," he decided.

Again he went below and came up with a spare anchor, an eighty-pound navy type chunk of ground tackle for which he had little affection. He eased this down on the floor of the cockpit, cast off the lashing on the wheel and took his seat at it.

The motorboard was racing to come close to the new course of the schooner, traveling at more speed than her slovenly appearance would indicate.

With another glance at the black clouds covering the northwest sky Redruth altered his course slightly, to approach the motorboat sooner. The squall was killing the trade wind; it meant business. Nick Redruth wanted to get his action with the other boat over; one man in a schooner with sails set is at best in no strategic position to meet a squall. The black clouds were lit balefully now and then by lightning. The sun went under, dropping Nick Redruth's spirits in spite of himself.

"It's coming up too fast to last long, but it's coming at a hellish awkward time," Redruth murmured. "Too late to take the rags off her, unless—"

He turned his eyes back to the motor boat in the hope that it might be merely a fisherman. But now, clearly enough, he could make out in the stern huge, ruddy-faced Bart Slocum. His was the only figure that showed above the gunwale of the boat.

Redruth touched his revolver, slipped the becket over a spoke of the wheel so that his hands would be free.

Slocum, now easily doing three knots to the schooner's one, brought his boat in toward the port quarter. At fifty feet he throttled down his motor. His eyes traveled rapidly over the yacht's deck, cockpit and solitary helmsman before he hailed:

"*Starlight!* How you fixed for gas?"

Every instant the motorboat was creeping nearer.

Redruth stood up. He could see now that there were men lying in the bottom of the boat—three men! He had not expected Slocum to honor him so highly.

"Down to my last gallon," Slocum's harsh voice was saying. "Can you lend me some?"

One of the men was moving slowly, with no further attempt at concealment, toward the wheel that Slocum now gripped with only one hand. The other two were straightening up and plain inside the shirt of one was outlined a sizeable automatic. Slocum's own right coat pocket bulged.

The motorboat swept alongside *Star-*

*light's* quarter, with its scarred and peeling rail menacing the side of the yacht.

"Maybe I can let you have some," Nick Redruth said. "Wait a minute."

Bart Slocum was shifting his body, getting set for the spring to his rail and then to the rail of *Starlight*. His empty hands were half closed, as if already clutching for a hold. Another fellow was reaching for a grapnel to link the two boats.

Nick Redruth picked up the eighty-pound stockless anchor. His slim hard muscles bunched. With a mighty heave he slung it over the side. The compact chunk of iron crashed down into the bottom of the motorboat as the startled men scrambled aside.

The anchor did not smash completely through the planking, but it stove in the boat. A thick column of water spurted up in her; made her a half-filled hulk.

With a rasping snarl of anger Bart Slocum leaped. He moved swiftly, with the agility of a man who knows that speed is life.

Nick Redruth was reaching for his gun. But Slocum plunged against him in reckless abandon; his huge weight overbore Redruth's leaner body and sent him staggering back. Desperately Redruth spun around, slipping Bart Slocum's clutching hands. He hit Slocum hard under the ear, stopping him. In the instant that Slocum wavered, Redruth darted out of range of those man-killing arms and leaped on to the cabin top. His fingers jerked out the revolver.

The man with the grapnel had dropped it, now he caught it up and slung it at the schooner's deck. But he had a foot on the line attached to it; the grapnel plunked into the sea.

"Back in your boat, Bart!" Redruth commanded curtly. "The game's cruder than I thought. Over the side, you!"

His swerving eyes made out that the boat, with motor misfiring, was now dropping astern. The men in her, now too far from the schooner to jump, were frantically working to plug the hole. They were out of this.

Bart Slocum was staring intently at Redruth's revolver. Suddenly he grinned.

"The one that was bunked in the food locker, huh?" he said. "You couldn't shoot craps with it."

He glanced coolly astern at his drifting boat. With no attempt at speed he reached into his own coat pocket and dragged out a forty-five automatic.

Swiftly Redruth snap-shotted at his hand. The trigger clicked on a dead cartridge—and another.

"This gun will shoot," Bart snapped. He flung a worried look at the ragged line of charging clouds. "I'm a peaceful guy; I came aboard an' borrowed the powder out o' yours two days ago."

He jerked a big hand toward the black squall. "Start gettin' sail off her, you! You're lookin' at your skipper."

With one wary eye on Redruth he bellowed down into the cabin. His voice had an anxious rasp. "Pierre! You, Martinique! Up and get the rags off her! Jump! You, too, Wright! All hands—on the prance!"

There was no answer.

STARING into the black muzzle of that heavy automatic, Nick knew despair and rebellion. You can't jump an experienced man with a gun—if that man is willing to kill. But was he? Slocum thought he was master here, with two men at his call. Would he kill ruthlessly? The automatic was aimed at Redruth's right shoulder—or so his hot brain reckoned.

Nick Redruth hurled his revolver. It thudded against Bart Slocum's leathery neck. With a queer, pained croak Bart Slocum got off a shot that burned Redruth's right arm, even as he launched himself from the cabin top. Next moment Redruth's body crashed into Slocum's; they sprawled on the cockpit floor, thrashing, against the benches.

All the muscles in Redruth's wiry body were directed against Bart Slocum's thick right arm, smothering the gun, fighting to break Slocum's gun wrist. His was the attack, a wholesouled, powerful assault, and Slocum, despite his size, was defending.

Somehow the big invader managed to clamber on to one bent leg. He heaved himself and Redruth upright; with his left fist he knocked Redruth toward the corner of the companionway. But *Starlight* heeled hard just then; Redruth was flung over the weatherboard down the companion stairs. His double clutch on Slocum's arm brought his huge enemy tumbling down with him.

It is one thing to fall a few feet with relaxed muscles and quite another to fall with tensed, straining bodies. Both men were hurt and nearly knocked out by their impact on the cabin stairs and floor. For an instant there was a lull in that savage battle.

But a greater battle was beginning just then above their ringing heads.

The thing that had made *Starlight* heel so sharply was the first puff of the approaching squall; now she heeled again, burying her rail deeply as a stiffer outrider of the squall struck at her full spread of canvas. Screaming wind tore through her rigging; the ship, with wheel in beckets, could not turn toward the wind and shake the wind from her sails.

Instead, leaning so far that the two men were thrown onto the leward bunk, she shot away on a wild course through the choppy seas. And these puffs were but the prelude to the tropic squall; the real wind was to come.

Redruth, mastering his groggy head and aching muscles a moment before Slocum, got a tighter grip on the automatic, but not in time to tear it from the thick fingers.

Slocum, though he gripped the gun, lay motionless, with ears awed by the rising scream of the wind.

"The squall!" he gasped. "It'll take the sticks—out of her—or smash her—the reefs!"

"We'll go with her—before you and Wright get her!" Redruth said fiercely. "Let go the gun if you want to live!"

Panting, Slocum strove to jerk his arm free.

"Live be damned!" he choked. "D'you want to wreck her—this schooner? Give her a chance!"

Was this a trick? There was a sort of snarling agony in Slocum's voice.

"The gun first!" Nick Redruth demanded with bitter ruthlessness. "I'm her master—I'll see her in hell before I'll let her go!"

With a curse Slocum relaxed his fingers. The automatic thumped on the bunk. Slocum clawed to his feet and flung himself at the companion stairs.

For only an instant, to grab the automatic, did Nick Redruth delay. Then he bounded up into the cockpit.

Bart Slocum was racing forward on the terrible slant of the deck, jerking out a knife. *Starlight's* life hung in the balance at that moment. Slocum slashed the jib halliard as Nick Redruth tore the lashing off the wheel.

With dizzy speed and thundering sails the schooner reeled into the wind. It was well that she obeyed so well; Redruth caught a glimpse, under the thrashing, dropping jib, of the ugly reef close ahead, pounded by wind and sea alike. He put her about, turning her stern to the reef. He gritted his teeth as he felt the force of the next gust.

Over she went, though he luffed her as best he could. It seemed to Redruth that her masterhead would spear the frothy, flattened sea. But with staunch pluck she came up a bit, plunging on with water swashing inboard along the side of her house.

Bart Slocum was back by the mainmast now, arms groping for the cleat on which the main halliard was belayed. There was no chance of slashing the line that held up that huge sail; it was a wire

rope. Redruth nodded reassurance; the wind would have swept words away. But the schooner was taking it—so far.

Redruth, a prisoner at the wheel while the mainsail was on her, saw Slocum cast loose the halliard and grab at the downhaul. The pressure of wind in the canvas kept it up; but Bart Slocum's corded body, in the slightest lull between puffs, brought it down in a tumbling flogging mass, as Redruth luffed up. Lightning stabbed around them; thunder—deafening crashes—jarred the deck under them.

Redruth sprang from the wheel to reach into the deck locker for the stops with which to secure the mainsail. The wind veered a point or two with swift malice. The heavy boom, masked in billowing canvas, whipped across the boat. Redruth was knocked into the sea. His clutching hands slipped from a precarious grip on the sail; then closed again on the downhaul trailing over the side.

Bart Slocum came jumping aft to help get the sail under control. For an instant he stopped, staring down at Redruth's helpless head and hands in the water, with only the downhaul tenuously connecting him with the schooner. Then he flattened out on deck, snarling, stretched down his long arms, gripped Redruth's hands and jerked him aboard.

"How about—fores'l an' stays'l?" Slocum roared.

"Take in the staysail!" Redruth shouted back. "She'll claw off under the fore. If it carries away—" He jerked a hopeful hand at the motor; then clambered back to the wheel.

She paid off on the port tack. Relieved of the main, she thrashed through the rising seas. With the wind veering to west and southwest the long line of reefs ceased to be a menace; she fought her way steadily on against a bobble of beam sea. The wind was terrific; any moment the foresail might blow out.

Bart Slocum secured mainsail and what remained of the jib. He came wearily aft to the cockpit. The wind lulled. The squall was passing as fast as it had come. Sudden rain in solid sheets drenched them.

Slocum's foot kicked against something. He looked down. It was his automatic, down on the cockpit floor.

Redruth tensed warily.

But Bart Slocum merely stirred the gun with his foot.

"What a lug I was not to ha' dropped an anchor on you when you were overboard," he shouted bitterly, against the roar of the rain. "It was a good trick—your anchor. But you can handle this ship, I'll say that for you."

Redruth kept his eyes on the pistol.

Slocum looked astern suddenly and stood up, searching the lifting gloom and slowing rain for his motorboat. Finally he made it out, running through a passage between two rocky islets and bound for a bit of beach on a larger island. The three hands were very busy pumping and bailing.

"Trust those lads to look out for themselves," Bart Slocum said sourly. "They were going to be my crew."

"Your crew? Was Wright—"

Bart Slocum snorted. "Wright!" he said disdainfully. "That fat lubber! He only thought he was in this play. D'you think I'd turn over *Starlight* to him?"

He jerked a hand forward. "He's been hammerin' on the hatch an' screechin' to get out ever since the first puff."

"What was the play?" Redruth demanded.

Slocum scowled but spoke:

"Wright planned that for five hundred I was to grab the schooner, strand her on a soft spot somewhere among those reefs and stick you on a rock somewhere else with a busted dinghy. We'd claim you'd wrecked her and then deserted her, and that we'd come along and got her off and salvaged her."

He nodded. "A thin yarn, but could you alone ha' made a tale about piracy on the high seas stick against all Wright's cash—when he had possession of her? Not a chance. Your yarn would

ha' been thinner than ours, he figured."

He struck the coaming a solid blow, his broad face lugubrious. "But that weren't my idea at all. I was going to grab her, dump you an' Wright on a reef so you could have nice talks together for a couple o' weeks, frame up some convincing wreckage, change her rig, head her across and down the African coast and work her around to the Pacific."

He sighed gustily.

"Like the schooner?" Nick Redruth asked.

Bart Slocum's New England blood came welling up.

"She isn't bad," he said slowly. "No, not bad."

He looked up at her towering mainmast with hungry eyes.

NICK REDRUTH struggled against an idea. Certainly Bart Slocum had no morals. But he had other things, mighty sinews, a seaman's instincts, and a love for this schooner that, Redruth suspected, might well equal his own.

"Pick up your gun," Redruth said suddenly.

Slocum stared at him; then, without a word, obeyed. He thrust it into his pocket.

"They'd have got her away from you," Redruth said, and the wave of his hand included all the land and landsmen in the world. "Legally, of course," he added.

Slocum nodded. "I guess so," he conceded. "My style ain't smooth enough."

"Just as they'll try their damnedest to get her away from me," Redruth went on. "If they can't do it through a seaman like you they'll work out something else."

The ex-pirate moved uneasily.

"Get Wright up here, will you?" Redruth requested suddenly. "But don't say a word to him."

With relief, as if the conversation were getting too personal, Bart Slocum went forward, threw the lashings off the crew hatch and opened it up.

Disheveled, wet with sweat, nursing fists sore from pounding on the hatch, Hurlburt Wright lurched aft. His deep-set eyes came out to normal in his skull at the sight of Redruth at the wheel. Slocum, a battered, dripping wreck, stood silently beside the master of *Starlight*.

Wright's popping eyes switched from one to the other and drew no comfort from either face. He gulped in air and his own face went gray.

"You two—were in this together!" he cried. "You deceived me, Slocum! You tricked me! And you, Redruth—"

He stopped but neither seaman spoke. They stared at him together.

Wright's eyes riveted suddenly upon the heavy automatic weighing down Slocum's pocket. He threw a desperate glance around the horizon.

"And now you're going to kill me!" he quavered. He pressed his shaking hand over his quivering lips. "Nobody knows I'm aboard! You're going to kill me—for the five hundred dollars I promised Slocum."

Nick Redruth remained rigid behind the wheel.

Wright's voice suddenly became soft, beguiling:

"I wouldn't do that, gentlemen; it really isn't necessary." He shook his head with anxious vigor. "I'll give you the five hundred; I have it with me, and more. I was playing square—" He caught Redruth's eye—"I mean—"

"You're a stowaway, Mr. Wright," said Nick Redruth severely. "You're in a serious position. Do you mean you are willing to pay your passage?"

"Y-Yes; that's it," Wright said eagerly. He pulled a roll of bills out of some sort of secret pocket inside the waistband of his trousers. "My passage! All perfectly regular . Five hundred—and a bit more, gentlemen. And if that isn't enough—"

"How about those supplies Wiggins

sold you—through me—for *Starlight?*" Redruth asked ironically. "Have you a receipt for them?"

"Yes, indeed, Captain," Wright assured him, bringing out a scrap of paper from an otherwise empty pocketbook. "This is it—an itemized and receipted bill—all perfectly regular. You won't have to pay for them."

Redruth laughed softly as he took it. He tapped his knife-edged nose. "I'll sell you a boat, Mr. Wright, a rowboat, and give you a man to row it—that Martinican of yours," he proposed. "The rain has killed the sea. The price is what you have, including that bill, and you can easily reach an islet such as you picked out for me.

"Perfectly regular, isn't it?"

Hurlburt Wright stared longingly at the mainland of Puerto Rico. Then he started violently at a sudden, restless movement by Bart Slocum.

"Yes! Yes!" he cried. "That will be satisfactory—perfectly. Just let me go, Captain, that's all I ask."

"You may get a few supplies together," Redruth said. "It's possible you won't be picked up for a spell."

Hurlburt Wright hurried away.

"My God!" muttered Bart Slocum, sweating with admiration. "The jams I been in tryin' to grab less than that! And he's handing it to you gladly! You're an artist, Captain, that's what you are!"

"I need a mate to help me keep *Starlight* afloat and clear of sharks and rocks," Redruth said abruptly. "A mate who knows how to obey and who will leave all decisions to me."

On Slocum's broad face an incredible hope was growing.

Redruth went on:

"A mate who can appreciate a berth in a ship like *Starlight* and" his face hardened—"who will not aspire to be her master—more than once."

"You've got him, Captain," Bart Slocum assured him solemnly. "Maybe I'm no saint, but nobody can say I don't play it straight with a man who deals 'em off the top of the pack to me."

He looked aloft at the bare mainmast, and then longingly at the wheel.

"How's she handle under that fores'l?" he asked.

Nick Redruth stood up, with one hand on the wheel.

"Take her," he said. "It's your watch, mister."

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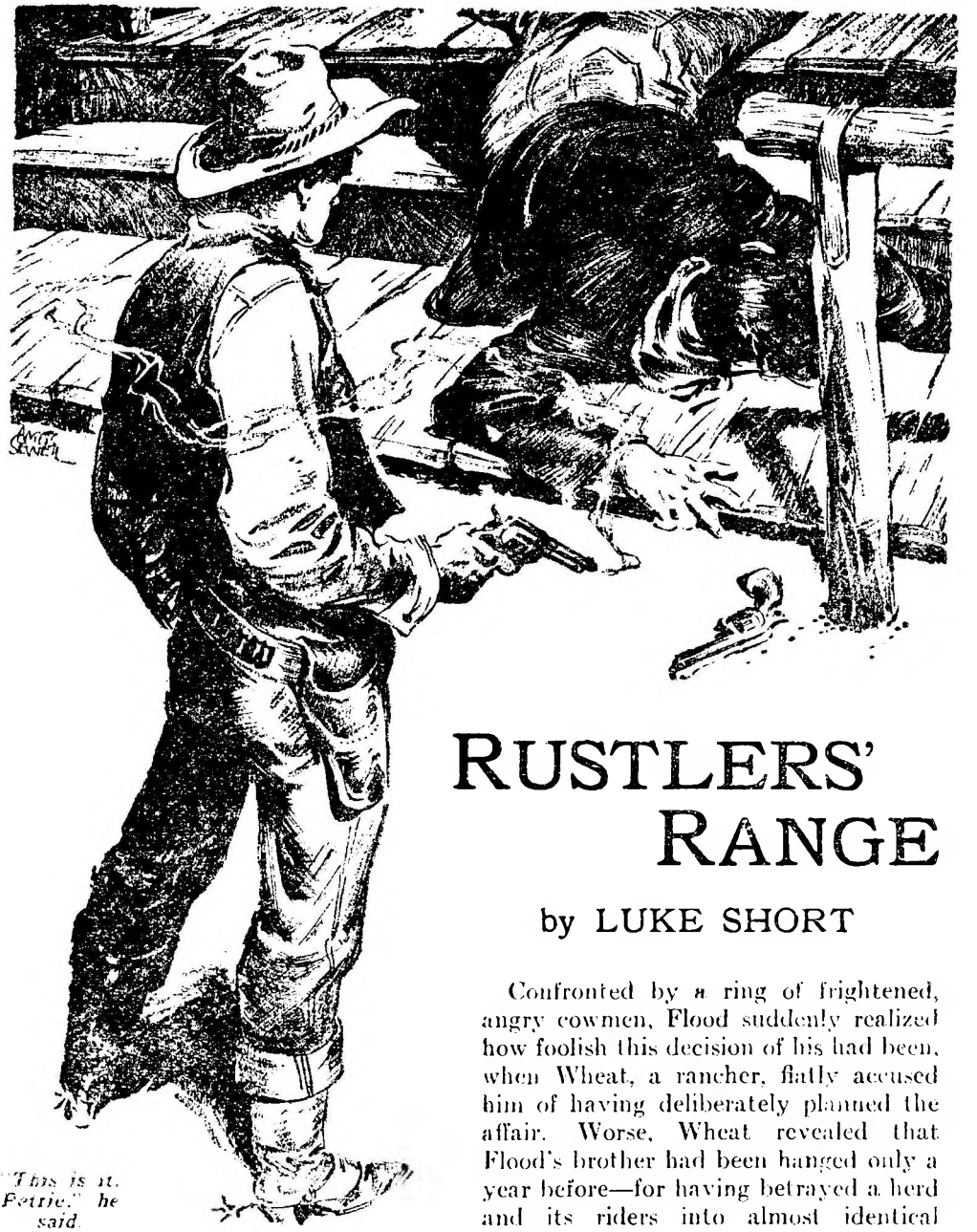


*"This is it, Pettie," he said.*

# RUSTLERS' RANGE

## by LUKE SHORT

EMPTY shell cases, half-covered tracks where men had died in the night—these were all the traces that Mark Flood, trail boss, could find of the great Shifflin herd which had been given into his charge, and which he had deployed and sent three days ahead of the main herd in order to expedite delivery.

Confronted by a ring of frightened, angry cowmen, Flood suddenly realized how foolish this decision of his had been, when Wheat, a rancher, flatly accused him of having deliberately planned the affair. Worse, Wheat revealed that Flood's brother had been hanged only a year before—for having betrayed a herd and its riders into almost identical disaster!

There was only one thing to do. Bluffing his way out, Flood escaped and took to the hills, seeking a trail which could lead him to the real culprit and clear his name. From all indications the answer to the sinister riddle was in Cleercreek, a town hidden in a nearby valley.

Cleercreek, he discovered, was in the

midst of a claw and fang, range war for the rights to the rich Bearpaw range, and it was necessary to align himself with one side or another. Knowing little of the affair, he signed on with Hand, who was fighting to the death against the rich Petrie spread.

While fighting off an attack by Petrie riders, one of them was trampled to death in the resulting stampede, and Petrie had the victim's body carried over to his own lands and "discovered", whereupon Hand was arrested, accused of the very crime Petrie had tried to commit.

But Petrie had not counted on one thing—the fact that Margot, his fiancée, would not stand by and see an innocent man framed. Warned by Flood, Margot revealed to the marshal that he had been hoaxed with false evidence. Flood convinced Margot that he was not the hired killer she had been led to believe.

Doubly marked for death now, Flood fled Clearcreek and went to Cienga, hunting the men who had beef contracts for the town. Somewhere the stolen Shiftlin beeves had to be marketed. There he had the rare luck to meet a dance-hall girl who had been friendly with his brother, and through her he made contact with the man who was a sub-chief in the rustling ring.

In the meanwhile, Margot had learned the full power of Petrie's vengeance, when her brother was murdered almost before her eyes. Realizing that, come what may, her destiny was welded with Flood's, she followed him to Cienga—only to learn that Flood had found an entrée to the chief of the rustlers—and that this well-hidden person lived in Clearcreek!

Later, perhaps, there would be a chance for happiness. But for the present the course was grim and plain. For her—flight in the night, through a hill trail studded with foes. For Flood, her lover—a return to a town where he was marked for death, and a final, ultimate showdown with the man who had killed his brother!

## CHAPTER XIX

### VENGEANCE TRAIL

IN LIFE, Breckenridge was as hard with horses as he was with men, so that in death, his horse did not ignore the trailing reins until along toward night, when he got both hungry and thirsty.

Darkness found him wandered back along the trail to the pasture between the two ridges. He fed there through the night, fretting only a little at the bit in his mouth and saddle on his back. By the next morning there was enough dew on the grass to quiet his thirst, so he continued to graze there through the morning until the heat made him thirsty. He started moving then, and was around the end of the first ridge when a rider picked him up.

The rider was one of those who had followed Coe in the stampede, and he regarded the saddled, ground-haltered horse with some reflection. He knew it was Breck's horse. The trailing reins had been scarred and cut, and were wet with grass stain. A few inches of one rein had been tromped off, all of which indicated that the horse had been riderless for some time.

Like many of his companions, this man, who had joined Coe out of spite and bravado, had been a little appalled at what he had helped do. At the coming of the Wagon Hammer riders, these men had scattered and slunk home, and were wondering now, with a kind of craven fear, if their names were known. This man had been to Clearcreek most of the day, just listening to talk. With much patience, he had discovered that the names of the men with Coe were not known. He was still uneasy, however, so when he saw Breck's horse, he had an idea.

What could be more indicative of a

man with an open nature and nothing to hide than to ride over to the Wagon Hammer with this horse? He would do it. In his eagerness, not once did he pause to wonder what had happened to Breckenridge.

As he expected, most of the Wagon Hammer riders were in. The house itself was a two-story log affair at the foot of a long grassy slope, so that he was seen long before he reached it. A cluster of scrub oak fringed the stream by the house, while the corrals and outbuildings lay on the other side of the place. An addition of newly-peeled logs joined the house on the corral side, and the man guessed this was the new office he heard Petrie had added to the house.

A half dozen men walked out from the bunkhouse to meet him, and he handed over Breckenridge's horse to them with the observation that he looked like he needed water.

Petrie came out of the office now and walked over to him.

"Where'd you find him?" Petrie asked.

The man told him. "It's Breck's pony, ain't it?"

Petrie nodded curtly, regarding the pony with a kind of irritable curiosity. His face was surly, unshaven, and the bandage he wore on his cheek was dirty. His hair was mussed, his eyes red and sleepy, and his usual confidence had turned into a sultry arrogance of manner. There was not a mark on his face from his battle with Flood.

"You didn't see Breck, did you?"

The man shook his head. Petrie told four of his men to saddle up, and then he addressed the man again. "Show me the spot where you picked him up, will you?"

The rider paused to consider before he answered, for he wanted it to appear as if he were making something of a concession with his time. Then he agreed, and did not wonder at the fact that he got no thanks for it. Along with Petrie and four riders, he returned to where he had picked up the horse. When the direction from which Breck's horse had come was established, it was evident that he had wandered down this long valley. Once in the pasture between the two ridges, Petrie directed one man to go up the trail for signs, the others to wait until he returned. As soon as the Wagon Hammer hand had reached the trail, he turned and rode back with the announcement that the horse had traveled from that direction, since the dragging reins had left their mark in the dust.

Ten minutes later, they rode onto Breck's body. All dismounted except Petrie, who sat his horse with a faint look of disgust on his face. The verdict of the men examining Breck's body was so obvious that he smiled sardonically.

"Shot in the chest, eh?" he murmured. "All right, who shot him?"

None of the men said anything, and Petrie looked around him with careless indifference at the hills. Then he looked at them again and said sharply: "Don't blot those tracks. Look around you."

He didn't comment when one of the men announced that there were tracks going west, made about the same time as those of Breck's horse.

"That wouldn't be you, then?" Petrie said to the man who had brought in the horse. He only laughed at the man's discomfort and said to his men: "Two of you go home for a wagon. I'm going into town."

HE RODE slowly back to the pasture, crossed the ridge and angled down the hillside past the cemetery. On the ride, he rolled a half dozen cigarettes and threw them away as soon as he had taken a few puffs. His every gesture was marked with a taut, savage disgust.

Only at the edge of town did he remember that nobody was with him, and then he knew why his men had looked so strangely at him when he announced where he was going. He went on anyway. He was no coward.

He saw Honeywell on the street, and Sam waved glumly to him without giving him much notice. At the bank, a narrow little cubbyhole with a cracked window, he dismounted and entered.

"How much cash—gold—have you got on hand?" he asked the single clerk, an obsequious little man in shirt sleeves.

"I'd have to count it, Mr. Petrie."

"Go ahead."

"Uh—are you thinking of making a large withdrawal?"

"Why do you think I asked?" Petrie inquired surlily.

"Yes, sir."

He smoked two cigarettes while the clerk went back to the small safe in the rear and busied himself.

When the clerk returned, he said: "A little over six thousand in currency."

"Give me five of it," Petrie said. "Put it in canvas sacks."

"I'm afraid I'll have to get Mr. Sewell's consent to that," the clerk said apologetically. "That will leave us pretty short, Mr. Petrie."

"Go get it, then," Petrie said shortly.

He stepped out and walked down to Sewell's store, the clerk following a few steps behind him. He paid no attention when the clerk walked through the store and up the stairs to Sewell's office. At the counter he asked for saddlebags and paid for them. By this time Sewell had come down the stairs and approached him.

Petrie said without turning to the banker: "I'm not fooling, Frank. I want five thousand cash tonight."

Sewell was the counterpart of his clerk, only a score of years older.

"But what if this starts a run, Petrie? We can't handle it."

Petrie said: "I've got more than twice that amount in your bank, Frank. I want it now."

"But think what will happen."

Petrie turned on him, eyes blazing. "What kind of damn do I give what happens! It's my money and I want it. If I don't get it, I'll demand all of it. Take your choice."

Sewell backed off and conferred with the clerk, who went out again.

When Petrie returned to the bank, the clerk was filling two canvas sacks with gold pieces. Finished, he gave them to Petrie with a slip to sign. He watched Petrie put the gold in the saddlebags and walk out, and he cursed feebly, but none the less bitterly, at his back.

PETRIE adjusted the saddlebags, and this time rode out of town west and up the hill. His pace was leisurely. Once, just as it was getting dusk, he stopped and dismounted and tied the drawstrings tighter on one of the sacks, so that the money would not rattle. He also stuffed the saddlebags full of grass, which served as a packing for the canvas sacks.

It was after dark when he reached Hartley's. Hartley stood in the door of his shack with a lantern, and he said not a word when Petrie pulled up his horse.

"Going to ask me in, Phil?" Petrie inquired dryly.

"Get down."

Petrie dismounted and left his horse ground-haltered and entered the cabin. He threw himself down in a chair while Hartley set the lamp on the table.

"I'm looking for Emory," Petrie said dully, rubbing a hand over his face.

"I'm not in this, Loosh. Don't look for him here," Hartley said flatly, and added: "You alone?"

Petrie nodded.

"I found Breck dead today," he said calmly.

Hartley didn't speak for a moment, then observed: "You might of expected that, considerin'."

"I know," Petrie said wearily. "I'm whipped, Phil. Range cleaned, men dead, and what have I got out of it?"

"Coe dead, Morgan dead, young Curtin dead—I dunno whether that's part of this or not, but he's dead—Breck

dead, Kenney dead and seven others over on your side of the range. That's what you got out of it," Hartley said implacably.

Petrie waved a hand in protest. "I know. I know. I want to get word to Hand to call this off. Where is he?"

"I don't know," Hartley said. "I don't even want to know."

"I thought that's the way it would be. That's why I want to talk to Emory. Where's he?"

"Up at the Brush creek line camp, I reckon."

"How can I get word to him? If I rode up there I'd get cut to doll rags before I could open my mouth."

Hartley regarded him with cautious speculation. "This don't sound much like you, Loosh."

Petrie smiled wryly. He spread one of his hands out on the table and gazed at it abstractedly.

"This is a weary range, Phil," he said slowly. "Bled out. All I ever owned I've lost. I want to call it off while I've still got a roof over me."

"What about that Silver Creek range?"

Petrie looked up at him and smiled wryly. "You don't have any use for grass if you haven't got the cattle to eat it, do you?"

Hartley considered him a minute; then he said: "I'll take you up to Emory. Want to eat first?"

"I couldn't."

Hartley went out to the corral, saddled his horses, and they rode off in the night toward the mountains. It was a silent ride. They took the same route Flood and Hand had taken the first night.

When they were in sight of the line shack, Hartley said: "You better hang back till I tell them about this."

"All right. I don't know who's there, Phil. If Hand is, I want to talk to him alone. If he isn't there and Emory is, I want to talk to him alone. Or Flood. Only if Flood is there, I want you to be with me."

"Don't trust him, eh?"

"He rides a little to proud to suit me. I'd kill him, sick as I am."

"Loosh, you heave that gun of yours off," Hartley warned him.

"I will."

When Hartley rode ahead, Petrie sat his horse in quiet patience. He was thinking of what he was going to tell Emory, and he smiled cynically when he thought of it. Hartley's halloo came to him in a minute and he unstrapped his gunbelt and slung it over the horn, then rode on to the shack.

Dismounting some distance from it, he tied his horse to a branch of a pinon tree and walked on.

Hartley was standing in the door, and he looked to see if Petrie had taken his gun off; then he stepped aside.

EMORY and Nosey were standing by the table, on which a lantern burned. They were unshaven, tired, and they regarded Petrie with a surly truculence.

"Hand isn't here?" Petrie said to Hartley.

Nosey laughed unpleasantly, nothing more.

"Then I'll have to do business with you," Petrie said to Emory. Hand's foreman nodded, but his eyes were alert now, wary. To Hartley, Petrie said: "I want to talk to him alone. You can search me for a gun or knife."

"I'll take your word for it," Hartley said.

"I won't," Nosey put in. He walked over to Petrie and slapped his pockets, his shirt, even looked in the tops of his boots. Petrie submitted to it, a quiet smile on his face, but when Nosey was finished he said to Hartley: "Maybe you better do the same to Emory."

Hartley's search of Emory revealed nothing except a pocket knife, which he kept. Then he said: "Come on, Nosey."

Nosey said: "I hear one yeep in here, Petrie, and I won't ask questions." He picked up a carbine standing in the cor-

ner and went out, followed by Hartley, who closed the door behind him.

Petrie was immediately at his ease. He rolled a smoke and offered his sack to Emory, who refused it, then motioned him to a chair. "Sit down, Wes. This will take some time."

They both drew chairs up to the table, Emory with a kind of stiff and hostile suspicion. There was a look of utter discouragement in his lean face, and he moved listlessly. In his dark eyes, however, lurked a hint of curiosity. His clothes were untidy and soiled, as if he had slept in them, and he needed a shave. He toyed with a match, revolving it in his fingers and watching Petrie.

Finally, after an uncomfortable silence, Emory said: "Get it over with."

"Get what over?"

"Hartley said you wanted to see Ben. He said you wanted to call this fight off."

"What do you think?" Petrie asked carelessly.

Emory said slowly: "I don't think you meant it."

Petrie's laugh was easy, unforced, as he leaned both arms on the table. "What are you going to do now, Wes, since you've lost your job?"

"I didn't know I'd lost it," Emory replied carefully.

Petrie shruggged. "Hand is wanted for murder. He's through in this country, after what he put Coe up to. Do you think even if that murder charge was dropped that Hand would dare come back to the Bar Stirrup and run it?"

"Flood did that," Emory said. "You hate Ben, Petrie, but you know he wasn't to blame for that."

"Maybe I do," Petrie said, "but you'll have a hard time making the widows and families and friends and relatives of those seven dead men believe that." When Emory said nothing, Petrie added: "Hand it through, Emory. He won't live a week if he comes back here. He'll stand about a month of this hiding out, and then maybe he'll try to come back. He'll face a murder charge and a lynching—if I have to breed the lynching myself. Understand that?"

"I understood it long ago," Emory sneered.

Petrie nodded and smiled. "All right, there's one thing for Hand to do. He'll have you get rid of his land and stock and he'll pull out. Where'll you be then?"

"I know cattle. I can find work."

"Exactly," Petrie said. He said in a pleasant voice: "Did you hear that Breck was bushwhacked?"

The surprise in Emory's face was genuine, but he did not speak for a moment. He regarded Petrie suspiciously, then shook his head. "No use, Petrie. I won't work for the Wagon Hammer, if that's what you're offering me."

"I thought not," Petrie said softly. "Who killed Breck, Emory?"

"I don't know. If I'd been given the chance, I would have."

"His gun was still in its holster. Whoever shot him didn't give him a warning or a chance. They just shot him."

"How much of a chance did you give Morgan when you rode him down?" Emory countered grimly.

"He had a gun. He knew his risk. He shot at us, and we got him. It was a killing, but it was an open one, almost necessary."

"Maybe Breck's killing was necessary. I never knew you to draw the line between a murder and a fight until now, Petrie."

"Hand killed him," Petrie said bluntly, slowly, smiling a little. "There was somebody riding with Breck when it happened, so Hand got out in a hurry. He had to. We don't know the man that was riding with Breck, and we never will, because that man is probably afraid to give himself up and lay himself open to the charge of murder. He ran. He didn't even bother to look for Breck's killer. He probably pulled off into cover

when he saw Breck blown out of the saddle, and then he ran because he was afraid he'd get the same thing. And after he'd run a little ways, he probably got to thinking that he'd better run some more and keep out of this. That's logical, isn't it?"

Emory said: "I don't think Ben killed him."

"Hand was in a sort of hurry, too," Petrie went on, ignoring him. "But he wasn't in such a hurry that he forgot to leave something behind him that would throw the blame on another man."

"How did you know it was Hand?" Emory said quickly.

"A man in a hurry, a scared man, is apt to leave tracks—his own and his horse's. Hand did. But he left something else, I say."

"What?"

Petrie paused now, so that what he was about to say would have more effect. He pursed his lips, brushed his hand slowly over the table top, watching Emory. Then he said pleasantly, slowly, leaning forward: "A bone-handled skinning knife, Wes. Maybe you remember it. The handle is made of elk-horn that was shaped by a rasp, a blacksmith's rasp. Maybe you remember the day it was done at Dave Wolff's. If you don't I can think of six or eight men who watched Dave shape it and fit it to the steel."

EMORY half rose out of his chair and his tired face came to life. "That's a damned lie! That's my knife, all right, but Ben Hand would never leave it there to put the blame on me! I don't know much about men, but I know Ben wouldn't do that!"

Petrie shrugged. "It could have slipped out of the sheath when he hurried away. I don't think so, though."

"Where is the knife?" Emroy asked suddenly.

Petrie smiled sardonically. "Do you think I'm damn fool enough to bring it with me, so you could murder me for it? No, that knife is safe. It will get me what I want."

Emory sat down, breathing hard, and his eyes had narrowed. "I left that knife at the Bar stirrup days ago, before it was burned. Whoever burned the house got the knife for you to use at a time like this. Isn't that it?"

"That is not it," Petrie said flatly. "You can think that if you want, Emory. I don't care. You can believe Hand planted that knife there to throw the blame on you, like I know he did, or you can think we're trying to put Breck's murder onto you. You can believe either way. I don't care. The point is, we've got the knife. Can you understand that?"

Emory's eyes were harried now. He said softly: "What is it you want?"

"Ah," Petrie said, sitting erect. "That's more like it. You'll listen to reason now, eh?"

"What is it you want?"

Petrie slouched down comfortably and stared at Emory, a look of mild curiosity on his face. "The way I see it, Emory, there's nothing left here for you. You've risked your neck for Ben Hand and he double-crossed you by putting a murder on your head. He—"

"I say he didn't!" Emory said, pounding the table.

Petrie drawled: "You poor damn fool. Why would Hand be carrying a skinning knife? What was he going to kill and skin? He comes to you every day for his food. He isn't in the mountains so he could hunt—or is he?"

Emory thought a minute.

"No," he said.

"Then why would he have your knife if he wasn't planning to leave it by Breck—or by me, when he murdered us?" When Emory said nothing, Petrie said: "He planned to come back, Wes. He planned to kill me and Breck, and throw the blame for it on you, just like he ordered Coe to kill my friends and

stampede my cattle and threw the blame on Flood. He'll stand on your necks to come back here and be top of the heap."

"What is it you want?" Emory said warily.

Again Petrie smiled. "I'll begin again. I said there was nothing left for you here, after this. How would you like to ride out of this country with enough gold to buy yourself a neat little outfit and stock it and be independent the rest of your life?"

Emory said slowly: "Who wouldn't? But what's the rest of it?"

"The rest of it," Petrie said casually, "is that you tell me where Ben Hand is now." Before Emory could answer, Petrie said sharply: "He crossed you. He sold you out so he could come back here and king it over this range. He gave Coe orders to kill innocent men and blamed it on Flood. He's dirty and crooked and cunning as hell, Wes. God knows, you've been loyal enough to him. You don't owe him more. You've fought his fights and bled for him and now this war is on your shoulders."

And now he pointed a finger at Emory and said quietly: "If you don't want to tell, Wes, that's all right with me. I'll turn in the knife to Mayhew, and I'll bring witnesses to swear where I found it. Then everything will happen like Ben Hand wants it to. You'll hang and he'll start gunning for me. He'll likely do to Nosey or Hartley what he did to you. He'll murder me and he'll hang it on them. And that's what your loyalty will get you."

EMORY was listening, his mouth a bloodless line. Petrie said easily: "Tell me where he is and you ride out of here a rich man. Don't tell me, and you'll swing. And while you are swinging, you'll remember that you are doing it so Ben Hand goes free."

Emory got up and walked over to a bunk and sat on it, his face in hands. Suddenly he stood up and walked over to the table and said in a choked voice: "I don't think you've got the knife, Petrie."

"Have you got it?" Petrie countered swiftly.

"No. I told you where I left it. But I think you are bluffing."

Petrie said softly, sardonically: "You don't think it enough to risk your neck on it, do you?"

Emory's gaze was beaten down. He dropped into his chair and sat there peacefully, staring at the table top. Presently he said: "If I only knew you had it. If I could only believe you."

Petrie stood up. "All right, Wes. If I've got to hang you to prove I have the knife, I'll do it. And when you are in jail, just wait for Hand to come around and tell how the knife got there by Breck. Just wait."

Emory stood up, his face haggard. "For God's sake, sit down, Loosh. Don't go!"

Petrie sat down carelessly. "There's a limit to loyalty, Wes. Do you have to be killed to find that out?"

Emory rubbed a hand over his face and stared at Petrie.

"How much money have you here?"

"Five thousand dollars. You'll admit that's pretty generous."

Emory said in a husky voice: "I've got to take a lot for granted, Petrie. I don't know whether Breck is dead. I—"

"Ask Hartley," Petrie put in. "Ask Mayhew. Ask any Wagon Hammer man."

"All right, but I don't know if Ben's tracks were near Breck. I—"

"I'll show you his tracks. Who else would kill Breck if Hand didn't? You didn't. Nosey didn't. Flood wouldn't. He's through with this row. Would your friends? No, not without Hand to back them up, and he's gone."

"All right. But I haven't seen the knife—"

"And you won't. Not until Mayhew shows it to you when he arrests you."

*"You'll get half now—the rest after it's done."*

Emory gave up. He sat down and stared vacantly at Petrie and Petrie was quick to take advantage. His tone was businesslike now.

"I can show you the knife and the tracks if you like. We'll ride down now and see them. But if I do that, you'll get only twenty-five hundred dollars from me."

"Why only half?" Emory asked.

"Because Nosey might follow us, or Hartley. He'd think it would look queer. He might warn Hand to change his hideout, and all this would be wasted. If you take me there now, the five thousand is yours."

He was counting on Emory's greed, and he counted rightly, for he had won and he knew it.

Emory said wretchedly. "A man has got to live, hasn't he? He can't trust anything in this world but money."

Petrie said nothing.

"All right," Emory said wearily, rising. "Let's go."

Petrie rose quickly. "Call Nosey in here and tell him you are taking me to Hand for a parley. Insist that you go alone. Tell him you aren't sure of me yet, and that you want a rifle. Tell him he's got to stay here in case this is just a trick to draw you away while I raid the

place and your cattle too. Tell him to convince Hartley he must stay too."

"You've thought this all out, haven't you?" Emory said, quietly bitter.

"I'm a careful man," Petrie said grimly.

Without another word, Emory walked to the door and stepped outside. Petrie heard him conferring with Nosey. Presently, he came to the door.

"I'm ready," he said.

As they stepped outside, Hartley's quiet voice said to Petrie: "This is one thing you'll never regret, Loosh. Go through with it, no matter what it costs you."

"It's costing me plenty," Petrie said dryly, then, as if he did not wish to be misunderstood, he said: "I've learned a lesson, Phil.

WHEN they had ridden away south from the cabin Emory pulled his horse up and said: "Let's see the money."

Petrie pulled up too, and his voice was perfectly sure, perfectly calm as he told him: "You'll get half now. You'll tell me the place where Hand is hiding too. Then you'll get the rest after it's done."

"I'll not help kill him!" Emory said hotly, and his voice was choked with shame.

"No. I'll do that. Tell me where he is."

"Damn you! Damn you!" Emory cursed miserably, impotently.

"The place." Petrie reminded him coldly.

Emory sighed shutteringly. "You remember that sandstone outcrop on the mesa wall on the north side of the Silver Creek range?"

"The red or brown sandstone?"

"The red."

"All right."

"There's a big cave back in the stuff. Ever been back in it?"

"Twice, I think."

"Do you know where that pinnacle rock is that looks like a big Indian drum?"

"Yes."

"The cave is half way up the wall closest that rock, about a hundred yards north."

Without commenting, Petrie turned around and took one sack of gold from the saddlebag and handed it to Emory. He watched, a sardonic smile on his lean face, while Emory struck a match in haste and fumbled at the drawstring of the sack.

The match went out and Emory cursed and then struck another. Holding it and the sack in one hand against the saddlehorn, he rammed his hand deep into the gold coins. He drew a long, shuddering breath then and stilled his fingers.

"Wait till I tie this," he mumbled.

Petrie said nothing, waiting. Emory carried the sack now, and no matter how he held it, the coins jingled faintly with the motion of the horse. They had ridden for perhaps a half hour when Emory pulled up and said viciously: "Can't I stop that damned noise?"

Petrie chuckled. "Put it in my bags, and stuff them with grass."

Emory only spurred his horse and rode on ahead. Petrie knew something was brewing, and he had an idea what it was, but he kept silent. When they reached the top of the mesa and were in open country, Emory dropped back beside him. The coins were still jingling faintly.

"When did Hand kill Breck?" Emory asked.

Petrie thought a moment and said carelessly: "The tracks showed about yesterday afternoon."

"Are you sure about that?" Emory asked in a tight voice.

Petrie's hand dropped to his gun, and he sneaked it out of the holster, holding it along his pony's flank.

"Yes, why?"

Emory stopped now . . . "Then it's a

damned lie! I spent all yesterday afternoon with Ben!"

Petrie raised his gun and shot twice. At that distance, even in the night, he could not have missed. The only sound he got on the backwash of the shot was the grunt Emory gave as his body hit the ground.

Petrie edged his horse close to Emory's, which had shied, and seized the bridle. Immediately the pony became docile and Petrie dismounted. It took very little time to untie Emory's slicker from behind the cantle and spread it over Emory's saddle seat. Then Petrie went over to Emory, struck a match and observed him for a short moment.

Satisfied, he picked up the bag of coins and put them in his saddlebag again, stuffing it with grass to kill any noise. Then he went over to Emory, picked him up and slung him face down across his saddle, and tied him there with his own lariat. The load neatly in place, he struck several matches in the process of getting the slicker pulled over every part of the saddle, so that the blood would not stain the leather.

He mounted then, and rode off, leading Emory's horse.

BY THE time he had ridden down the mesa on its far side and reached the outcrop of red sandstone, he had a reasonable recollection of this place. He left Emory's horse a few yards into the small badlands, dismounted himself and took his boots off.

Then he walked on ahead for perhaps a quarter of a mile, until he found the pinnacle rock which loomed blackly against the high stars. Now he was more careful, but just as sure. He made a thorough reconnoiter of the canyon wall for a hundred and fifty yards north, and found only one place where the talus under the wall would allow a man to climb its steep side. By a single process of deduction, he knew this was the only place the cave could be, since it was the only place a man could climb up.

He climbed, a foot at a time, slowly, cautiously, with infinite patience. He was mildly gratified when he found the talus level off about forty feet up from the canyon floor, and he judged he was at the mouth of the cave.

Now he rose, and moved almost carelessly, but slowly still, since he often stopped to listen. He did not think it strange that there was no thumping of his heart to fill the night with fear and sound. Presently he picked up the sound of breathing. Moving toward it, he shifted his six-gun to his left hand, while he reached in his right pants pocket for matches. When he had them, he shifted the gun back to his right hand, took two matches in his left hand and reached above his head for the cave roof. It was low, barely clearing his head.

When the breathing was almost at his feet, he struck the matches on the roof. In their flare, he saw Hand lying on his back on the cave floor, almost at his feet.

Petrie cocked his gun and shot once, carefully, expertly, and then the light died. He struck two more, barely glancing at Hand, instead searching the cave. He found a neat stack of wood along one wall and he built up a roaring fire at the mouth of the cave, where Hand's fire had been.

And now he left Hand and went back to the horses and brought them both up to the foot of the talus. This next job had to be done carefully, so he worked slowly, sweating a little as he removed Emory from the saddle, cradled him in his arms and struggled up the slope with him. He had remembered to put on his boots again, but even with the aid of their digging heels he had to rest twice before he reached the cave with his burden. Pausing to get his breath, he did not put Emory down until he searched out a likely place at the mouth of the cave. Then he laid him

down there on his side, took Emory's gun, shot twice at the sky, and wrapped the already stiffening fingers around the butt of it.

This done, he went over to Hand, raised him, dragged him two feet off his blanket and laid him on his face. Hand's gun he shot three times at the sky, then put carefully in Hand's hand.

All this was easy, he reflected, sweating from the exertion. Now he must be more careful. Taking a burning brand from the fire, he went down to Emory's horse. Removing the bloody slicker, he studied the saddle. Only the right stirrup had blood on it, and this he peeled off with his knife, rubbing dust on the place to darken it and make it look natural. Then, with the aid of the burning brand, he considered the ground. It was gravelly, so that tracks would not show. Satisfied, he took the slicker up to the cave, threw it on the fire, and prodded it until it had burned to ashes. He studied the footprints on the floor of the cave, and decided they would pass. Taking the blanket, he pulled it over Hand, placing the bloody spot over the red blot on Hand's back.

Lastly, he took another brand and went down the slope, this time caving in the prints of his stockinged feet and the deep prints of his heels. He mussed up the sand considerably, gouging it deeply as he came down.

Then he mounted, took the reins of Emory's horse and rode out the way he had come. Where he had first left the horses, he stopped, and without dismounting, lighted a match and leaned over in the saddle, studying the ground. It, too, was gravelly. There were several pebbles covered with blood where Emory's horse had stood. He leaned down and picked these up carefully and held them in his hand while he rode on.

When he reached the grass, he threw the pebbles away, then made for the creek, although it was out of his way. Reaching it, he led his horse and Emory's through it several times. This was to wash off the blood on one hind fetlock of Emory's pony. Finished, he struck off in the direction of Clearcreek at a smart trot.

He reached it well after daylight, pausing only once, and then only long enough to cache the two sacks of gold in a place where he could find them again.

IN TOWN, he rode straight to the sheriff's office. Honeywell was in and Petrie greeted him curtly.

"I've just killed Hand and Emory," he announced pleasantly. "I thought you and Mayhew ought to know."

Honeywell's expression was sad, shrewd, placid, and it did not change when he heard the news.

"Sit down," he said, indicating the other chair. Petrie sat down, and Sem said: "How'd it happen?"

Petrie went back to the finding of Breck's body, and his conviction that this war must stop. He told of going to Hartley, and Hartley taking him to the line camp. Emory, he said, offered to take him to Hand. They went to the red sandstone outcrop, up to the cave. Instead of hallooing as any normal man would, Emory merely started up the talus to the cave. Petrie thought this was funny, but he supposed it was a prearranged way of coming in. At the mouth of the cave, Emory spoke to Hand, who evidently was asleep. Hand grunted. Emory announced that Petrie was here to parley. Then all hell broke loose. Hand started shooting, and then Emory, panicked by his boss, started shooting also at Petrie. Petrie did the only thing he could. He shot once at Hand, then turned his fire on Emory because he was closer and more dangerous. When it was over, he found he had killed Hand on the first lucky shot, and of course, Emory too. It was self defense. Hartley could testify to his good intentions, just as Nosey could. Hand's damned bull-headedness had got him

and his foreman killed. Now what did Sam think of that?

Sam only said: "Well, that ends the war, don't it?"

"But not the way I wanted it to end," Petrie said glumly. "I had enough of this butchery, Sam. I didn't love Hand any the better for it, but at least I came to my senses. I was willing to make concessions, because I had to." He spread his hands expressively, then let them fall. "Then this had to happen."

"It's tough," Sam said sadly, and for a moment Petrie wondered if Sam was mocking him.

"I did the best I could," Petrie said wearily. "If only Hand wasn't such a stubborn man."

Sam said nothing, only watched him.

"Well, here I am," Petrie said. "I don't know what you aim to do with me."

Sam said: "I can tell you better later." He rose with a grunt and hitched up his pants.

"Going to lock me up, Sam?" Petrie asked, without much interest.

"I reckon not. I know where to find you if I want you."

"I'll be around. I'll answer any questions you want me to."

"I know that," Sam said, a little grimly. "You go get some sleep. I'll pick up Max and we'll ride out and take a look."

"I didn't touch a thing," Petrie said. "I knew you'd want to see it."

"I reckon you did," Sam said dryly, stepping out the door.

Petrie watched him go, then rose and stood in the door. It was a beautiful morning, he noticed, clear, with a cool wind dusting the streets and making tiny dust devils in the road. The kind of a morning that gives a man an appetite, he thought, as he stepped out the door and headed for the café.

## CHAPTER XX

### ESCAPE

ON THE street, Flood paused before a darkened storefront, knowing that what he did next would carry a risk with it that he must minimize as much as possible. But balanced against that, and weighing stronger in his mind, was the safety of Margot. If all his plans must go overboard in making certain of that one thing, then they must go.

He knew it would be unsafe, as well as unwise, to let Klaus and these men think he had any connection with Margot. And yet he must get her and Teresa out of town, and safely. To do it, he must get her horse at the feed stable, but this would be the first place Klaus' men would watch. So be it. Let them watch.

It was still raining softly as he crossed the street and walked down to the stable. He paused in the wide door to wait for the night man, whose lantern he had seen moving in the office window.

When the man came out, Flood asked for his horse, tendering money to pay for it. He gave the man one coin, then held out another, saying:

"Was there a woman, young, light-haired, who left a horse here tonight?"

"A sorrel, branded Waggon Hammer?"

"I wouldn't know," Flood said, giving him the coin. "If you are sure that is the horse, take him up to the hotel. She stopped me in the lobby and asked to have her horse brought up. She said you'd know."

The man, a stolid, slow-moving man of fifty or so, looked at the coin speculatively.

"When does she want it?"

"She didn't say. She said to tie him out front."

"Don't she know it's rainin'?" the man asked quietly. "Even saloon bums don't leave their ponies stand out in this."

"That's what she said," Flood replied. He started to walk down the centerway, then paused. "Isn't there some shelter back of the hotel you could put the horse under, then leave word at the desk?"

"I'll do that," the man said. "There's a shed back of the place."

Margot's horse was in the stall next to Flood's gray, and Flood loafed around until the night man had finished with the sorrel and ridden out to deliver it. Then Flood rode out into the rain and down the main street. His pace was slow, casual. And then ahead of him, in front of the marshal's office, he saw a half dozen men mount and ride south. He swung into the hitchrack in front of the Bonanza, went in for a drink, and came out again soon. He reckoned these men had had time enough to clear out of town by now, and the stable men to deliver Margot's horse. It was as Teresa had predicted: Klaus and Brothers were taking care to guard the town and see she did not leave.

When he mounted again, he rode north, and when he came to a dark alley between two unlighted buildings, he turned into it. It opened out onto the back lots of the buildings fronting the street, among which was the hotel. He found Margot's horse along with three others under a long, open-sided shed behind the hotel.

Satisfied, he set about his business. He rode north again now, keeping to the rear of the buildings until they thinned out and he was free of them and the town. He could not guess where Klaus' men would be on this side of town, so he swung over through the rock and brush to the road.

Once he looked back, and was pleased to see that the lights of Cienga were so dim that nothing could be seen in silhouette against them. Then he rode on, wary, waiting, his gray in an easy trot.

He was neither surprised nor unready, then, when, a little farther on, a voice called out of the night beside the trail: "Pull up there!"

A match flared to light a lantern, but Flood was quick. He shot once, and the man holding the match dropped it. Then he spurred his gray, leaning down across his neck, and reined him off the road. Approaching the spot where the man who had the lantern was, he swerved his horse, crashed through the brush. Some one shot, cursing, and plunged through the brush, and then there were more shots, all wild, all guesses, all directed by the sound of his horse. And now he yanked his horse back to the road and continued up it, urging all the speed from his horse that he could get. A half mile on, he paused and listened. He could hear nothing, but he knew they would come. Now he dismounted and led his horse carefully off the road, picking his slow and sodden way through the brush and boulders until the sound of horses approaching stopped him. He paused and stroked the neck of his horse, waiting.

He heard them approaching, an increasing calmness settling over him. His horse was blowing, but that would be lost in the racket they made. And through the rain, riding on it, it seemed, they drew even with him in a splashing, sucking, slogging wave, which held a moment, and then died into slow-fading silence and gave way to the insistent murmur of the rain. Three of them, he guessed.

HE RODE back to town, through the back lots, to the shed at the rear of the hotel. Walking through the long corridor, he sat down in the lobby, where he could see the street. He could only guess at the time he would have to wait if he had been successful. But this time came and passed, but still he sat, wondering. Then, as he was about to abandon his chair, a half dozen horsemen rode up from the south and pulled up at

the marshal's office. They had a few words with a man from the office whom Flood could not see, then they rode on, north.

Flood waited a few moments, then went upstairs, nodding pleasantly to the desk man.

Margot and Teresa were dressed and waiting. While Flood was gone, Margot had stepped out and bought a slicker for Teresa. They looked at him expectantly, and he said: "Let's try it."

He told them to give him two minutes, then to go down the back way to the shed at the rear of the building.

Margot said: "Will it work, Mark?"

"If you can find your way up the mountain in this rain, it will." And he smiled, wondering if she suspected how little he knew if it would succeed or fail.

He left then, and went down the back stairs himself. Out in the rain again, he knew he must find a horse for Margot, and he knew where he would go. To buy one would leave a trail for Klaus to follow. Then he must take one. Across these back lots in the rear of the assay office, he had seen a saddled horse in a shed. He went back to it, now. The horse was dry, the saddle and bridle blankets thrown over the manger.

Flood lighted a match and considered the horse, a tough, stocky roan with a deep chest and short legs. The saddle he only glanced at. It was old and worn. Then he saddled up the roan, left enough money on the manger to pay for the horse and saddle, and led it back to the hotel.

*He could hear nothing, but he knew they would come.*

Teresa and Margot were waiting. They mounted and rode off. Flood in the lead. He still clung to the back lots, but this time he rode south. At this edge of town, they were forced to the road by the deep jut of rock that narrowed the canyon at this place until only the road and the river could knife by it. This was where they would meet trouble, and Flood ordered them to stop while he rode ahead.

But he went unchallenged past the rock. And only now did he realize that

he had played in luck, and that the thin and tenuous probability of these men believing his ruse had been stronger than he had reckoned.

The three of them passed the rock; once past it, they hurried. The rain held on, and the night was black and thick, so that Flood knew the finding of the trail up the mountainside would take a long and weary search. He tried to recall all the landmarks near the place where the trail joined the road, and he could, but they were useless if they could not be seen. He did remember a greasy, mucky pot-hole in the road that was less than a minute's ride from the trail. He found it now, filled with a foot of water. And from there, he found the trail with no trouble at all.

Turning up it, he let his gray have the rein, and he found that the horse followed the trail without any difficulty.

Satisfied, he stopped and dismounted while Teresa and Margot pulled up beside him in the dripping trees.

"Good luck," he said quietly. "Ride hard and long and follow me into Clearcreek from the Silver Creek range."

"Mark," Margot said quietly. "What if—suppose your trail won't take you to Clearcreek?"

"It will."

She dismounted now and came over to him.

"You'll be careful, Mark?" she asked gently. "I only understand enough of this to guess how it will end. He will fight, you know."

She could almost see the quiet smile on his face. It was the first time she had referred to this man he was hunting, and even now she did not know why she had said this. She only knew she had put into words what she had been thinking, guessing, and now she asked: "Do you know who he will be, Mark?"

"I think I knew long ago," he told her quietly. "I had to get proof."

"You won't tell me?"

"No. I have to be fair."

Margot put her arms around him and kissed him. Even then, needing the strength his body and his nearness could give her, she felt him hold himself back when she was in his arms. It was something within him, some final bedrock honesty, she knew, that would not allow him to give himself until he could give freely, wholly. And she loved him more for it, loved him even as his body stiffened and his lips were cold and ungenerous. It was as if he were suffering some torture, she thought guiltily as she took her arms away.

"Teresa depends on you," Flood said gently, and Margot smiled secretly at the gentle evasion.

And, as if reading her mind, Flood said quietly: "All you are thinking now, I will answer, Margot."

She felt one desperate second of stark fear, not for herself, but for him, who was so confident he would come to her. Then it was gone.

"I had no right to do that," she said. "But I can play this game, Mark. I will be strong."

Flood did not speak for a moment, then he said strangely: "I will spare you that if I can. Good-by."

He went to Teresa, as Margot mounted. "It's all over now, except the drudgery."

"I nearly killed you tonight," Teresa said curiously. "Why are women so blind?"

Flood thought of her face, beautiful and lovely, but so hardened and cynical that she never let a man see her real self.

"Why are men?" he asked.

She smiled wanly.

Flood stepped back and they rode off. Walking over to his horse, he wondered if his luck would hold. But at the hotel, after inquiring if anybody had been to see him and being told they had not, he believed it had. He went to his room and undressed and was immediately asleep.

HE WAS wakened before daylight by Klaus hammering on his door. He lighted the lamp and let him in. Klaus was wet and surly, and he did not bother to introduce the man with him, a middle-aged man with a square face and narrow eyes, who stepped into the room but did not sit down as Klaus did. Flood dressed quickly.

"How much did you tell this girl?" Klaus demanded.

"Teresa? About our proposition? Nothing. Why?"

"She's gone," Klaus said savagely, drumming the table with his fingers.

"You damned fool," Flood said quietly. "How much did she know?"

"If you didn't tell her, I don't reckon she knew much. At any rate, no more than she knew already, and that wouldn't bother us here much. She don't know the time nor the place."

"Then you're going to take me to see your man?" Flood asked.

"Why do you think I come up here?" Klaus demanded surlily.

"To admit you were bull-headed, I hope," Flood said quietly. "Where do we go?"

Klaus regarded him hostilely, as if he wished to hold the secret as long as he could.

"Clearcreek," he said curtly.

Flood raised his eyebrows in feigned surprise and said: "Who is it over there?"

"You'll find that out," Klaus said.

It was on Flood's tongue to argue him into reasonableness, but he refrained. If he forced the issue, they might become suspicious. He shrugged instead, and said: "I haven't eaten since yesterday afternoon. Can you spare the time?"

"I thought you were in such a hell of a hurry you were leaving this morning," Klaus said bluntly.

"I was in a hurry to make your minds up for you," Flood replied. "I'm eating. Come along if you want."

Klaus' companion looked questioningly at his boss, but Klaus got up and said: "All right."

There was not yet false dawn in the east when the three of them crossed to the café. Flood wanted to delay their start as long as possible, so as to let the rain wash out the tracks Margot and Teresa would leave, for the rain was still slanting down in a raw, everlasting drizzle. By the time they were finished eating, it was beginning to lighten in the east.

Flood started across to the hotel when Klaus said: "Now where?"

"My horse is behind the hotel," Flood said.

"What's he doing there?" Klaus demanded. "I saw him in the stable last night."

"I brought him over," Flood said. "I reckoned you would be ready to leave around midnight." He looked Klaus over insolently. "You look like you needed cash worse than you do."

Klaus let the jab ride and he and his companion went down to the stable, while Flood settled his hotel score and got his horse. Riding around to the feed stable, he was careful to rein his horse through all the mud and water he could find, so that by the time he arrived there, fresh mud was plastered on his gray's legs and belly.

At the stable, Klaus was waiting beside his horse in conversation with his companion, to whom he was evidently giving orders.

When Flood rode up beside him, Klaus gathered his reins up and said: "Well, if you aim to stick to that thousand head cut, Flood, I'm wasting my time. But I'll go."

"I don't think you are," Flood said.

Klaus shrugged. "This man doesn't argue. He just tells you."

"Sure," Flood said.

Klaus squinted up at him in the rain. "Once in a while you see a proud man that's never been licked. He rides like you, Flood, and he talks like you and he even looks like you. But once in his

life he meets a man that he tries to cut his dogs loose on and this man won't take it." He turned to his companion, who was grinning, and said to him: "You ought to be along."

Flood said slowly: "Once in a while you ride up beside a man that you'd like to kick in the mouth. You'd like to kick all his teeth down his throat. I haven't got much patience."

He loosed a foot in the stirrup and Klaus stepped back, his hand falling to his gun. Flood only laughed, and wheeled his horse and rode out into the street.

Klaus soon caught up with him and said grimly: "This is going to make you sweat, Flood. That's all."

## CHAPTER XXI

### TRAIL'S END

THEY rode hard that first day in a driving, relentless rain that piled down the canyons on gusty, whipping wings. They could not have talked if they wanted to, and they did not. Part of the time, they were in a boiling fury of clouds that swept past them in writhing tendrils of fog, so that the trail and all the visible land marks were obscured. Flood wondered if Margot would lose her way in it, and he cursed himself for not having provided food for her in case she was forced to wander days among these peaks before she found her way out. But he put this out of his mind as soon as he thought of it. He tested himself, and saw that he remembered every turn and twist, every canyon, every switchback of the torturous trail. If he could remember it, then she could too. The thought comforted him, somewhat.

They did not stop at noon. The rain had eased off a little, but the wind held, driving the drizzle before it. Klaus had evidently understood Flood, for he made no talk.

His slack, heavy body sat in the saddle like a rock, and he seemed intent on holding the pace he had set, a steady, mile-eating one that counted no time out for blowing the horses or pulling in the lee of a rock to dismount and stamp chilled blood into circulation again.

Flood was surprised when, just at dark, Klaus left the trail for a side canyon. Halfway up it, he dismounted before a cave in the canyon wall under whose overhanging of rock there was room for both horses and men. There was wood stacked neatly against one wall and a tow sack of grain which swung out from a crack in the wall by a wire, to keep it from mice. Klaus built a fire while Flood grained the horses and rubbed them down. Soon, both men were drying out their clothes and warming up for the first time since they left. The comfort of it seemed to thaw out Klaus, and his eyes were a little less hostile as he watched Flood. Flood decided to see if he would talk, and he said casually:

"Ever try a drive in this weather?"

"Drive?" Klaus said blankly.

"I saw several signs," Flood said carelessly. "There have been cattle through here. I thought maybe they were your outfits."

Klaus did not answer for a moment, then, as if he had resigned himself to Flood sharing the knowledge of all this with him, said: "It's purely hell. We had to hold a herd back yonder one night in a snow that all but bogged us in."

Flood chuckled appreciatively, but said nothing.

"We started them off before daylight. We figured if we waited another hour, we'd be there forever. We come through all right."

"You've just got to take a chance, then?" Flood said easily.

"That's it. Last time we got the herd in a rain, drove them in a rain, walked into this snow here and delivered them

in a rain. We earned that money," Klaus said shaking his head with the memory of the misery of that trip. He sighed. "But that's the weather we need."

That would have been Shifflin's herd, Flood thought calmly. He wanted to ask a thousand questions now, but he did not dare. As long as Klaus talked of his own volition, it was all right. But to ask questions would be dangerous.

But Klaus was sleepy and showed no disposition to talk, so Flood had to be content. He had more proof now, besides what Klaus had dropped, that these men had taken the Shifflin's herd. Klaus yawned, got his blankets and announced he was turning in. Flood followed him, and was soon asleep. Just before he sank into sleep he thought of Margot and Teresa, who were probably huddled together in the shelter of some rocks far up the trail, waiting for daylight. And when he thought of Margot, he thought of what tomorrow would bring for him, and he welcomed it because of her. Tomorrow, he would be a dead man or a free man. So he slept, content.

The day broke clear, with a cold, frosty wind that had a bite to it. They hit the trail early, hungry, but not so cold now that they were in the saddle. The sleet and snow had been washed away by a later rain.

By noon they were sloping down through the notch onto the Silver Creek range, and the day was warm, almost hot under a clear sky. Flood had withdrawn into himself, for all there was to do now was to wait. He could find no signs on the Silver Creek range that riders had preceded them, but he laid that to Margot's wisdom in covering her trail.

THE RIDE to Clearcreek seemed endless. Klaus was almost garrulous this morning, but nothing he said seemed to affect Flood. When they topped the hill into Clearcreek, Flood's face was composed, yet alert. For a moment, he wondered if he had been wrong, if Klaus was hunting some other man, but he asked no questions. It was as if all this was out of his hands now, and would unfold and conclude without him and in spite of him, as if all he had done at the start had set it in motion to vanish in this hour.

They rode down the street, past riders and wagons and people that seemed one with the sunny indolence of the afternoon, to pull in at the hitchrack to one side of the Palace. Flood looked across to the sheriff's office, and saw Honeywell standing in the door, regarding him with impassive curiosity. Flood only shook his head and Honeywell nodded, did not move.

"Will he be here?" Flood asked, as he dismounted beside Klaus.

"I reckon. I'll find out."

Flood said. "It woudn't be wise for me to go in, would it?"

Klaus looked at him thoughtfully.

"I mean my name and all. If he lives here, the two of us ought not to be connected. Remember, I had a brother here."

"You're right," Klaus said, nodding.

"I wouldn't even mention the name," Flood said. "Not in there. When we're alone, it will be all right."

"Sure," Klaus said. He swung under the hitchrack.

Flood turned and walked across the street to the sheriff's office. As he walked, he took out his six-gun and rammed the shells out into the dust of the street and put fresh loads in. When he was finished, he was fronting the hitchrack before the sheriff's office. Sam was still standing there.

"Did you notice him, Sam?" Flood asked.

Sam nodded.

"Go over and see who he talks to. Don't arrest him now, but don't let him go, either. He's a man you want."

Sam stepped nimbly out of the door, swung under the hitchrack and said to Flood as he passed: "Trouble?"

"The end of it, I think," Flood said.

Then he turned and leaned on the hitchrack. He looked down the street once to make sure nobody would be crossing when he shouldn't, and then he looked up it. He saw Margot and Teresa were riding down it now. They approached and Teresa swung into the hitchrack by Flood's horse.

Margot reined her horse in the middle of the street, and looked at Flood.

"In there?" she asked, her voice carrying plainly across the distance.

"I think so," Flood said.

"Mark," Margot said, although Flood was watching her. She looked at him a moment, then said: "Square my end of it too, Mark. I'm Margot Munro, you see. That's what I never told you."

Flood understood this, understood it while looking at the dark door of the Palace knifed by the bat-wing doors. He understood that she had ridden into the hitchrack, and that the sun was warm on his shoulders, and that the quiet somnolence of this afternoon was gathering to burst.

When he saw the legs under the bat-wing door, then saw them break open, he straightened up and started to walk slowly across the road, and he said, "Ah," quietly, with deep and welcome satisfaction.

Petrie came out first, Klaus behind him. Honeywell behind him.

Then Petrie stopped dead. He had seen Flood.

Flood came onto the middle of the street, and paused, his hands loose at his sides.

"This is it, Petrie," he said, and his voice ripped across the still afternoon like a whip.

There is a haste which is harnessed panic, and it was this that stirred through Petrie like a chilling wind as he clawed down for his gun and brought it out, and shot and hit the hitchrack in front of him and shot again and crashed a window behind Flood, while Flood raised his gun in a deliberate arc bisected by the click of the gun-cock, raised it eye-high for the certain sight he needed and let the hammer go.

Petrie's third shot boomed against the high false front of the sheriff's office, and then he brought his gun hand, with its gun, and his other hand to his chest even while he was falling, so that he fell on crossed, clawing hands. He shuddered that way, his head lowered a little over the edge of the board sidewalk, as if he were a child looking for a coin that had slipped through and under the walk.

Flood said to Honeywell: "Is the Wagon Hammer inside?"

"Max will take care of that."

"Not all of it," Flood said. He came upon the walk and said: "Bring that man in here."

INSIDE, eight or ten Wagon Hammer riders were at the bar. They were all looking at Mayhew, who leaned against the front wall, his gun covering them. Flood saw their faces change as they looked at him.

He began, "Have any of you ever heard of the Munro herd that was rustled down by the Point Loma breaks last year some time?"

"You hangin' that on us, too?" one of the Wagon Hammer hands asked bluntly.

"Have you?" Flood insisted.

Several men nodded, and Flood went on: "Last week, three thousand head of cattle from Texas under nine men and a trail boss named Shifflin disappeared one night from a bed ground on the Ruidoso. The men were killed, the cattle were driven across your range, into the notch at the head of Silver Creek range and sold in Cienga across the mountains. Do any of you know who planned the steal?"

This time they said nothing.

"Petrie did," Flood said quietly. "He brought a gang over from Cienga for both jobs." He indicated Klaus. "This man will back me up."

Klaus said huskily: "You got the wrong man, Mister."

Flood turned to Sam. "He went to Petrie?"

"Ask Max," Honeywell said. "He was at the bar."

Mayhew said: "He came up to Loosh and said: 'A gent wants to see you outside.' Petrie finished his drink and went out."

*"If you don't want to crowd your luck, ride out of here."*

"Want to talk now?" Flood said to Klaus.

This time Klaus nodded. He looked at the Wagon Hammer men and said: "That's right. All he said."

Flood said to them: "You weren't fighting for range when you fought for Petrie. You were fighting for that notch that led into the trail over the mountains to Cienga. Petrie had to have that for an outlet for his trail rustling. Hand moved in on Silver Creek, and Petrie had to fight for it or quit. He fought." He paused, regarding them soberly. "If you don't want to crowd your luck, ride out of here. No man has said the Wagon Hammer hands were in on these steals. Hand wins this war, and you men have cleaner hands than his Bar Stirrup. I'd get out."

The men looked stubbornly from Flood to Mayhew. Honeywell said: "If it's Breck you are wondering about, I killed him. I don't know just why I killed him, but I reckon I'll find out soon." He added dryly: "I didn't think anybody connected with the Wagon Hammer would mourn him."

One of the Wagon Hammer hands laid a gun gently on the counter and stepped out.

"I've wanted to do this for a long time. There's my ticket," he said cheerfully.

He walked past Flood and out the door, paused to gaze down at Petrie; then they could hear him whistle softly as he walked down the street.

Honeywell touched Flood's arm and gave him his gun. "Hold this on your friend a minute. This is all over, I reckon."

He stepped outside to Petrie, then leaned over and with much effort pulled off Petrie's boots. He examined the sock feet of the dead man and then came into the saloon again. Walking up to the bar, he reached a fat hand in his shirt pocket and brought out a small buckle which he laid on the bar. He said to the Wagon Hammer men:

"Loosh killed Emory and Hand. I wondered why a man would be padding around in his sock feet out there, and I

figured it about the same as you would. Emory bled quite a bit. Loosh stepped in it when he went back to his horse after killing Hand. What got me to wonderin' was that there was a bullet hole in Hand's blanket. I dug the slug out of the dirt floor." He indicated the buckle. "That was off Emory's bloody slicker he burned. You men still want to fight for him?"

Flood looked across at Mayhew. "Ben Hand is dead, then?"

Mayhew nodded. "There are people here who wouldn't have let him live anyway. Maybe it's best."

And now Flood turned to Klaus. "There were ten men with that last herd Petrie stole. Where are they?"

Klaus licked his lips.

"Dead?" Flood asked.

Klaus nodded once. "We caved a cutbank over them out there in that shale beyond the barrier rim."

Suddenly, this room and its men had become unbearable to Flood, and he turned and left, and it was like walking out of a life. It was over, he thought wearily, with no man the victor.

He started toward the hotel, noticing that Margot and Teresa were not at the hitchrack; and he did not wonder at it, for he was thinking that a woman who had the patience to wait as long as Margot had waited, would have the patience to see it through—all through.

When Honeywell dropped in beside him, Flood knew he was going to the hotel too.

"To see why I killed Breckenridge," Honeywell explained, his sad face a little fretted, nothing else.

THE DOOR to Margot's room was open and she was sitting on the bed. She rose at sight of them.

"That morning you left, I killed Breckenridge," he said quietly. "Mind telling me why he was following you?"

"I am Margot Munro, Sam," Margot said simply. "I came here after Dad died. The theft of his herd ruined him and he died two months later. Lee and I came here, hoping we would find the persons who stole the herd." She shrugged wearily. "You know about Loosh and myself. I don't know the rest, except this." She looked at Flood briefly, and the warm, sturdy courage in her eyes made Flood glad. "When I loved Mark, Petrie knew. I think he believed I had sent for Mark, because Mark saved his life and did not kill him. He fought him and did not kill him. Loosh saw and understood. The night I went to warn Mark at Hartley's cabin, Loosh or Breck or both searched my room. I think they were after the letters they were sure Mark had written me. They came across these."

She indicated a sheaf of letters on the table. "I was unwise enough to save them—letters from my mother, addressed to Margot Munro, that I saved all these years since she died. When they saw the name, they knew they must get rid of us. They killed Lee, and—and —"

"Breck was after you," Honeywell said. He turned, closed the door gently behind him. Margot came over to Flood's arms and leaned her forehead against his shoulder. Then she looked up at him.

"Shall we finish it all, Mark—all this that stands between us?"

Flood said: "Is there any more?"

"Teresa. Could we leave her here to run our hotel?" And when Flood began to smile, she said: "I promised to see it clean through. All of it. Remember?"

Flood nodded, smiling broadly now.

"She could run it while we are away. Are we going away?"

"If you say. Where?"

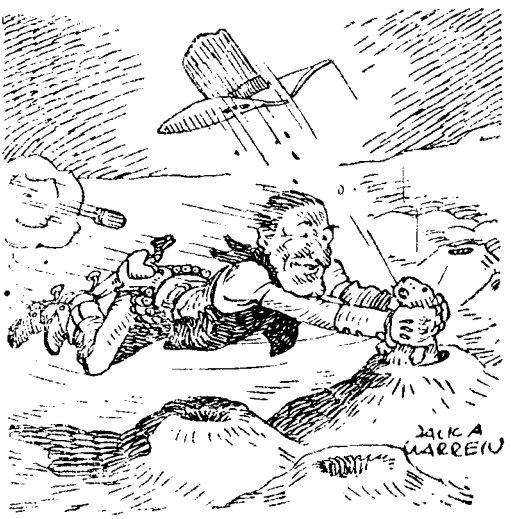
"Home. Our home. Is it all finished now, Mark?" she asked quietly.

But she discovered that she did not want an answer. This was enough, this that the arms and the heart held.

THE END

# PIZENOUS SPEED

## by MODY C. BOATRIGHT




"We got mighty good runners down here in the Pecos country," opined Red, the cowhand. "But the swiftest was the college feller down on Ed's spread who was too fast to live."

"How was that?" asked Lanky.

"He was a greenhorn," Red said, "but he was learning fast, only he never could get a-holt of a prairie dog, which he wanted to stuff and send home."

"Are they hard to hit?" Lanky asked.

"Oh, he could hit 'em all right—plug 'em right in the eye—but they'd always jump in their holes and get lost.

"Well, one day he gets plumb desperate when he sees a prime prairie-dog a-settin' barkin' in the sun. He pulls out his six-shooter, takes aim at the critter's eyes, and jist as soon as he pulls trigger he runs like hell. He got there in time, all right, and bent down to grab the prairie-dog, but jist as he touched it, the bullet hit him in the back.

"He was crippled so bad we finally had to shoot him. Too bad it was, too; he had the makin's of a first-class cowhand."

*From "Tall Tales from Texas Cow Camps."*

*It was now or never.*

# HUMAN FLY

## by NOEL LOOMIS

IT WAS a tough spot. There I hung, just under the cornice of a twenty-eight-story building. I could not go back down, and the only way I could come out of it alive was to jump three inches into space and catch the edge—and the only hold I had for this jump was with my finger-tips and bare toes in the cracks between the bricks. In a few seconds there probably would be one less human fly in the world.

Boy, it was a hard racket in those days! I started climbing when the game was young, and there weren't over two or three men in the business. That was twenty-one years ago, and I've seen a lot of them get theirs in that twenty-one years.

You know, a fly has to use his head more than anything else to keep from being flattened out on the sidewalk. A fly can't climb up a flat brick wall unless it has extra big cracks between the bricks. He generally has to climb either on a corner or on a side, where he can go from one window-casing to another. In either case he has to rest at least every ten stories, every six stories is better.

It isn't a matter of "sticking" to a wall. It's taking advantage of whatever corners he can find—and he's just human; if he doesn't rest often enough, his toes and finger-tips become numb, and he loses all feeling in them. His hands and feet are just like anyone else's; once he loses the sense of touch he can't cling to the crevices and will fall.

So he has to climb a building where there is a ledge every few stories so he can rest. Most buildings have, every so often, some bricks or stone sticking out

several inches; and a fly can stand on those with his feet, and hold with the palms of his hands, to give his toes and finger-tips a rest and a chance to get the blood circulating.

When I was just learning the game, I would climb a building without looking at it first. Later on, though, when I was going to make a climb, I would go around to the building in the daytime, stand on the sidewalk across the street and carefully look over every foot of the building, noting the ledges, window sills, and everything that offered help or might cause trouble. The most important thing was always the farthest away. That was whether I could get over the top or not.

Sometimes I had to estimate within an inch whether I could reach the edge of a cornice-piece at the roof of a thirty-story building without losing my balance on the wall. Down on the ground, you could get an idea on the width of a cornice by comparing it with the nearest window—and hope the top windows were the same size as those at the bottom.

Those cornices were the worst thing in climbing. Some of them were built straight out from a wall, and a fly had to hold with one hand and lean way out to catch the edge.

When I saw there weren't enough ledges to rest on, I got another building for the climb. Most of the flies that were killed in those days were new at the game. They tried to make climbs without looking over the building first, and when they got to the top and their fingers were numb and they couldn't make it back down, they did the only thing there was left to do—jump and crack up on the pavement.

I had a fall once myself—six stories. But I was lucky. I struck an awning that slowed me up. Just fractured a leg and some ribs—not like breaking your neck.

That was when I was learning and before my fingers and toes were strong. This building was sixteen stories, without any ledges at all. But I didn't notice that. They offered me $150 to climb it, and as soon as I could get my shoes off—up I went.

When I got up about four stories my fingers began to get tired, but I was anxious to show my stuff and I needed the $150, so I kept on. At five stories my fingers and toes were numb, and I was dumb enough to think that was a good sign, that I could keep on to the top without feeling the tiredness.

But at the sixth story—it was a corner-climb—one of those weary fingers couldn't tell me it wasn't in a crack when I moved the other hand. I didn't feel the difference, and when the other hand was lifted, I went square over backwards, and whirled end for end through sixty feet of space! As I turned over and over I could catch glimpses of the crowd below me, and it's funny—I wondered what would happen if I hit one of them, and wondered if he would sue me.

I hit a canvas awning, with one leg over one of the cross-bars. It broke my leg, but it saved my neck, because if it hadn't been for that cross-bar I'd have gone through to the sidewalk.

I was lucky, that's all. I just missed death several times, when I was young and foolish and new at the game.

That's where the twenty-eight-story building comes in. I was making a night climb in Minneapolis. I had worked my way, story by story, to the top, but it was a long job, and I was getting awfully tired.

I came to the corner-piece, just above my head, and then I looked up and got an awful shock when I saw that the edge had fooled me when I looked at it from the sidewalk 280 feet below—it was a lot farther out than I had counted on! I hung on with the toes of both feet and the fingers of one hand, and reached out as far as I possibly could without slipping from the brick wall. My outstretched fingers lacked three inches of

making the edge of the cornice!

The spotlights were on me, and I could hear the band far below; the crowds watching had seen me reach, and I knew they realized as well as I did that I had missed the edge.

Some confused talk drifted up to my ears. Some of them thought I was faking. They didn't know what a desperate hole I was in, with only luck between me and the morgue. I looked down and saw a couple of policemen edging in through the crowd to the spot right under me on the sidewalk. I decided to reach again, and if possible stretch that other three inches!

I leaned out till I thought my left finger-tips would grind off the plaster between the bricks; I could feel my tendons being strained—hard! I tried to *will* myself to have three inches more reach! My left arm went out and out until it felt like I was tearing my insides apart, but it just couldn't be done! I could not even touch the edge, and I drew back before I lost my balance.

The band had stopped playing. I looked down at a sea of faces, every eye glued on me with the horror of realizing that I was up against it—about to fall, in full view of thousands, but beyond the help of any human being.

It was a matter of seconds. I was terribly tired. I wanted to just turn loose and go to sleep, but I forced myself to understand that nobody else in the world could do anything for me.

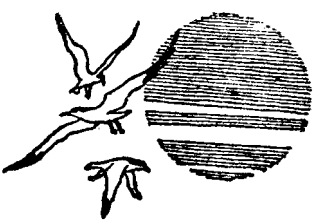
The crowd began to clear a spot under me. The night wind up above the city was cold, but I could feel the sweat pouring down my body, wetting my fingers and toes and making it harder than ever to hold on.

I had to do something. I could not hold on any longer. I dare not try to go back down, for I could never get down a single story, let alone the six stories to the first resting-place. It was now or never! I must jump that three inches, from a slippery perch on a brick wall!

I looked down for the last time. I could see more movement below. The band played to prevent a panic as people started back out of the way. There was no time left to think. As the band blared, I surged upward and outward all I possibly could, and clawed at the cornice with the fingers of my left hand—

I made it, but there were lots of them who didn't. It's a million to one. No room for a mistake in this man's game. One bad guess and your climbing is all over.

I never thought about falling. I just went ahead and climbed. It was a business, just like anything else, and the first few years were the hardest. If you were smart, maybe you could save yourself for a wheel-chair. Some of us got cold feet and quit before we made that last climb. But if you weren't lucky all the way, you'd be liquidated on a concrete sidewalk.



# THE CAMP-FIRE

*Where readers, writers and adventurers meet*

WITH "The Comanche Kid," E. B. Mann makes his first appearance in our magazine—a new member of the Writers' Brigade which has marched for twenty-six years and included most of the noted American men authors in its ranks. Mann lives in Florida. His story you will judge for yourself, and I hope you will like the people in it as well as I did. Mann makes this introduction of himself to the Camp-Fire circle.

I would have said, if asked, that my life so far had been an interesting one. I've found it interesting, and amusing, and even—from time to time—exciting. Yet when I come to setting it down on paper it seems insipid stuff, like last night's beer. . . . Perhaps it's asking too much to expect a fictioneer to stick to facts!

I was born in Kansas in 1902; was graduated from Decatur County (Kansas) High School in 1920, and for some time after that I traveled—mostly as a non-paying passenger—from Butte to the Brazos and to and fro. The trails my father had traveled in a covered wagon I traveled in boxcars and in Pullmans, working on ranches here and there, following the wheat harvest, wielding a billiard cue, setting type in various print-shops, earning a little, learning a little. I heard the lingo and the legends of the west from childhood on, and read omnivorously.

I came to Florida with the birth of "The Boom" but I went to college while the other boys sold subdivisions. They made more money than I did, but they lost more too when the bubble burst. I had played football in high school and baseball afterward; in college, I played politics and found the game more fun, if not more profitable.

I arrived in New York City in 1927 and within a month I knew men in scores of fine offices all up and down Manhattan Island. They had said, "No," when I asked them for jobs. One gentleman finally said, "Yes," and I became an advertising man.

I sold my first story in March, 1928, and bought an overcoat. I needed it.

Some six months later I said goodbye, with some regrets, to advertising and devoted all my time to the writing of the franker forms of fiction.

Was married in 1928 to Helen Frazier Cubberly.

Children: none.

Recreations: Tennis; shooting.

Hobby: guns.

Ambitions? To live pleasantly; to acquire a backhand drive; to shoot a shotgun as well as I do a pistol; to have a hand in the redemption of the western story from its past and present low estate.

WE have heard with much regret of the death of Lieutenant Commander Vernon Chamberlin Bixby, known to many comrades as *Ask Adventure* expert on navy matters. He was retired from active service in 1932 because of a heart affliction. He lived then at Orlando, Florida, keeping up his navy interests and contacts through answering varied queries from our readers. His father wrote after the burial: "He enjoyed this work and many interesting letters came to him." Commander Bixby was born at Providence, Rhode Island, in 1891 and died on September 21, 1936, at Naval Hospital, Charleston, South Carolina. Burial was at Arlington, where the service was conducted by Chaplain Vogler who had been a shipmate of his on the U.S.S. Rigel.

Commander Bixby's service record in the Navy follows:

He enlisted in the U. S. Navy on September 19, 1910, and was discharged on September 18, 1914. For this service he received the Mexican Campaign Medal.

At the outbreak of the World War he enrolled in the U. S. Naval Reserve Force, on May 10, 1917; was ordered to active duty the next day, and accepted appointment as Ensign, Naval Reserve Force, on October 5, 1917, to rank from that date. He was under instruction at the Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, from October, 1917, to February, 1918, and reported for duty on board the U.S.S. St. Louis on February 16, 1918. He was temporarily appointed Ensign in the U. S. Navy from February 1, 1918, to August 15, 1918. In November of that year he reported for duty at the Naval Training Station, San Diego, California, in connection with instruction and training, at Training Camp, Training Station, Receiving Ship, College Naval Unit, Officer Material School and other special Training Schools.

In May, 1919, he was transferred to the Naval Air Station, San Diego, and on July 6, 1919, reported for duty in command of Subchaser No. 273. He was transferred to the U.S.S. Hamilton in August, 1921, and on November 21, 1921, he accepted permanent appointment as Lieutenant, junior grade, in the Navy, to take rank July 1, 1920. He was commissioned Lieutenant from January 1, 1922; reported for duty on board the U.S.S. Newport News in April, 1922, and in January, 1924, was transferred to the U.S.S. Hancock. (This was at Pearl Harbor, Honolulu.) In October, 1925, he reported for duty on board the U.S.S. Altair; was attached to the Naval Station, Key West, Florida, from October, 1928, to June, 1930, and was Executive Officer of the U.S.S. Elliott, from June, 1930, to December, 1931. He reported for duty on board the U.S.S. Rigel in November, 1931.

He was retired to the Retired List of Officers of the Navy, from March 1, 1933. Subsequently, he was commissioned Lieutenant Commander on the Retired List, to take rank from June 14, 1932.

For service during the World War he received the Victory Medal with Escort Clasp.

CEDRIC W. WINDAS, marine painter of California, begins for us an illustrated feature showing the sea origins of many expressions we commonly use without stopping to think where they came from. Along with its general interest, the feature may lead to some discussion and argument, and I hope it does. There's Bill Adams, for instance—he hasn't hailed us for a time, and nobody can snort better than he if there's snorting to be done. Mr. Windas explains:

Now with regard to the authenticity of the "Traditions." In the main, and with but very few exceptions, I can quote as my authority for my explanations, volumes from the libraries of London, New York, Melbourne, San Francisco and Hollywood. Volumes such as the Encyclopedias, the Oxford and other dictionaries, and of such famous historians as Esquemelling, Lovat Fraser, and others. In fact, I am glad that you brought up this ques-

tion, because some of the items in my collection of "Traditions" are in the "almost unbelievable" class, and serve to make me more diligent in my research.

Other items, again, seem to have more than one explanation, (as in the case of "Taffrail") and these are really the hardest to handle, as sailormen as a rule are of a most obstinately conservative type, and are the first to howl "Heck! that ain't the way *I* heard it"; forgetting that old adage of the sea: "Different ships . . . different long splices." Which is a seaman's way of saying that a thing may be done (or told) in more ways than one. Now with regard to the "exceptions" I mentioned, of which I have no printed record. These items are in the nature of traditional jokes played on shipboard, as in the case of "Red Oil for the Port Light." Any sailorman will remember (with perhaps a rueful grin) this and other jokes played on him when, as an ignorant lad, he joined his first ship.

THAT question of the strange breeding habits of eels has found so many comrades on the knowing side that I wish I had raised along with it another question—the best way to get one of the things off the hook in a rowboat. The first response came from Henry A. Nichols, director of the Pennsylvania Fish Culturists' Association. Here is what Mr. Nichols says:

Although I cannot pretend to be an expert on the subject, I know sufficient about the common American and European fresh-water eels to agree with your remarks concerning their breeding-habits.

To begin with, both with the American and European eel, no male is found in fresh water, nor is any female found with definite sexual characteristics outside of brackish water. It appears that the male remains at the outlets of the Atlantic coastal streams, while the females work their way for tremendous distances up into the inland fresh waters. The latter remain inland for approximately seven years. Then, in great numbers, they work out to the sea, developing roe and other sexual characteristics as they reach the waters where the males are waiting. At this point both sexes stop feeding and assume a light coloration, becoming "silver eels" which are taken in nets and traps.

No young eels are found in fresh water except those which have developed well past their primary stage. In this (the primary) form they are found only in salt water, on the way to shore. We never observe "runs" of mature eels coming back from the ocean. Therefore it seems obvious that the grown eels go to sea to breed, and, having done so, die, and never come back.

The point selected for the spawning ground of the American eels is an area north of the West Indies. The European eel seems to breed northeast of this point. We cannot see them spawn, for in those places the water is more than 3,000 feet deep. Few, if any, dead mature eels are found after spawning; but many things could happen to them in that water after death. These points are determined chiefly because they represent the places where deep-water seines and other traps catch the tiniest infant eels, in their transparent larval form.

Having hatched, varied research and tracing with nets shows that the baby eels, both American and European, start their journey along the Gulf Stream. They gradually develop toward the true-eel form and gradually move upward from the depths as they approach the central Atlantic coast of this country. Finally, at a point in this area where the young American eels move in toward our coast, our youngsters leave the mob. It has taken them about a year to reach this point, and the young American eels will by this time have assumed their adult formation; although they will still be very small. Their companions have still another year or more of journey in the Gulf Stream before they reach Europe, and they will be much less fully developed. Why, one can't say; but perhaps the trip across the ocean would be more dangerous had the European eels discarded their larval form before leaving the American coast. When they do get to Europe they look just about as their American companions did many months before.

Both the grown eels moving out to sea and the elvers coming in, travel chiefly by night, resting during the day time. It is virtually impossible to stop a column of them, for they can travel through water in almost any condition and if the stream gives out or a barrier appears they will work snakelike around or over it with ease. They appear to be able to live and travel out of water for some time as long as their gills are damp.

Specimens have been kept successfully in captivity for several years past their normally allotted span of six to eight years. The female is considerably larger than the male. Their intelligence is probably not notable; but I have seen seven specimens in a running stream which would come to a man who claimed to have "trained them," eat from his hands and allow themselves to be picked up and petted much like pups. With any other persons they

were quite vicious. The "owner" said that he first became acquainted with them while swimming in the stream and gradually taught them to accustom themselves to him.

I hope this will be of some interest, and of value in your next argument with your friend. Likewise hope that your increase in pages will work out successfully, for we can never get too much of such a good thing!

RIGHT on the heels of the good letter above came another from F. S. Carr, of New York City, covering some of these points and adding, as others do also: "Look up the stories of the late F. St. Mars. Unless I am mistaken, I remember one on eels similar to the one you remember reading 'somewhere' (was it *Adventure?*)" Heard from on the same subject to date are Tom Elliot, Deer Lodge, Montana, and Charles Harrington, Robarts, Montana. And Cpl. Chas. W. Seeley, Headquarters Company, Seventh Infantry, Vancouver Barracks, Washington, writes to tell us of a thorough-going article on the subject: "The article 'Mysterious Life of the Common Eel', by Smith, is in vol. XXIV, 1913, of the *National Geographic Magazine.*"

From Walter C. Ellis, of West Somerville, Massachusetts, comes more information and a touch of advice—he is mindful of the fact that I got into this discussion by the catching of an eel on the Maryland eastern shore and ran into complete disbelief when I tried to explain what I thought I had read "somewhere" about its breeding habits.

One circumstance which puzzled the early, and even recent, ichthyologists is that the newly hatched eel is of a totally different form from that of the adult. The larval form for many years was even classed as a different species of fish. This larval eel is a flat, ribbon like creature, completely transparent, with a small head whose mouth possesses a ridiculously ferocious appearing armament of long projecting teeth. All this in a fish but a fraction of an inch long.

The larvae grows to what is known locally as a glass-eel by the process of shrinking. Apparently, it does not feed in the transformation from a ribbon shape to the rounded adult form and there is a considerable shortening of the body. The dragon's teeth are also lost in this change.

The eel still retains its transparency until it approaches the coast and fresh water, when the adult pigmentation gradually appears. The eel, now about three to six inches long, is twelve to eighteen months old, in the American species. Here still another factor enters which confounded the older investigators. The eels which ascend to fresh water are all females; it is only rarely that the male goes further than to brackish water and then only in streams where easy access is had to salt water.

The females after growing to maturity in fresh water migrate to the sea and are there joined by the males. At this point the sex organs, while developing, are far from being ripe. These countless billions of eels migrate, drawn by some unknown impulse, to the mid-Atlantic, there to spawn and die, their life cycle completed.

Now for your friend's queries.

We establish the first premise; the American and European eels are two (or more) entirely separate and distinct species. The proof of the life history is entirely a matter of deduction and induction; no one of course can chase an eel while it cruises on the broad Atlantic. There have been numerous expeditions in many parts of the ocean at different times of the year. These collection trips gathered and classified all manner of fishes, and other pelagic animals, and through the years there has gradually accumulated time and quantity data on thousands of species which has been collated by our hard working scientists until all the parts of the jig-saw puzzle have been fitted together to make a complete and cohesive pattern which is the life story of the movement and growth of our American fishes.

The eels of course are marked, not by man but by a Greater Power which dictated that this species of eel shall have such a number of vertebral segments, such a form of scales, such a proportion to the body parts, such a number of teeth, such a design of cranial bones, and that no other species shall have the *exact* same features.

I hope what I have said will be of some value to you, but don't hope to convince your friend. I know from experience that it can't be done.

AND F. A. Partridge, of Auburn, California, adds another point:

Terrific pressure is necessary for the expellation of the eggs, (or young, I forget which),

which is why eels will not breed in captivity. The young eels are almost microscopic, and for a long time were not identified. If I remember, although the eels from America and from Europe breed in same general area, they segregate themselves definitely, and the young eels from those areas return to the coast that their parents came from. Also, the old eels die after breeding. Remember, this is all memory of a discussion that took place in *Adventure* back, I believe, in nineteen thirteen or fourteen.

AND after the above letters had gone to the printers, along came other good ones from A. M. Orr, Greenville, Pa.; "E. B.", Toledo, Ohio; J. E. Jones, Jersey City, N. J.; Ted Dobynski, Company 288, Fort Hancock, N. J.; G. O. Morrill, Washington, D. C., who looked up an exhibit on the subject in the Department of Commerce building; and George H. Cole, Rochester, N. Y. Many thanks. This array of evidence certainly should convince my fishing friend, stubborn as he is. I won't have to bring up the subject, and I guess that he won't do it—he reads this magazine.

When Old Backlash comes to this point, and it penetrates the two-ounce sinker he keeps his ignorance in, he'll start to cuss. He'll do a pretty good job of it, too. Once he sneezed his upper plate overboard, and I know.

DAVIS QUINN of New York City tells us here a strange and tragic story of a reckless attempt to run the Colorado River—a trip that ended in two deaths under circumstances never explained.

Mr. Mallory's enquiry regarding a trip down the Colorado River, recalls a similar exploit of one Glen Hyde and his wife in the fall of 1928. Glen, then 28, was an avid *Adventure* fan, a potential future author, and my closest personal friend. Together, we spent nights in the Bowery, bivouacked in the deserts of the Snake River valley, near his ranch at Kimberly, crossed part of the Everglades by canoe in '24.

Glen was a veteran riverman, skilled in the passage of swift, dangerous water. He had just gotten married, and the unique idea of a honeymoon voyage down this "most treacherous cataract in the world" fascinated him. I say unique because I believe that no woman has ever, to this day, done the Colorado or, outside of his wife, even attempted it.

Glen built his own boat. A flat bottom scow it was, ruggedly constructed of two by fours, 20 feet long by 5½ wide, with a long sweep oar front and back. He depended on river current for power. Starting at Green River, Utah, Oct. 20, he allowed six weeks to two months to reach Needles.

The stretch through Cataract Canyon and some very difficult water below Lee's Ferry and Marble Canyon of about 100 miles was made with no more than minor mishaps. A stop at Bright Angel trail for repairs, and the Hydes set out again for the last stretch of rapids, some 160 miles, after which there would be another cruise of about the same distance to reach Needles. After leaving Bright Angel trail it is impossible to communicate with the outside world. No one lives on or near the river and as a matter of fact the river is impossible to reach except on foot and then only by one familiar with the country.

The couple was days overdue at their destination when army planes and desert Indians on foot began the search. Air currents created by canyon conformations make airplane exploration of the river extremely hazardous and no private planes could be induced to help. The Indians and a few whites were gotten out through a reward of $1,000 offered by Glen's father.

Some days later the boat was found—empty. Mysteriously downstream from most of the bad water, it was undamaged and its contents (including camera film later developed, and a diary) were intact. The scow was moored 30 feet from shore by a rope caught on a submerged rock.

Footprints were found in many places along the canyon shore where Glen had landed to scout ahead for a look-see at the rapids. Strangely, between where his tracks were last found and the boat, there was no rough water. All the canyons and plateaus for many miles above and below were diligently searched. No trace of the pair ever came to light.

What odd accident occurred will never be known. Was the boat wrenched away as they towed it over rocks, leaving them to starve at the base of an unscalable wall; did a sudden rise of water in the night carry the scow off, leaving them to the same fate? (The canyon river has been known to rise 60 feet in a day

during summer floods.) Or was one of the pair thrown out of the boat and the other jumped in to the rescue, both drowning? According to their notes, found later, this same incident had happened once before with however a happy ending.

The couple had been on the water 40 days, had run 400 miles of some of the worst water in the world, and the irony of it is that ten miles below where the scow was found, they would have conquered all the cataracts and rapids of the Colorado River.

IF Comrade Mallory still wants to try the Colorado River trip after reading the letter above, here is another plain *don't* for him to digest. This one was written in camp at Mancos, Colorado. I hope it is faithfully translated into type. The pencil that wrote it had been out of touch with civilization for a long time, and maybe it had stirred the flapjack batter along the trail. I hope we'll hear from Dutch again, as he says we shall, and if he loses that pencil he can just sharpen a stick and write with that —we'll be glad to have his letter.

You have said in one of your issues that no matter what anyone wants to know or what corner of the globe it is in, somewhere a Camp-Fire comrade will know the answer. So here goes. I noticed in *Ask Adventure* that R. D. Mallory of Oberlin, Ohio, asked information about a trip down the Colorado river, from its source to the Gulf of California. I just left the Colorado in Utah, after spending five years in the deserts on both banks of it.

But I had better introduce myself. I am Dutch Henry Ziplinsky, a saddle tramp. I travel with horse and pack outfit all over the southwest, and punch cows when I need a grubstake. I just spent five years riding over the southern part of Utah, from Bluff City to Saint George to Panguitch, the dirty Devil, the San Raphael and Colorado Rivers. I crossed and recrossed Utah from the Colorado and Arizona line and the strip, to the Nevada line and as far north as Mount Pleasant.

For God's sake, tell that Ohio Pilgrim to lay off of that trip, and stick to the highway and a car.

He will never last half of the trip. Only a seasoned desert rat can make it. Alkali water will kill him if nothing else. Feed is scarce, so is drinking water. It is all alkali and will kill horses or any other stock. It got me, but I made it out and I am not over it yet by a hell of a sight. My stomach is as sore as a boiled owl. I broke my leg in Sinbad. Only sheer luck brought a cowpoke along, about noon. I had been lying there since sun-up, after my horse fell on me.

That is the dope on that country, and it is all bad.

I can get no reply to this, as I am leaving here for Farmington, New Mexico, and don't know when I'll get there, but will write again later. I want A. S. Hoffman to know I am still among the living, only 64 years old at the present writing. Best to you all.

YEARS ago we had a department called "Lost Trails". I don't know who discontinued it, or why. It had general interest, and it served in many cases to renew old friendships between men situated thousands of miles apart. It was long enough ago so that a great many trails have been lost since then, and we'd like to see the department revived.

It happens that two requests are on hand now.

T. Glenn Harrison, of 187 Baldwin St., St. Paul, Minnesota, asks that Barrett Philip get in touch with him. He heard from him last in 1917 from 42 Washington Square, New York City.

J. Russell Leland, 2084 Eastburn Ave., Philadelphia, Pa., would like to hear from any fellow members of the crew of the submarine O-12 who were there "in the Windward Passage in 1922. Average 51 degree roll for 20 hours, and every gyro compass in the flotilla gone haywire." Or the time they hit bottom nose first in twenty fathoms and the stern was out of water ten feet.

I wish that you would write in at once and inquire for some comrade whom you wonder about now and then, and help to start the ball rolling. It is surprising into what odd corners of the earth this magazine goes, and this gives you a pretty good chance of getting news of that friend wherever he may be.

H. B.

# ASK ADVENTURE

*Information*

*you can't get elsewhere*

RELOADING may be a gun fan's hobby--but it's a money saver, too.

Request: I have a Colt .45 Frontier Model revolver, and cartridges for this gun are a little difficult to obtain in this neighborhood. Therefore I thought I could save some money if I could reload my own cartridges.

Would it be cheaper? What tools should I need? What are the advantages and disadvantages of cartridge reloading?

As I know nothing about the reloading of cartridges I would appreciate any help you can give me in personal advice or in the recommendation of articles or books dealing with the subject.

H. W. Booth, Roselle, N. J.

Reply by Old Man Wiggins:--Well, to begin with, I figured out my .45 Colt revolver cartridges cost me, reloaded, about ninety cents per hundred, and shoot better than any I can purchase. Does that sound interesting? I thought so.

The chief cost is a set of reloading tools, in which you can invest various sums. See the A. F. Stoeger, Inc., catalogue. (Address 507 Fifth Ave., New York City.)

I use the Ideal pot and dipper for moulding bullets, on my gas stove, using old battery lead from garages for bullets, first washing it off in a stream from the hose to remove all acids.

In greasing the bullets, I set them, muzzle up, in a cardboard box, and pour the melted lubricant, made of bees wax softened with cup grease in the right amounts, on them till the grooves are covered, and then let the grease harden. Then I push a tube of the right size, or a shell with the head cut out, over each, to remove the extra grease or sizing.

I use $6 DuPont pistol powder, and Winchester or UMC primers of the non-fouling sort. I crimp the cases hard, too, to prevent bullets jumping ahead to jam the cylinder in rotation.

I advise you to order an Ideal Handbook, price fifty cents, from the following firm: The Lyman Gunsight Co., Middlefield, Conn. It's surely a gun-lover's bible. It tells you all about reloading, and I'd not be without it.

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WHEN an anchor to windward won't hold, maybe a trysail would be the trick.

Request: As a constant reader of *Adventure*, may I ask your services in determining the proper storm trysail for my boat, a built-over thirty-six foot Friendship sloop?

None of the local sail-makers seem to know anything about this sail; it has never been used on Chesapeake Bay boats. However, in a number of heavy squalls while at anchor I have found that it is difficult to keep the sloop pointed into the wind, owing I suppose to the fact that most of her weight is in the stern. I have aboard two double fluke, or spade palm, anchors of forty and one-hundred pounds, with ample cable. Yet with these out, unless she points into the wind, she will drag. It is my understanding that a storm trysail, as a substitute for the main sail, will serve to hold her steady.

Will you be good enough to enlighten me on this point, also suggest the size of a storm

sail best suited to my needs? I have a gaff-rigged main sail, about thirty feet along the foot, twenty feet luff, etc.

—RALPH J. ROBINSON, Baltimore, Md.

Reply by Mr. A. R. Knauer:—I can suggest the size of a storm trysail for you, but I doubt that will solve your problem.

A storm trysail about ten foot on the foot and ten on the hoist, laced to the mast, should be sufficient in size. This sail would be made of heavy canvas and hoisted on the throat halliard. It is, of course, triangular in shape, and would be sheeted down with the mainsheet.

If your boat is a true Friendship boat the mast is very far forward and this sail would have a tendency to either balance or possibly pull the head off with a lee helm, which is exactly what you do not want. If your boat were yawl rigged, the mizzen would act in the way you desire—similar to the tail of a weathervane.

It is the unfortunate habit of certain types of boats that they will not lie satisfactorily to moorings, and I am afraid that you have one of this type, which however has plenty of good features to counterbalance this defect.

You might try, just as an experiment, a small piece of canvas stretched from the end of the boom (outboard) to the stern and laced tight to see if this would help out. This would be triangular in shape and stretched flat. This is the only thing that I can think of which might help you.

I would be interested to hear from you about how this works out.

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## SIFTING fact from fancy about Alaska.

Request:—I have been thinking of going to Alaska next spring to homestead. I have in mind the Kenai district not far from Seward or around Homer. I have been told by a person who claims to have been in Seward that that country is very poor agricultural ground. He says the land is covered with moss and tall, waist-high grass, and is of no value for live stock. Is that true?

Is that part of Alaska covered with timber, enough for building and fencing purposes? Or, is the timber so dense that it would have to be cleared before one could do any farming?

I have heard that potatoes, cabbages, etc., grow so fast during the short season that they are too watery and pulpy, and that they cannot be kept through the winter. Is that true?

Can I obtain any agricultural bulletin that deals with crops in this neighborhood?

What time of year would you suggest that I leave Seattle? Also what are transportation costs, myself and baggage? I suppose the cost of livestock, tools, etc., is high up there.

—ROY W. HEFLIN, Walnut Creek, Calif.

Reply by Mr. T. S. Solomons:—Practically all good agricultural land in Alaska is covered with more or less timber, though it is usually rather sparse and not very hard to clear. That grass is probably of the sort that is not very good forage, though the typical meadow grass of southern and central Alaska is splendid. Cut and stacked away, it is winter feed of the best for any kind of stock. On the whole, Alaska anywhere south of the reindeer moss country is pretty good grazing land. Nothing to compare with the prairies at their best, however. But the trouble is the long winters. The Department of Agriculture has been and still is (more or less) experimenting with cattle and with forage crops of various kinds to solve that problem.

Timber doesn't grow very tall in Alaska, due to the latitude. Saw logs wide enough for ordinary building purposes are easily obtained, though sluice boxes are usually procured by importation and carried into the country. An exception is the several National Forest areas where the growth is pretty good. I speak of Alaska and the Yukon in general. You have to burn the ground, usually, to get rid of the moss sods prior to planting.

All that dope will come to you if you write the Departments of Agriculture and Interior, selecting the particular bulletins you want after you get a list of them.

It is not true that Alaska products will not keep through the winter. There are exceptions, in places, of course. The rapid growth is due entirely to continuous daylight, or practically so. But growth as regards absorption of water can easily be controlled. The Agriculture bulletins will tell you all about that. (Experiment Stations).

Write Alaska Steamship Company regarding rates and routes. The main advice—worth all the rest—is to *keep your money in your pocket* till you have been in the country and know *if* you want to settle and *where* you want to settle. Also *when*, for that matter! Then, and not till then, get your outfit.

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## IT is a matter of the right foot forward in fencing.

Request:—My brother recently became in-

terested in fencing and wishes me to go in partnership on a pair of foils. And as I am greatly interested in boxing, I wish to know whether the practice of fencing will benefit me in boxing.

Could you tell me whether it is possible to become proficient in fencing by studying it from a book, and if so, could you name a good book from which we could study and tell me where it can be obtained?

ERNEST J. BERNHARD, Augusta, Georgia.

Reply by Capt. Jean V. Grombach:—The best books on the modern sport of fencing are: "Rules of Fencing," price $.35 and "Manual of Fencing," price $1.00. Both are published by the Amateur Fencers League of America and are purchasable by writing John Howard Hanway, 55 Liberty Street, New York City.

A group of students at Ohio State University learned to fence from these books alone, without an instructor, and later entered a national competition—one of them placing in the meet. So you see it can be done. From the positions illustrated, you can practice correct form before a full length mirror. You should have no difficulty in learning the sport sufficiently well to give your opponents excellent competition.

But I warn you, do not fence unless both of you get masks. If you poke your eyes out you can neither fence nor box!

With regard to the comparative good the two sports do each other: Fencing will help boxing by giving you better co-ordination, speed and timing and balance, but boxing is not good for competitive fencing.

It must be remembered that fencing and boxing have two great differences. One being, as it is called technically, "The Diagonal." Boxing has left hand and left foot in front with great emphasis put on the use of the left hand, while fencing has the right hand and right foot in front and with the entire emphasis on the right side.

The second basic difference that makes boxing bad training for competitive fencing is with regard to muscular reflexes. Both sports are executed with muscles relaxed but when an opening occurs in boxing and a boxer takes advantage of that opening by punching, he taughtens or stiffens his muscles at impact, or delivery of the punch, following through with his shoulder and body. In fencing an opening calls for a lunge, which is a further relaxation or melting and which should not carry a shoulder follow-through.

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## WHERE money grows on trees.

Request:—I should like what information you can give me on tropical forests in South America. I am interested in the following products: balata gum, rare orchid bulbs, sarsaparilla bark, and quinine bark—or any other of commercial value.

—JOHN W. PERRIN, U.S.S. Claxton, Norfolk, Va.

Reply by Mr. William R. Barbour:—*Balata gum* is the product of a tree of the same name, several species of the *genus Mimusops* of the family *Sapotaceae*. It is produced mainly in the Orinoco drainage in Venezuela, with some coming from British Guiana. They are tapped by a rather primitive process of oblique channels cut through the bark, draining into some kind of container, usually a gourd. It is dried in shallow trays in the sun. Sometimes the trees are cut down to obtain the gum.

The business of collecting rare orchid bulbs is not as extensive as it used to be, for two reasons: United States plant quarantine restrictions, and the fact that orchid fanciers have now solved the complicated problem of raising plants from the almost microscopic seed. (They are started on agar-agar jelly in test tubes.) Now they are even cross-breeding to get new varieties. Orchids are found all through the tropics, most of them as air plants on the limbs of large jungle trees.

*Sarsaparilla.* You can get full information from the United States Pharmacopeia, a copy of which would be found in the prescription department of any drug store.

*Quinine bark.* The product of various species of *Cinchona* of the family *Rubiaceae*. Originally came from the mountainous portions of western South America, hence the former name of Peruvian Bark. At the present time almost the entire world's supply of quinine comes from plantations in the Dutch East Indies, the Dutch having almost a monopoly. This is unfortunate, for in the case of war with disorganized shipping a shortage could easily result. The United States is much interested in developing plantations nearer home, and two years ago I started test plantations in Puerto Rico. I rather believe they will be successful, but it will take ten to twenty years to find out. The Pharmacopeia also has very full information on quinine.

Another important tropical American medicinal product is *ipecac*, from the plant *ipecacuanha*, native to the jungles of Colombia and Brazil.

Another possibility would be nux vomica

root, which is found in Colombia and is valuable.

I can only make one more suggestion. You probably know what burls on a tree are, big warts the wood of which nearly always has a fancy grain. Sometimes these are very, very valuable. Also logs which show a ribbon, birdseye, or mottled grain. On the ground you might be able to pick up such fancy pieces cheaply and get good money for them from some veneer manufacturer. Such pieces are sliced almost as thin as paper and used as fancy panels and trimming with plain grain wood.

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ALASKA has more gold, easier to get than Baja California—and besides, it's cooler.

Request: — What about a prospector's chances in northern Mexico—Sonora, along the west coast down to San Blas, say, and in the mountains just below Imperial Valley? Baja California, also contains possibilities, I imagine, for it is for the most part unexploited; much even unexplored. Of course, it is tough country, and nothing for the greenhorn to tackle.

I have had in mind for some time, the idea of looking over that region. Can you give me any information or practical suggestions?

—ROLAND HEYER, Newark, N. J.

Reply by Mr. Victor Shaw:—As you say, Baja California is little known to the general public, but it has been explored to some extent by prospectors and miners, and so far there has been little, beside some copper deposits, discovered. What is now known as the Compagnie Du Boleo, a French concern of Paris, France, are operating a copper deposit some miles inland from Santa Rosalia, in the southeast coast of Lower California, about two hundred and sixty miles north of La Paz. The deposit was discovered about 1868, and the present company began large scale operations in 1886 and have continued shipping up to the present. There are four principal mines, the Rancheria, Providencia, Purgatorio, and the Santa Marta, extending from one to four miles from the harbor at Santa Rosalia where the smelter is located on the shore of the harbor, the smelter and mines being connected by twenty miles of railway.

Another new mine, started three or four years ago, is connected by a wire tramway about four miles in length. The mine hauls annually some 400,000 tons of crude ore to the smelter, and exports around 12,000 tons of blister copper. This is the only mine in the entire area of Baja California, that has been found in nearly seventy years, the rest of the peninsula being mostly desert, with a range of mountains along its central portion, and little or no water or vegetation anywhere. The geology of the region doesn't seem favorable for gold, the basic rocks uncovered in the above mine being adesitic lavas, overlaid by conglomerates and fossiliferous tuffs interspersed by beds of gypsum.

So far as mining and prospecting in Old Mexico is concerned, many parts are highly mineralized with gold and silver, with some very rich.

This is true of some southern states such as Guerrero, west and south from Mexico City across the high Sierra, also of Sonora, and parts of Sinaloa. The State of Sonora in particular is highly mineralized throughout with gold, silver, copper, lead and many of the rare metals. Many of the central states have old abandoned Spanish mines that are still very rich.

However, it doesn't seem advisable for aliens (especially Americans) to attempt to mine, because the Mexican mining law operates to exclude aliens by providing that all sub-soil values are owned by the state on the principle of "Mexico for Mexicans". This is covered in Sec. 1, of Art. 27, of the *Ley Extranjeria*, which governs foreigners. Recent gold strikes, in fact, have barred all aliens from the districts. In addition, the internal political disturbances make it unwise to try to do business there. In my opinion, you'll do well to keep out of Mexico proper, and if you enter Lower California your chance of discovering anything worthwhile is far from good. It is much better in certain parts of Central America.

Nicaragua is considered richest in mineral resources, but has been too disturbed politically of late years. Costa Rica has excellent mineral prospects along the western coastal mountain region, and welcomes mining men from the U.S.A., and their local laws are favorable for prospecting and mining. Salvador, also, has good mineral prospects and its mining laws do not bar foreigners.

The best area for you to prospect and mine today is Alaska, as it is about the only United States possession still having virgin ground in known gold belts which are as yet unexplored.

It is an immense area with gold and other metals scattered practically all over it, much of it still, partially or wholly, unprospected. Northern Canada is about the same, but is harder to reach and more expensive to pros-

pect and mine. New gold strikes are being made each year in many parts of Alaska, with many rich ones in 1935. This is a region I can recommend without reservation. Prospecting chances there are better, in my opinion, than anywhere else on this continent today.

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A VINEYARD just naturally grows sour grapes. Can a reader give any suggestions on this man's problem?

Request:—This question may not be in your field, but I would more than appreciate any help you can give me.

We have a vineyard in the Sierras of California. Do you know of any sure method of preventing the birds from eating the grapes?

—Chris Mueller, San Francisco, Calif.

Reply by Mr. Davis Quinn:—Sorry not to have answered your inquiry a bit sooner, but I have been endeavoring to find out just how to help you solve your problem—and it seems, alas, without much success.

In the East here we tie a cheesecloth bag around each bunch of grapes. This is impractical except on a very small scale.

Another technique better adapted to large vineyards is to sheath over the whole, by rows, with mosquito netting, cheesecloth, or a small mesh fishnetting. The latter, while slightly more expensive in the beginning, is cheaper in the long run because it lasts longer.

I don't suppose scarecrows would be much good, although you might experiment with some sort of mechanical scarecrow that moves continually.

More effective would be the firing of a blank cartridge every time birds settle in the vineyard. If you have enough grapes to warrant the expense, a small boy might be employed to do this very cheaply.

Further than the above, which is admittedly punk, I am afraid I cannot help you. I suggest you write to your state department of agriculture, and also to the U.S. Biological Survey, Washington, D.C. for advice.

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SCIMITAR, Tulwar, Yataghan — words to roll on the tongue. They are all weapons of deadly design.

Request:—Please tell me the difference between a Scimitar and a Tulwar.

—Leon Powell, Spark Hill, Ill.

Reply by Capt. R. E. Gardner:—The *Tulwar* is usually straight-bladed and of sturdy construction. It is sufficiently heavy to be effective against an armored enemy. It is a double-edged weapon.

The *Scimitar* is single-edged and dependent upon its keenness for effectiveness. The Scimitar was borne by the lightly armored and armed troops schooled for a slashing attack and quick withdrawal. The bearer of the Tulwar was heavily armed and protected, and as a rule, a member of the foot troops.

The *Yataghan* is closely allied to the Scimitar and much confusion among cataloguers results. However the Yataghan is a single-edged weapon usually straight bladed but more rarely curved. When it is curved however it curves outward toward the point-end (along the cutting edge) the Scimitar blade is curved backward from the cutting edge toward the point.

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AND a little child shall lead them.

Request:—I should like to inquire whether you consider a two-year old boy too young for swimming lessons. What is the best age?

How does one go about teaching a young boy to swim? I have no knowledge of swimming and have never learned. Would I have to hire a professional swimmer or one who makes a business of teaching swimming to beginners?

I am thirty-six years of age and have never learned to swim. That sport was rigidly forbidden by my parents. I had an uncle who was drowned while swimming; I was told about it at a very early age and thereby cultivated an unwholesome fear of the water.

I wonder if you can advise me how I can overcome this fear. I understand it is a very fine sport as well as a good body builder and I should like to learn to swim so that I can participate in it at the same time that my boy does. And I don't want him to fear water as I do.

—Abe Meiland, Columbus, Ohio.

Reply by Mr. L. DeB. Handley:—I believe a boy two years old is too young for instruction in swimming, but not for preliminary work in the water. A baby of that age does not react very well to verbal teaching, yet he will respond to physical suggestion, if I may so express it.

To explain: it has been my experience that boys and girls of two or three are not capable of absorbing the spoken word in mentorship of this kind.

But if you buoy them up with artificial support, such as the inflated rubber tube, then take their arms and legs and gently guide

them into performing the dog paddle, which consists of the rudimentary movements of the crawl stroke, they will presently execute them voluntarily and learn to propel themselves along, still supported, of course.

Later, by the same process, combined with illustration, they can be taught the action of the advanced crawl and swimming respiration. After that the air in the tube is diminished gradually and they swim unaided.

Concerning your own problem, I suggest that you find a shallow pool, with water approximately waist deep, and endeavour to overcome your fear by following this course:

Start by holding on to the side of the pool, with feet on bottom; take a deep breath, then dip the face and exhale through the nose under water.

Standing up, with hands on solid wall, you should have no trouble in submerging the face. Once you are used to it, try the same thing without holding on, but still standing. Bend from the waist to dip the face and now seek to keep the eyes open.

Next, turn with your back to pool wall, stretch both arms forward on the surface and raise one foot to the height of knee, resting it on the wall.

Then take a deep breath and hold it, closing mouth; dip face; push off from wall with raised foot and immediately stretch out flat on water, body forming a straight line from tips of fingers to toes.

The impetus derived from the push off will keep you afloat. Glide for a few seconds. To again get on your feet, do three things simultaneously: push downward with both arms, lift head, and seek bottom with one foot only, not both, drawing up knee toward stomach, and dropping the foot, imitating the movements you make in taking a step forward.

This method of coming to your feet will prevent floundering and I feel confident when you realize you can rise from swimming to standing position without any difficulty, the worst of your fears will be over.

After that, it is a case of learning to glide a bit further, as far as a good, deep breath will carry you, then taking up in turn the various parts of the crawl stroke, leg drive first, arm action next, breathing last.

The crawl is the best stroke for all purposes and the easiest to master. Some may tell you it is not suited to other than young and athletic people, but that's nonsense. I have personally taught it to men and women in the sixties and they have become proficient swimmers.

I advise you to give the outlined preliminaries a trial, then seek the help of a competent instructor and arrange for a course of lessons. Self-instruction usually is successful if one follows the standard system, but it is much easier to learn under expert guidance. The chief handicap is that one cannot see himself in action. It is impossible to tell, therefore, if one is executing the movements correctly.

## NOVA SCOTIA produces some interesting gem-stones, but investment in them is like investment in anything else—it all depends.

Request:—Will you kindly give me the following information about the gem-stones of Nova Scotia?

What are chalcedony, carnelian, and staurolite? Are they used for jewelry? Will you list them and also jasper, onyx, bloodstone, amethyst, and garnet in their order of value?

Do you know of any famous stones taken from Nova Scotia? An amethyst from Cape Blomidon was among the French crown jewels, having been sent to King Henry IV. I wonder if it had any historic interest, and if its present owner is known.

Also, is there any standard scale of value for precious stones? For instance, if I were to invest one thousand dollars in garnets, would I be sure of receiving in return for them one thousand dollars from any jeweler at any time?

—HUGH D. MACLEAN, Nova Scotia.

Reply by Mr. F. J. Esterlin:—Chalcedony, carnelian, and jasper are closely related. Chalcedony is usually bluish or white, carnelian, red; and jasper, varigated. They are in the same group as agate, although differing in color and somewhat in texture.

In their order of importance they are amethyst, garnet, bloodstone, onyx, carnelian, jasper, chalcedony, and staurolite, or "cross-stone," which has no jewelry value except in the locality where found.

Historic stones can be traced through our national museums, if any record has been left.

Value of gems vary with each group, and individually in each group according to quality, size, true color, and perfection.

I have sold a good many gems during the past few years, which were purchased for investment alone, but they were stones I knew could be sold at a profit, in a buying market, and stones I had purchased below cost. The prices gems get vary with quality, first of all, demand for them, their rarity, etc. There is no fixed price.

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**Baseball**—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

**Camping**—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

**Boxing**—CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St., N. Y. C.

**Canoeing:** *paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 161 W. Harrison St., Chicago, Ill.

**Coins:** *and medals*—HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

**Dogs**—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care of *Adventure.*

**Fencing**—CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St., N. Y. C.

**First Aid**—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

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**Globe-trotting and vagabonding**—ROBERT SPIERS-BENJAMIN, 1177 East 15th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

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**Horses:** *care, training of horses in general; jumping; and polo; the cavalry arm*—MAJOR B. ERNEST DUPUY, care of *Adventure.*

**Motor Boating**—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

**Motor Camping and Trailer Camping**—MAJOR CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M.D., 152 W. 65th St., N. Y. C.

**Motorcycling**—*regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, Scottsmoor, Fla.

**Mountain Climbing**—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 845 W. Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif.

**Old Songs**—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 995 Pine St., San Francisco, Calif.

**Old-Time Sailoring**—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

**Oriental Magic and Effects**—JULIEN PROSKAUER, 148 Lafayette St., New York, N. Y.

**Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers:** *foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. No. 3, Box 69, Salem, Oregon.

**Shotguns:** *foreign and American makes; wing shooting*—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care of *Adventure.*

★**Skiing and Snowshoeing**—W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

**Small Boating:** *skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

**Soccer**—MR. BEDA VON BERCHEM, care of *Adventure.*

**Stamps**—DR. H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Avenue, Denver, Colo.

**Swimming**—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y. C.

**Swords:** *spears, pole arms and armor*—CAPT. R. E. GARDNER, 1354 N. 4th St., Columbus, Ohio.

**Tournament Fly and Bait Casting**—H. B. STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

**Track**—JACKSON SCHOLZ, 125 Lambert Rd., Jenkintown, Pa.

**Woodcraft**—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

**Wrestling**—CHARLES B. CRANFORD, School of Education, New York University, Washington Square, New York, N. Y.

**Yachting**—A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

## SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

**Anthropology:** *American; north of the Panama Canal; customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

**Automobiles and Aircraft Engines:** *design, operation and maintenance*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care of *Adventure.*

**Aviation:** *airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachute gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

**Big Game Hunting:** *guides and equipment*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

**Entomology:** *insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

**Ethnology:** (*Eskimo*)—VICTOR SHAW, 20th & W. Garfield Sts., Seattle, Wash.

**Forestry:** *in the United States; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

**Tropical Forestry:** *tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, Chapel Hill, N. C.

**Fur Farming**—FRED L. HOWDEN, 104 Fairview Ave., Binghamton, New York.

**Herpetology:** *reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

**Marine Architecture:** *ship modeling*—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

**Mining:** *territory anywhere in North America. Mining law, prospecting outfitting; any mineral, metallic or nonmetallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

**Motor Vehicles:** *operation, legislative restrictions and traffic*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care of *Adventure.*

**Ornithology:** *birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 3508 Kings College Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

**Photography:** *outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places, general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

**Precious and semi-precious stones:** *cutting and polishing of gem materials; technical information*—F. J. ESTERLIN, 901-902 Shreve Bldg., 210 Post Road, San Francisco, Calif.

**Radio:** *telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

**Railroads:** *in the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

**Sawmilling**—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.*

**Sunken Treasure:** *salvaging and diving*—COMDR. EDWARD ELLSBERG, U. S. N. R., care of *Adventure.*

**Taxidermy**—SETH BULLOCK, care of *Adventure.*

**Wildcrafting and Trapping**—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

## MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE SUBJECTS

**Army Matters:** *United States and Foreign*—CAPT. GLEN R. TOWNSEND, 6511 Cabanne Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

**Federal Investigation Activities:** *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, 251 Third St, Fair Haven, N. J.

**Police, City and State**—FRANCIS H. BENT, 251 Third St., Fair Haven, N. J.

**U. S. Marine Corps**—CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, C. C. C. Co. No. 510, Mammoth Cave, Ky.

**World War:** *strategy, tactics, leaders, armies, participants, historical and political background*—REDA VON BERCHEM, care of *Adventure.*

## GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

**The Sea. Part 1** *British and American waters, ships, oceans, waterways, seas, islands, Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Cape Horn, Magellan Straits, Mediterranean Sea, Islands and Coasts.*—COMDR. EDWARD ELLSBERG, U.S.N.R., care of *Adventure.*

**Philippine Islands**—BUCK CONNER, Quartzsite, Ariz., care Conner Field.

**★New Guinea**—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

**★New Zealand: Cook Island, Samoa**—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

**★Australia and Tasmania**—ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge St., Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

**★South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Cardross," Suva, Fiji.

**Asia. Part 1** *★Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies Ceylon*—V. B. WINDLE, *care of Adventure.* **2** *French Indo-China, Hong Kong, Macao, Tibet, Southern, Eastern and Central China*—SEWARD S. CRAMER, care of *Adventure.* **3** *Northern China and Mongolia*—PAUL H. FRANSON, Bldg. No. 3 Veterans Administration Facility, Minneapolis, Minn. **4** *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **5** *★Palestine*—CAPT. E. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

**Africa, Part 1** *★Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 26th Ave., West, Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya.*—GORDON MAC CREAGH, Box 197, Centerport, Long Island, N. Y. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara, caravans.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Morocco.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, care of *Adventure.* **5** *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Nigeria.*—N. E. NELSON, 1641 Greenlawn Ave., Akron, Ohio. **6** *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, and Rhodesia.*—CAPT. F. J. FRANKLIN, Adventure Camp, Simi, Calif. **7** *★Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ont., Canada. **8** *★Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa.*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure.*

**Madagascar**—RALPH LINTON, 824 Sterling Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

**Europe, Part 1** *Denmark, Germany*—G. I. COLBURN, East Ave., New Canaan, Conn. **2** *The Balkans: Jugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece and Turkey. The Austrian Succession States: Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary*—*History, customs, travel.*—REDA VON BERCHEM, care of *Adventure.*

**South America, Part 1** *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure.* **2** *Venezuela, The Guianas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil.*—DR. PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

**★West Indies**—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

**Central America**—SEYMOUR POND, P. O. Box 5007, Ancon, Canal Zone, Panama.

**Mexico, Part 1** *Northern Border States.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** *Quintana Roo, Yucatan, Campeche.*—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Poplar Ave., Takoma Prk., Md. **3** *★South of line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—JOHN NEWMAN PAGE, *care of Adventure.*

**Newfoundland**—C. T. JAMES, Box 2064, St. John's, Newfoundland.

**Greenland**—*Dog-teams, whaling, Eskimos, etc.*—VICTOR SHAW, 20th & W. Garfield Sts., Seattle, Wash.

**Canada, Part 1** *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island*—FRED L. BOWDEN, 104 Fairview Ave., Binghamton, N. Y. **2** *★Southeastern Quebec.*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 24 Plessis St., Quebec, Canada. **3** *★Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, Southeastern Ungova and Keewatin.*—S. E. SANGSTER, care *Adventure.* **4** *★Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, *The Courier Advocate*, Trenton, Ont., Canada. **5** *★Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario, National Parks.*—A. D. L. ROBINSON, 269 Victoria Rd., Walkerville, Ont., Canada. **6** *Lake of Woods Region.*—R. P. LINCOLN, care of U. FRILUND, 4943 Dupont Ave., So. Minneapolis, Minn. **7** *★Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C.

**Alaska**—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 845 W. Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif.

**Western U. S., Part 1** *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure.* **2** *Utah and Arizona.*—GORDON GORDON, P. O. Box 2582, Tucson, Ariz. **3** *New Mexico (Indians, etc.)*—H. F. ROBINSON, 1211 W. Roma Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Wyoming and Colorado.*—Homesteading, etc. E. P. WELLS, Sisters, Oregon. **5** *Nevada, Montana, and Northern Rockies.*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **6** *Idaho and environs.*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **7** *Texas, Oklahoma.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

**Middle Western U. S., Part 1** *Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.*—JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care of *Adventure.* **2** *Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and border waters; touring, fishing.*—R. P. LINCOLN, care of U. FRILUND, 4943 Dupont Ave., So. Minneapolis, Minn. **3** *Missouri, Arkansas, Missouri River up to Sioux City, Ozarks, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Mississippi and Lake Michigan.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.* **4** *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River.*—GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton, P. O., Ingram, Pa. **5** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottom.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

**Eastern U. S., Part 1** *Eastern Maine. All Territory east of Penobscot River.*—H. B. STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Western Maine. All Territory west of Penobscot River.*—DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main St., Bangor Me. **3** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 29 Baldwin St., Aimes Pt., West Haven, Conn. **4** *Adirondacks, New York.* RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. **5** *New Jersey.*—F. H. BENT, 251 Third St., Fair Haven, N. J. **6** *West Va., Md., District of Columbia.*—ROBERT HOLTON BULL, 842 Spring Ave., South Hills, Charleston, W. Va. **7** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care *Adventure.* **8** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains South of Virginia.*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

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