

COMPLETE ADVENTURE

DEC.
15¢

THE EXOTIC
LAND

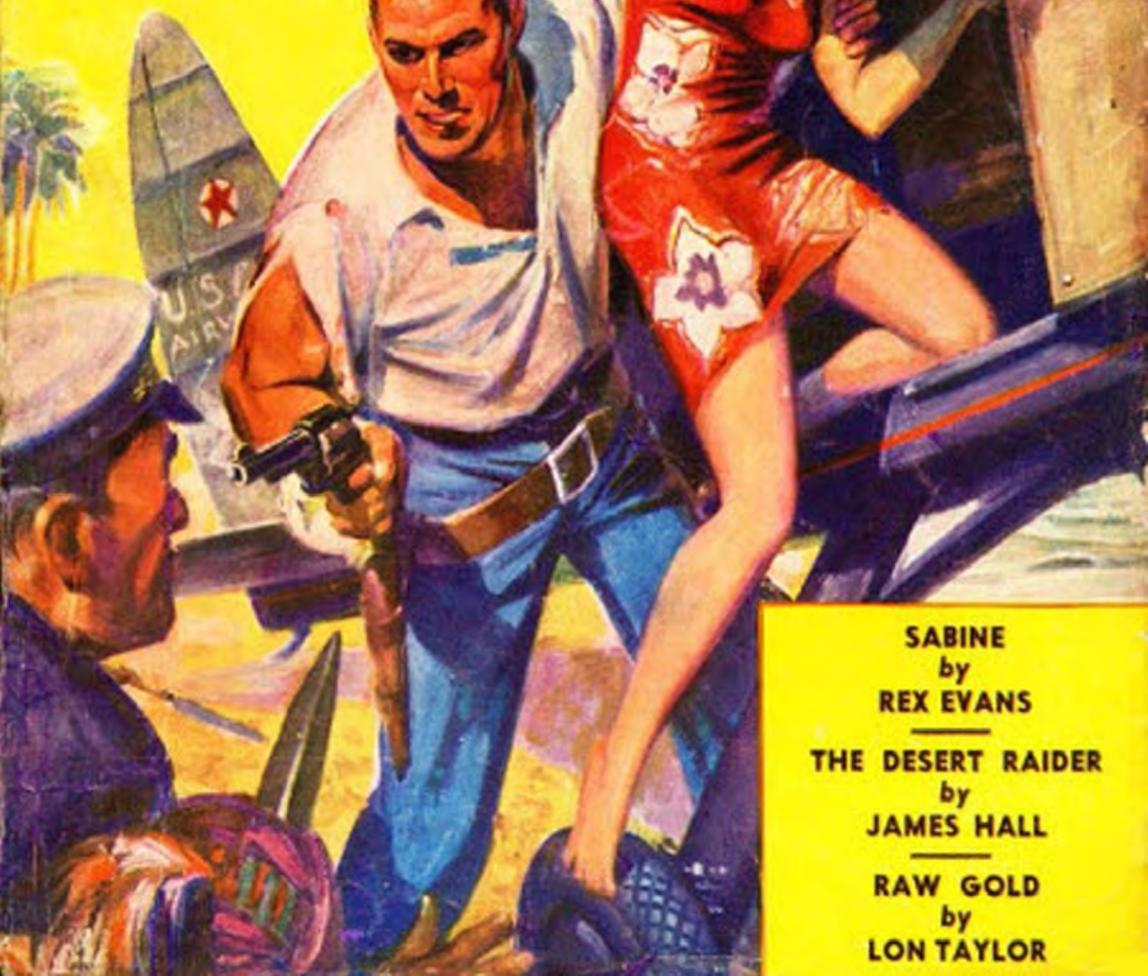
by

Ken Jason

DEEP IN BORNEO

by

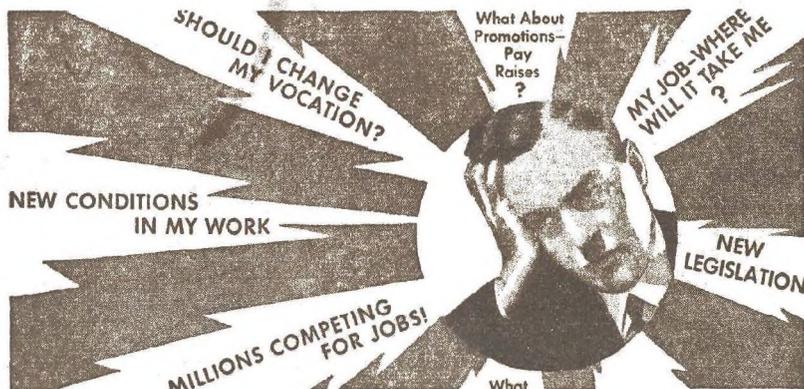
J. Allan Dunn



SABINE
by
REX EVANS

THE DESERT RAIDER
by
JAMES HALL

RAW GOLD
by
LON TAYLOR



WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

YOU'RE like a million other men—you're facing a big question. The depression turned business topsy-turvy and now the rebuilding period stares you in the face.

Are the things that are happening today going to help or hinder you—what will they mean in your pay check? Where will they put you five, ten, twenty years from now? How can you take full advantage of this period of opportunity?

We believe you will find the answer here—a suggestion the soundness of which can be proven to you as it has been to thousands of other men.

The whole trend today—legislation, spirit, action—is to put men back to work, raise earning and spending power, *give every man a fair chance to work out his own salvation.*

The road to success remains unchanged but, bear this in mind, *what it takes to win is radically different!*

No employer today would dare risk an important post in the hands of a man who had not learned the lesson of '29. Why should he, when right at this moment he can pick and choose and get almost any man he wants at his own price?

Business organizations are rebuilding—reorganizing for the new conditions. Before it is over every man and every method will be judged in the cold light of reason and experience—then dropped, remade or retained. This spells real opportunity for the man who can meet the test—but heaven help the man who still tries to meet today's problems from yesterday's standpoint! Out of the multitude still

jobless there are sure to be many frantically eager to prove him wrong and take his place.

Some Men Have Found the Answer

Seeing these danger signs, many aggressive men and women are quietly training at home—are wisely building themselves for more efficient service to their employers.

You naturally ask, "Has your training helped men withstand conditions of the last few years?"

Our answer is to point to a file of letters from many of our students reporting *pay raises and promotions while business was at its lowest ebb*—together with a myriad of others telling of greater success during these recent months of recovery.

Amazing evidence is ready for your investigation. We have assembled much of it in a booklet that is yours for the asking, along with a new and vitally interesting pamphlet on your business field.

This is a serious study of the possibilities and opportunities in that field. It is certain to contain an answer to vital questions bothering you today about your own work and earning power.

Send for these booklets—coupon brings them free. Be sure to check the LaSalle training that interests you most. We will tell you also how you can meet and take fullest advantage of today's situation. No cost or obligation—so why not mail the coupon now?

LASALLE EXTENSION, Dept. 992-R, Chicago

Please send me—without cost or obligation—full information about how I can, through your training, equip myself for the new problems and opportunities in the business field I have checked.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Accountancy | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Law: Degree of LL.B. | <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Law | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stenotypy | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Foremanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Office Management |

Name

Position

Address



LASALLE
EXTENSION adult business training

GREATEST BARGAIN

IN TEN YEARS

Remington
NOISELESS
Portable
NOW **10¢** A DAY!

10-DAY FREE TRIAL. Now for the first time in history you can own a real Remington NOISELESS Portable for only 10¢ a day or \$3 a month. Think of it! The finest Remington Portable ever built at the lowest terms we have ever offered. Every attachment needed for complete writing equipment—PLUS THE FAMOUS NOISELESS FEATURE. Brand new. Not rebuilt. Send coupon today.

WE PAY ALL SHIPPING CHARGES. You don't risk a penny. We send this Remington Noiseless Portable direct from factory to you with **TEN DAYS' FREE TRIAL.** If you are not satisfied, send it back.

FREE →

TYPING COURSE

With your New Remington Noiseless Portable we will send you—absolutely FREE—a 19-page course in typing. It teaches the Touch System, used by all expert typists. It is simply written and completely illustrated. Instructions are as simple as A, B, C. Even a child can easily understand this method. A little study and the average person, child or adult, becomes fascinated. Follow this course during the 10-Day Trial Period we give you with your typewriter and you will wonder why you ever took the trouble to write letters by hand.



FREE →

CARRYING CASE

Also under this new Purchase Plan we will send you FREE with every Remington Noiseless Portable a special carrying case sturdily built of 3-ply wood. This handsome case is covered with heavy du Pont fabric. The top is removed by one motion, leaving the machine attached to the base. This makes it easy to use your Remington anywhere—on knees, in chairs, on trains. Don't delay... send in the coupon for complete details!



MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE
10-DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER

FACTORY TO YOU

The gem of all portables. Imagine a machine that speaks in a whisper... that removes all limitations of time or place. You can write in a library, a sick room, a Pullman berth without the slightest fear of disturbing others. And in addition to quiet a superb performance literally makes words seem to flow from the machine. Equipped with all attachments that make for complete writing equipment, the Remington Noiseless Portable produces manifold and stencil cutting of truly exceptional character. Furnished in black with shining chromium attachments.

SPECIFICATIONS. Standard Keyboard. Finished in glistening black with chromium attachments. Takes paper 9.5 inches wide. Writes lines 8.5 inches wide. Standard size, 12 yard ribbon. Makes up to 7 clear legible carbons. Back spacer. Full size platen. Paper fingers, roller type. Black key cards with white letters. Double shift key and shift lock. Right and left carriage releases. Right and left cylinder knobs. Large cushion rubber feet. Single or double space adjustment. All the modern features plus NOISELESS operation. Write for full details today!

MONEY-MAKING OPPORTUNITIES OPEN. Hundreds of jobs are waiting for people who can type. A typewriter helps you put your ideas on paper in logical, impressive form... helps you write clear, understandable sales reports, letters, articles, stories. A Remington Portable has started many a young man and woman on the road to success.

GIFT FOR ALL THE FAMILY. If you want a gift for birthday or Graduation... one Father, Mother, sister or Brother will use and appreciate for years to come... give a Remington Noiseless Portable. We will send a Remington Noiseless Portable to anyone you name, and you can still pay for it at only 10¢ a day. Few gifts are so universally pleasing as a new Remington Noiseless Portable. Write today.



Mail Now!

Remington Rand Inc., Dept. 287-6
315 Fourth Ave., New York, N. Y.
Please tell me how I can get a new Remington Noiseless Portable typewriter, plus FREE typing course and carrying case, for only 10¢ a day. Also send me new illustrated catalogue.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED--THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!

MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH MARY--I MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP. IT ALL LOOKS SO HOPELESS.

IT ISN'T HOPELESS EITHER BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY A NEW FIELD LIKE RADIO?



TOM GREEN WENT INTO RADIO AND HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY, TOO. I'LL SEE HIM RIGHT AWAY.



BILL, JUST MAILING THAT COUPON GAVE ME A QUICK START TO SUCCESS IN RADIO. MAIL THIS ONE TONIGHT



TOM'S RIGHT--AN UNTRAINED MAN HASN'T A CHANCE. I'M GOING TO TRAIN FOR RADIO TOO. IT'S TODAY'S FIELD OF GOOD PAY OPPORTUNITIES



TRAINING FOR RADIO IS EASY AND I'M GETTING ALONG FAST--

SOON I CAN GET A JOB SERVICING SETS-- OR INSTALLING LOUD SPEAKER SYSTEMS OR IN A BROADCASTING STATION

THERE'S NO END TO THE GOOD JOBS FOR THE TRAINED RADIO MAN



YOU SURE KNOW RADIO--MY SET NEVER SOUNDED BETTER

THAT'S \$15 I'VE MADE THIS WEEK IN SPARE TIME



I HAVE A GOOD FULL TIME RADIO JOB NOW--AND A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD IN RADIO

OH BILL, IT'S WONDERFUL YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO.



I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME In Your Spare Time For A GOOD RADIO JOB

Many Radio Experts Make \$30, \$50, \$75 a Week Do you want to make more money? Broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as \$200 to \$500 a year--full time servicing pays as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts operate full or part time Radio businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to \$6,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay, see the world. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loud speaker systems offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio.

**Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra
in Spare Time While Learning**

Almost every neighborhood needs a good spare time serviceman. The day you enroll I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheet. They show you how to do Radio repair jobs; how to cash in quickly. Throughout your training I send plans and ideas that made good spare time money for hundreds of fellows. I send special Radio equipment, give you practical experience--show you how to conduct experiments, build circuits, illustrating important Radio principles.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities, also those coming in Television; tells about my Training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning; shows my Money Back Agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard--NOW!

**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 7JK1
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

**J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 7JK1
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.**

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which prints out the opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home to become Radio Experts. (Please Write Plainly.)



J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 1914
The man who has directed the home study training of more men for Radio than any other man in America.

HERE'S PROOF THAT MY TRAINING PAYS



N. R. I. Training Increases Yearly Salary \$1,200

\$10 to \$25 a Week in Spare Time



"Since securing my operator's license through N. R. I. Training, I've been regularly employed and am now with WOOD. My salary has increased \$1,200 in Radio."--JULIUS C. VESSELS, Station WOOD, Chattanooga, Tenn.

"I am making from \$10 to \$25 a week in spare time while still holding my regular job as a machinist. I owe my success to N. R. I."--WM. P. RUPP, 203 W. Front St., West Conshohocken, Pa.



\$1,500 a Year in Own Business

"After completing the N. R. I. Course I became Radio Editor of the Buffalo Courier. Later I started a Radio service business of my own and have averaged over \$3,500 a year."--T. J. TELAAK, 657 Broadway, Buffalo, N. Y.



NAME.....AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

Please mention AMERICAN FICTION GROUP when answering advertisements

Steady Work

As nearly all manufacturing and building starts on the drafting table, the draftsman is one of the first to be hired, last to be laid off. His blueprints, his specifications, give the final word in what the workmen are to do

Good Pay

The draftsman has been called the Junior Engineer, which accurately describes his work, position and pay. He combines knowledge of principles, mechanism and construction details with ability to draw plans and indicate methods. Usually his salary is considerably above the wages of the mechanic and, of course, less than that of the engineer.

Become a Draftsman



Enjoy a Real Job in Industry

Chance for Promotion

Helping design new buildings, machines or construction methods, the draftsman knows what his firm is planning or considering. It may be the superintendent—engineer—even the prospective buyer with whom he consults. These contacts, plus his experience, place him in an excellent position for promotion when next there is a good opening.

A Job Where You Are Not Old at 40

Athletes, farmers, factory and shop workers—all who rely on muscle often are old at 40. Office workers—executives, teachers, professional men, *draftsmen*—just approach their prime at 40 to 50. Training increases your value **AT ONCE** and *continues* to help boost your earning power as you mature.

Train Now for 40 and the Years Between!

Even if you are now only 18, 25 or 30, you should *look ahead*—begin training **TODAY** for the job you want at 50. Training helps you to be *independent—self-supporting*. It helps you to enjoy associations denied to untrained men. Training helps you to offer your family advantages far in excess of what you could give them as an untrained man. Investigate **NOW**.

American School, Dept. DD-660, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

2 Drafting Lessons Free

Test Yourself! See how readily you can learn Drafting by interesting, practical home study. Write **TODAY** for facts and 2 beginning lessons **FREE**.



ROOFLESS Plates

ORDER BY MAIL AT MONEY SAVING PRICES **FREE!** Sanitary Wrapped Impression Material **SEND NO MONEY!**

These Plates are Held Firmly by Vacuum Cup Suction. Restores Natural Voice and Facial Expression. Don't Delay. Write Today. Send Name and Address for Information.

60 DAYS TRIAL

Dr. J. S. LIPPERT

Plate Specialist with 33 years' experience
DEPT. 327-1, 24 & VAN BUREN ST., CHICAGO, ILL.



U. S. Government Jobs

Start \$1280 to \$2100 a Year!
MEN—WOMEN. Common Education usually sufficient. Write immediately for free 32-page book, with list of many positions and particulars telling how to get them.

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE
Dept. G-180, Rochester, N. Y.

Always Buy a
RED CIRCLE MAGAZINE
For the Best Stories

TRINIDAD · ZANZIBAR · NEW ORLEANS · NICE · MONACO · CAIRO · DENVER · PORT SUDAN · NASSAU · VIENNA

A WORLD OF ROMANCE FOR YOU!

COPYRIGHT
1937



● A world of adventure is waiting for you through the Club Idyllwood—stimulating contacts, friendship, glamour, romance! If you feel that life is cheating you of the things you want most, if you are desperate for a chance to meet new people and do new and exciting things, write **TODAY** for information about membership in the Club Idyllwood.

● The Club Idyllwood is a confidential social organization for men and women who want to make really interesting friends, and who want a confidential introduction-by-mail service enhanced by the right social background.

FOR COMPLETE DESCRIPTIVE FOLDER, ADDRESS

CLUB IDYLLWOOD

Post Office Box M Dept. 32

MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA

Please Mention **AMERICAN FICTION GROUP** when answering advertisements

Free TO MOTORISTS WITH OIL EATING CARS



STOP WASTING MONEY!

Give your car a chance to be a joy and pleasure again! Know the thrill of stepping on the gas without the fear of how much it is going to cost. Give Ovrhaul an opportunity to put your motor back on the paying side. A single application through the spark plug openings will last up to 10,000 miles and costs less than spark plugs.

PROOF! FROM USERS!

Nearly a half million motorists and service station attendants have used Ovrhaul in place of new rings and rebore. In our files we have thousands of unsolicited letters. We reprint here only a few—the originals of which are open to inspection in our offices.

- "Nearly doubled gas mileage." C. A., Colo.
- "Checked oil pumping." J. W. McG., Pa.
- "Have been using Ovrhaul for the past nine thousand miles and find it to do everything you said." M. H., New York.
- "Ovrhaul that I installed has done wonders to the cars and the people praise your product." B. G. A., Pa.
- "Stopped smoking after ten days." E. H., Ill.
- "New Rings unnecessary." L. J. W., S. D.
- "Raised compression—cut oil consumption." F. C., Mich.
- "Used 68 gallons of gas on 1250 mile trip (about 18 miles to a gallon) BEFORE USING OVRHAUL. Made same trip AFTER and used only 48 gallons (which is 26 miles to the gallon)." P. D. C., Ind.
- "Increased Gas Mileage 50%." M. P. A., Va.
- "Old car ran like a new machine." J. G. R., Ore.
- "800 miles on one quart of oil—formerly only 75 miles." H. N. L., Ohio.

GET YOUR FREE SAMPLE NOW!

Your motor takes more punishment during hot weather than at any other time. Use the coupon or send your name and address on a penny postcard and mail for free sample of this amazing mineral—and full details of a real money-making opportunity.

B. L. MELLINGER, Pres.
OVRHAUL CO., L-102
KANSAS CITY, MO.

Send THIS COUPON

MAIL COUPON TODAY

(Paste on Postcard and Mail)

B. L. MELLINGER, Pres.
OVRHAUL CO., L-102, KANSAS CITY, MO.

Without cost or obligation rush me at once a FREE SAMPLE and your big money-making plan.

Name

Address

City..... State.....

Make and year of car or truck

MINER'S AMAZING MINERAL DISCOVERY SAVES UP TO 95% OF NEW RING AND REBORE COSTS—IF YOUR MOTOR WASTES OIL AND GAS . . . IF IT HAS LOST THAT "NEW CAR" POWER, SPEED AND QUIET . . . SEND THE COUPON BELOW—NOW—FOR FREE SAMPLE. BIG OPPORTUNITY FOR SALESMEN!

**SAVES UP TO 50% ON OIL
INCREASES GAS MILEAGE
UP TO 45%***

Here is a simple, inexpensive, time-saving method of checking oil and gas waste caused by worn rings and cylinders. Ovrhaul, the amazing mineral product, actually performs the important benefits of expensive rings and rebore—but a fraction of the cost—in only a few minutes' time and without any special tools or equipment. Ovrhaul, the original patented mineral motor reconditioner, has revolutionized the cost of motor upkeep for thousands of motorists. *Sensational records of oil and gas savings have been reported by Independent Laboratory and road tests, great State Universities, Automotive engineers and editors of well-known mechanical publications. Ovrhaul has convinced the most skeptical!—Give it a trial and it will convince you.

TAKES ONLY 30 MINUTES

Before you spend up to \$150.00 for new rings and rebore—send for a free sample of this amazing mineral and find out why nearly a half million motorists decided to "Ovrhaul" their motor. Let us show you why, when rings and cylinders are worn, this phenomenal product will increase the compression—quiet the noises—give your car added power and speed—reduce the gas and oil waste—and pay for itself many times over in what it saves.

BIG MONEY MAKING TERRITORIES OPEN!

18,000,000 cars need Ovrhaul. This enormous market of men and women with money to spend is proving a bonanza for Distributors and Salesmen. Desirable and big profit territory on an exclusive basis still open. If you would like to get in the BIG MONEY, let us tell you about our plan and show you the plain dollar and cent facts about what others are doing. Ovrhaul is fully covered by patents for your protection and legal action is taken against all infringers.

Proof! From Salesmen and Distributors!

Wide awake men tell us Ovrhaul is the fastest selling and biggest repeating item they have seen in years. They are cashing in BIG. Below are only a few—others have made more—some less—these show the opportunity.

- "I have sold 1204 Ovrhauls, making a total gross profit of \$2,718.46. My best month, \$834.50. I find 99 & 10% are more than satisfied."—B. Wisconsin: "My profits have been as high as \$78.80 in a single day."—R. Fla.: "Send ¼ Gross. Last six dozen lasted 3 days."—E. H. H. Maryland: "By the end of 60 days I will be selling 500 Ovrhauls a week."—T. K., Oklahoma: "I have sold as many as 60 Ovrhauls in one day."—M. E. P., Conn.

TESTING LABORATORY REPORT

Below is reprinted a copy of the certified laboratory report of the Industrial Testing Laboratory.

"We hereby certify that we have tested OVRHAUL UNDER WORKING CONDITIONS

—1928 Pontiac driven 72,000 miles. TOTAL GAIN in compression 92 lbs. (nearly normal according to manufacturer's specifications). OVRHAUL does NOT scratch, abrade or otherwise injure the motor. The "pick-up" speed, and hill climbing performance were increased ENORMOUSLY. Car runs practically as well as when new.
There is no guesswork about Ovrhaul. Proved harmless to finest motors. Contains no mica, graphite or harmful abrasives. YOU CAN SELL IT WITH CONFIDENCE!



AMAZING NEW ELECTRIC ARC WELDER

RETAILS
Only

World's Lowest Priced
ELECTRIC ARC WELDER

WORKS OFF A
STORAGE BATTERY
or 110-Volt Line

Yes, it's true! Only \$1.95 for the complete, marvelously efficient COMET ELECTRIC ARC WELDER! Just invented! Generates tremendous heat to weld or braze metals. Costs ONLY \$1.95 COMPLETE! Repairs fenders, auto bodies, galvanized cans, radiators; brazes castings, machinery parts, etc. Fuses broken parts permanently, stronger than before. Low power consumption. Take the Comet anywhere to the job, operate from auto battery or 110-Volt A C line (with connector which we supply at low extra cost). Sturdily built of finest materials to last years.

Welds or Brazes All Weldable Metals — Solders Too

By new scientific principle the Comet Arc Welder operates from a six-volt automobile storage battery. Uses standard welding rods and welds or brazes all weldable metals and alloys, as well as being ideal for electric soldering. The Comet quickly brings metals to the melting point, using very little current—about 20 to 25 amperes—equal only to twice the juice consumed by your headlights. No skill or experience is needed—anyone can operate the Comet and do welding or brazing jobs on fenders, bodies, wiring brace rods, tanks, batteries and sheet metal of all kinds.

Thousands of USES!

You'll find a thousand uses for the Comet around your home, garage, and work shop. Thousands of garages used the Comet Welder. Also factories, repair shops, mechanics, farmers, inventors, tin shops, plumbers, etc.

SEND NO MONEY!

Order a Comet now. Send no money. We'll rush one to you, complete with supply of welding rods and a carbon. Pay postman only \$1.95 plus few cents postage. If not delighted, return Comet in 5 days from receipt and money you paid for it will be refunded instantly. Rush your order NOW.

COMET WELDERS
Dept. Z-174, Halifax Street
CINCINNATI, OHIO

\$1.95
COMPLETE

GUARANTEED!

The Comet is FULLY GUARANTEED. You take no risks. If you are not positively delighted with the Comet within 5 days from receipt the Comet costs you nothing—simply return and every penny paid us will be cheerfully refunded.



SPECIFICATIONS

Comet is 11½ in. long, made of highest quality materials throughout. Design principles as used on expensive professional arc welders. Every alloy brass Electrode Holder; cool, balanced Wood Handle; Carbon Electrode; 6 ft. No. 8 weather-proof. Braided Cable; 25 amp. o.s.p. Battery Clip complete with supply of Steel Welding Rods and clear **EASY INSTRUCTIONS.**

COMET WELDERS, Halifax Street, Dept. Z-174 Cincinnati, Ohio.

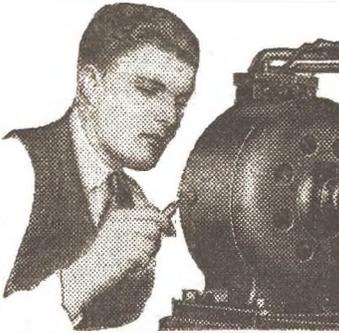
Send me a Comet ELECTRIC ARC WELDER. I will pay postman only \$1.95, on delivery, plus few cents postage. If I am not more than satisfied, I may return within 5 days from receipt, and every penny paid will be instantly refunded.

Check here if you wish to use on 110-Volt line.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....



EASIER WAY TO SUCCESS *in* ELECTRICITY

LEARN THE GREATEST INDUSTRY OF THE AGE—TRAIN NOW FOR A REAL FUTURE

I'll Finance Your Training!

Here is YOUR opportunity. Every day brings news of new developments in this fascinating, big-pay field, with new jobs and a greater future for the trained man than ever before. If you are ambitious to get ahead, I want to help you. MAIL THE COUPON BELOW and I'll tell you about my finance plan, which has enabled thousands to get Coyne Training with very little money. Get training first, then take 18 months to complete small monthly tuition payments starting FIVE MONTHS after you begin your training. NOT a Home-study course.

Opportunities for a good job, or a business of your own
Are you dissatisfied with your job? Are you out of a job because you lack specialized training for a live industry? Is your future uncertain? Then let me show you an amazing, easy way to get your start in Electricity, where thousands of TRAINED MEN earn good pay. Where hundreds of Coyne Graduates are drawing Good Pay every week. Coyne has been training ambitious fellows for the Electrical Industry since 1899. Whether you are 16 or 40 years old, Electricity thru Coyne training offers you your start for a real future—and you can start training any time.



W. C. Lewis

Learn By Doing In 90 Days

The great Coyne Shops are famous the world over for their unusual Learn-by-Doing method of practical, individual instruction. There is no book study, no reciting—you learn quickly and thoroughly by doing actual jobs under the personal guidance of trained instructors, on a great outlay of machinery and equipment assembled strictly for training purposes. That is why, in 12 short weeks, we are able to take fellows without previous experience or a lot of book learning, and train them for their start to a real future.

MANY EARN WHILE LEARNING

If you need part-time work to help pay living expenses while at school, tell us your problems and we may be able to help you as we have hundreds of other students. Then, after you graduate, our Free Employment Department will give you life-time employment service. Every Coyne graduate also receives a Life Scholarship, with free technical and business service and privilege of review at any time without additional tuition charge.

**DIESEL OPERATOR
ARMATURE WINDER
AND TESTER
SUBSTATION OPERATOR
AUTO ELECTRICIAN
INVENTOR
MAINTENANCE ELECTRICIAN
SERVICE STATION OWNER**

and many other money-making opportunities in the Electrical field. Learn by actual work on real dynamos, engines, power machinery, autos, switchboards—equipment ranging from door bells to large power motors, controls and generators, in full operation every day.

**DIESEL ENGINES
REFRIGERATION
AIR CONDITIONING**

These two fast growing industries offer opportunities to the trained man. Right now I'm including instruction in Diesel Engines, Electric Refrigeration and Air Conditioning at no extra cost.

HOME OF COYNE SHOPS

This is our fireproof modern home wherein is installed thousands of dollars worth of Electrical Equipment. Every comfort and convenience has been arranged to make you happy and contented during your training.

**W. C. LEWIS, PRESIDENT FOUNDED 1899
ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 67-15, Chicago, Ill.**

PROOF That Coyne Training Gets QUICK RESULTS

"I owe my electrical success to your 12-week shop course," says R. H. Umberger of Tennessee. "Two weeks after leaving school I took a wiring job," reports E. O. Berndt of Illinois, "and the profits from this one job alone more than paid for the entire course." A. C. Hoehle of Ohio says "Received several raises in pay, due to the training I received at Coyne." And I could quote from hundreds of similar letters from successful Coyne-trained men. What they have done, you should be able to do!

GET THE FACTS... NOW

Coyne is your great chance to get into this big-pay field. This school is 37 years old... Coyne training is second. And it costs you nothing to find out about this amazingly easy, practical way to learn Electricity. Simply mail the coupon below and I'll send you the big, free Coyne book, with photographs... facts... opportunities. There's no obligation... so act at once.



Send Today for this FREE Book!

**W. C. LEWIS, President
Coyne Electrical School,
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 67-15, Chicago, Ill.**
Without obligating me, send full details of your "Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation" Plan and Big Free Illustrated Catalog.

Name.....
Address.....
City.....State.....
Mail in envelope or paste on a postcard.



COYNE

The Desert Raider

by JAMES HALL

A colorful romance of French North Africa and a much-dreaded desert raider.

A TROOP of horsemen trotted slowly across the plain. The northern horizon was barred by the rugged profile of a range of hills. The slopes formed a wall of shadow, iron black. The crest gleamed with steely reflections, fringed by the crimson of lingering rays, like a jagged sword blade slashing against the luminous Algerian sky.

Southward, the Plateau of Dahar rolled endlessly, studded with runted shrubs, strewn with dark boulders, already hinting of the Saharan desolation.

The riders were sixteen in number. Fourteen of them wore the picturesque, garish uniform of the Spahis, splendid scarlet cloaks draped over loose trousers and red tunic, great white turbans wound with cordelets. One of the two in lead was an Arab in snowy white. The other, tall and lean in a well worn khaki uniform, was the French lieutenant in charge.

His face was tanned; the resolute, keen features enlivened by blue eyes. A short cropped blond mustache stood out, almost white against the gaunt, bronzed cheeks. Jacques de Gerval was twenty-six, had been in North Africa five years, since his graduation from military school.

The Arab riding at his side, Amar ben Amar, was a trader from Mecharia, one of the northern cities. Perhaps thirty-four, his body was fleshy, his face round and flabby, yellowish in the thin fringe of black beard. Obviously, he was ill at ease among armed men, made nervous by the martial rattle of stirrups and carbine plates.

The little detachment had left Bir-Dahar that morning and come thirty miles since dawn at the same even, easy





pace. Many times in the past two years, De Gerval had covered the same stretch of ground to gain the caravan route crossing from east to west, where the caravans swung north to avoid the French post at Bir-Dahar.

Before the arrival of the French in the South Oranese Territories Bir-Dahar had been nothing more than any other similar well in the region—scrubby date palms, sand, dust, heat and swarming flies. The spot had not changed much since, save for the erection of a blockhouse surrounded by a high defensive wall enclosing the residences.

Taxes and legal formalities follow the tricolor, as they follow the flag of any civilized power in primitive lands. Part of the commander's duty was to inspect, as often as possible, the papers of passing camel convoys.

THIS time, however, De Gerval had more important business. If things went as he planned, he was to have an opportunity to capture a famous Berber

raider, Lakhdar ben Lardaf. The raider would not be with the caravan he hoped to intercept but planned to join it a few hours later. De Gerval was acting on information brought him by Amar ben Amar. He glanced about, then shrugged, and turned to his guide, lifting his hand to order a halt.

"Amar, it is near sunset and the caravan is not in sight."

"It will come, Lieutenant. No doubt it halted during the heat of the afternoon to start afresh at the first cool wind."

"I hope I was not brought here on a fool's errand," De Gerval added. His voice was gentle, his smile kindly. But he looked at the informer with some scorn.

"Lakhdar ben Lardaf will come, Lieutenant," Amar insisted confidently.

De Gerval nodded, then moved forward until he was boot to boot with one of the Spahis. At first glance this man was not distinguishable from the Arab and Berber troopers. Nearer, a square, honest face showed under a turban, un-

mistakably that of a Frenchman. Sergeant Martin was two years older than his chief, sterner, thicker in build, a solid man with solid common sense. De Gerval and he had lived together, eaten at the same table, for twenty-four months. Difference in rank and up-bringing counted for little compared with dangers and solitudes shared in common.

"What do you think of it, Martin?"

"Of course, Lieutenant, this bird, Amar ben Amar, is a slob. Anybody who'll sell a man of his own race and religion, take money for information, is a slob. But I think he's telling the truth."

"I still feel that this woman business sounds queer."

"No," Martin said placidly. "Those guys are odd that way, Lieutenant. They'll treat some women like dogs. Then they'll fall in love with another one and lose their heads."

"You think Lakhdar would risk his neck for a woman?"

"Wouldn't you, Lieutenant?"

"That would depend on the woman, Martin."

De Gerval laughed.

"Guess that's the answer," Martin concluded.

He lifted his hand, called his chief's attention to a tawny cloud crawling forward on the plain, far east. Through the haze of dust, gleamed metal, reflections of the sun on gun barrels.

"The caravan—"

"Dismount," De Gerval ordered.

While the Spahis were fastening the horses, he unstrapped a cloak from behind his saddle, tossed it to Amar.

"Hide thyself in this," he said in Arabic. "Remain aside while I converse with the headman. In case the man we seek has already joined them he will think thee a Spahi."

Amar obeyed and stood aside. A strange fellow, the trader, yet he had come with a convincing story and himself was officially approved by the French resident in Mecharia.

He had come south, so he said, to avenge his family's honor on the person of Lakhdar ben Lardaf, and was one of the most timid avengers the lieutenant had ever beheld.

Of course, Lakhdar ben Lardaf's reputation warranted this to some extent.

ACCORDING to the Arab Bureaux, which forms the secret service of France in North Africa, Lakhdar had been born in one of the Berber encampments twenty-four years ago. From his sixteenth year he had followed raiding expeditions. His father and two of his uncles had been killed by the French Camel Corps.

In spite of his youth and lack of experience—eight years do not count for much in the career of a raider—Lakhdar was now a chieftain. He commanded a band of gaunt land pirates, flat bellied pillagers, varying in number between fifty and one hundred men, according to recent successes or failures. He had emerged victorious from two encounters with the Meharistes; victorious in the sense that he had managed to extricate his band with booty intact. As the Meharistes' rank and file are recruited among desert men, commanded by crack French officers selected from the most daring in other units, this was no small accomplishment.

Like all post commanders on the Saharan border, De Gerval had received official instructions to pay particular attention to Lakhdar. He knew that his capture would mean credit and promotion. But to outwit a born raider is a task for the most experienced officer in the service. It is difficult to cope with the invisible. Raiders are visible only for brief moments to the troops charged with police duty in the dunes, the few minutes that the skirmishes last.

Amar ben Amar had arrived at Bir-Dahar with credentials from French officials and the *kaid* of his own tribe. He told his odd tale to De Gerval—

In Mecharia, Amar, three months previously, became acquainted with a native called Bechir. Their friendship grew swiftly. There was even talk of marriage between Bechir and Amar's sister, Mabrouka. But Amar was not altogether blinded by friendship. Bechir was vague in his explanations of the past, of his business, although he spent recklessly, denied himself neither comforts nor luxuries.

One day, by accident, Amar saw his friend stripped to the waist. Bechir claimed to be a man of peace. His torso was seamed with scars. Amar investigated, bided his time and eventually came to the conclusion that Bechir was

none other than Lakhdar ben Lardaf, come north for one of his well known speers. Amar, wishing no man for a friend who was a foe of France, invited Lakhdar to a last joyous evening. There was eating and drinking, music and dancing girls, in a house rented for the occasion. The French police were warned. Lakhdar, well fed, seemingly sleepy, watched the steps of an Ouled-Nail dancer, unaware, apparently, of the sound of footsteps, the clicking of steel as the soldiers took place at the exits.

Amar ben Amar was satisfied, having done his duty. Then, bruskiy, a few minutes before he was to give the signal for a concerted rush into the house, Lakhdar reached out calmly, closed long fingers around his throat. The city dweller was no match for the raider.

When Amar recovered, Lakhdar was nowhere to be found. The soldiers entered, searched the house, the gardens and neighboring structures, vainly. Amar returned to his father's home, fearful that he would not reach it alive, wondering why he had been thus far spared, for the vengeful nature of the Berber was known.

His father, shaken and nervous, informed him that there had been a commotion in the women's quarters. A friend of the family, there for the evening rushed forward pistol in hand. The old man, following as fast as his aged limbs could carry him, found him dead, on the stairs leading to the harem, killed by a single knife thrust.

The bewildered women could only say that a tall man had entered, beaten off the guards who tried to halt him, and carried off Mabrouka. Patrols were launched in all directions; groups of men with fixed bayonets, gendarmes and native infantry. But Lakhdar had made his escape to the open *bled*.

AMAR had connections throughout North Africa and discovered traces of the fugitive. Pressed for time the Berber had trusted Mabrouka to friends in a small village of the hills north of Fahra, and had gone south to join his men. Amar had ascertained that Mabrouka would be sent with the caravan of Mohammed el Kettabi, that the raider would meet the caravan and claim her at the stopping place nearest Bir-Dahar.

Besides a legitimate desire to free his

sister, Amar ben Amar was honor bound to avenge the friend slain in his home. He explained to De Gerval. If he failed to kill Lakhdar with his own hand, or at least to contribute to his death, he would be dishonored. He added that he was a law abiding man, had little love for the ancient, primitive customs of his race and was glad to have recourse to soldiers, professional killers. In a way, he hoped that Lakhdar might not be slain immediately, but taken north for trial—with only one possible issue: conviction of murder and execution by the guillotine.

Knowing natives, De Gerval had found his vindictiveness natural. But he was shocked by the interest shown by Amar in the amount of the reward offered by the Government for the raider's capture. A wealthy man, such as Amar, should not have considered two hundred *douros*.

The caravan approached. Sixty camels at most; great uncouth beasts, lurching patiently onward, setting their hoofs down with absurd daintiness into the sand. Skinny, sunburnt men, in short *jellabas*, carrying clubs, walked beside them, encouraged them with a monotonous, droning chant. Asses followed; some laden with enormous packs, others carrying old men or women. There were a dozen guards, mounted on skinny horses, bearded, tanned, at ease in the high saddles, long barreled flintlocks hung on the strap from the pommel.

Mohammed el Kettabi was known to De Gerval. He halted his horse near the lieutenant and dismounted with the assistance of his followers, who rushed forward to hold his stirrup and offer their shoulders for support. His face was wrinkled and seamed by twenty years exposure in the Sahara, his beard yellow. Only in the restless glance could De Gerval discern his annoyance at thus unexpectedly meeting the French.

"Greetings, Lieutenant. All well with thee?"

"All well, Si Mohammed. Why didst thou not stop at the post for inspection?"

"It is off my path. My papers are in order."

De Gerval scanned the documents, stamped by officials of the French Government. The caravan was bound for the nearest oasis of the Saoura District, then down to Taoudeni, halfway across the Sahara to pick up cargo for the re-

turn trip from the Timbuktu caravans, come there for salt.

The lieutenant asked a few questions, perfunctorily. He was not at this time interested in the smuggling of a few bales of goods. His real purpose was to give plausible reason for his presence in the vicinity.

"Thy papers are in order, Si Mohammed. Thou wilt camp not far from here tonight?"

Mohammed was in excellent humor. The inspection had not been severe. De Gerval knew he had much feared delay and trouble due to the presence on his camels of undeclared goods.

"We camp an hour's march away, Lieutenant. At the little well—"

"There is only water enough there for your beasts and a small provision to carry away. My men would take water of more use of thee. Hence, I shall stay here for the night, to rest for the long trip back to the post tomorrow."

"My tent is thine," Mohammed said courteously.

"Perhaps I shall come to visit thee tonight," De Gerval said. "Or in the morning to bid thee farewell."

AGAIN, their hands touched. The camels lurched by slowly, the guards exchanged a few words with the Spahis who had drawn forward. As De Gerval watched the caravan march by he wondered which of the veiled figures was Mabrouka, the woman loved of Lakhdar, for whom he had killed a man and risked capture. The long procession ebbed in the shimmering dust.

De Gerval beckoned to Amar.

"Was she there?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Thou art certain?"

"I know my sister, Lieutenant."

"I watched closely," De Gerval resumed, "and no movement of alarm was made by any woman. If she were there she would know that I would help her. She saw the soldiers with me."

"Fear prevented her from speaking, Lieutenant. Someone may be guarding her. A bullet is soon fired. Then flight." Amar indicated the darkening plain, the hills. "Out there, a well mounted man can find safety. How can twenty slay one, if they cannot find him?"

"Granted." De Gerval turned to Martin who had drawn near. "I told the

old man I might pay him a friendly visit. Hence, when he hears the hoofbeats tonight, he will reassure whoever is with him that I merely come to bid him farewell. Lakhdar, if he is there, will have no reason to suspect we come for him and will remain quiet rather than attract attention by flight. We'll wait until eight-thirty or nine. They'll have eaten by then and be comfortably settled for the night. You will take six men and circle the camp near the well, quietly. If anyone tries to get out of camp at my approach, shoot. This is no time for caution. Two men will remain with the horses left here. As for me, I'll start an hour or so after you, with five men and Amar and ride openly toward the encampment. If Lakhdar is there, Amar can point him out to me. I'll arrest him and whistle. You close in then. Understood?"

"Perfectly, Lieutenant."

"I had better not show myself," Amar, who had followed the conversation in French, protested. "Should he see me, he will know our errand. I shall be the first mark."

"But I must know him without chance of mistake, Amar."

"He is easily recognized. He is tall, his beard—"

"Be still," De Gerval snapped impatiently. "Thy hide is no more precious than ours. With the cloak thou art not easily recognized."

Amar hesitated, coughed.

"Lieutenant, the reward shall be paid immediately after the man is caught?"

"As soon as we reach the post, yes," De Gerval promised.

Fires were built. Soon after night had fallen the two Frenchmen had their meager dinner together, smoked and drank coffee. In the distance a coppery gleam against the sky marked the camp of the caravan.

De Gerval and his small escort reached Mohammed's camp between nine and ten. They were challenged several times by sentries, tall, hooded silhouettes rising brusquely out of the gloom before the horses, the sharp, glistening line of a long gun barrel. Even so near the protection of the French troops the caravan guarded itself well. De Gerval answered, was recognized. Evidently the chief had spoken of the possible visit.

The weather was fine. No tents had

been erected. The evening meal was finished and the last prayer had long ago been called. Groups were formed around the fires of dried roots, conversing in low voices, or listening to music. One or two drums rumbled softly, the thin notes of the camel-leer's flute, the *jusk*, lifted. The men formed a happy, jovial crowd. Belts had been loosened, hoods lowered, turbans unrolled. Under gleaming shaved skulls, coarse swarthy faces grinned, teeth flashing in black beards in the glare of the fires. Near by the weapons: long rifles, with the batteries wrapped in greased cloth, and sabres. Each man carried a knife passed through the sash, and not a few had long barreled Riffi pistols.

"*Sa-laam, ouled!*" the lieutenant greeted.

"*Sa-laam, Khallif!*"

"Where is Si Mohammed?" De Gerval asked, reining his horse near one of the fires.

A MAN rose and indicated the direction with a gesture.

De Gerval dismounted. The Spahis followed suit.

In a cleared space, the exact center of the camp, a great fire was blazing, fed by a negro slave. Mohammed was seated with several men, each resembling the other, identical white beard, wrinkled faces and shrewd, unblinking black eyes. They were his lieutenants, the *bechamars*. Mohammed rose, came forward

"Thou hast come, praise Allah!"

As a matter of fact, De Gerval knew that he was far from welcome and admired the old chap's calm acceptance of the situation. Room was made for the newcomer. Amar and the Spahis were assigned other places, near the end of the semicircular line around the bush fire. A glass of boiling tea was offered the lieutenant; the stem of a water pipe disposed invitingly.

After an exchange of polite banalities De Gerval glanced in Amar's direction, noted an almost imperceptible nod, saw the trader's hand outspread on one knee. Four fingers of the right hand—therefore he counted four places on his right.

A young man was seated there, apparently in quiet conversation with one of the *bechamars*. Like many others, he had discarded turban and cloak. His skull was covered with a pointed red cap,

tasseled in blue silk. He smoked a pipe, the bowl hooded with perforated brass. His arms and legs, long and muscular, were bare, tanned, like those of an ordinary camel driver. His long face was further lengthened by a crisp, square cut black beard. His lips were thin, firm; his teeth, when he smiled, very white. In the sash molding his slim waist appeared the butt of a modern revolver, the metallic handles of two knives. In addition to this already imposing armament, he carried a sheathed blade strapped against his left forearm, in the fashion of the Tuareg. Dangling on his chest, hung from leather cords, were several little bags of red leather amulets.

De Gerval laid his hand on Mohammed's arm lightly.

"That man over there, the fourth on the right . . . Do not seem to look, for if there is trouble in this camp thou shalt be held responsible, and can come no more into French Territory for trade, lest prison be assigned thee . . . Who is he?"

"One of the camel men, Lieutenant."

"That lie is forgiven, for it is thy duty to protect thy guest who came in the name of Allah. Promise only that thy men shall not interfere with what will come."

"I promise, Lieutenant," Mohammed said philosophically. "Wolves can protect themselves."

"Are there more with him?"

"Four men."

De Gerval lighted a cigaret from a coal picked from the fire. Then, quietly, he unloosed the hook of his revolver holster, ascertained that the weapon would slide out easily. For many seconds now the others had sensed that something unusual was about to occur. Silence had come over the entire camp. Everywhere the officer could see faces turned toward him, calm, yet alert.

He rose. The young man he had noticed rose at the same time, smiling. With the left hand, which held the cigaret, De Gerval indicated him to the Spahis.

"That is the man we seek."

Four carbines were leveled toward the Berber. At the same time De Gerval's hand came into view, holding his revolver. He walked toward Lakhdar ben Lardaf, with an answering smile.

"Greetings, Lakhdar!"

"Greetings, Christian!"

De Gerval kept an eye on the raider's hands. The right still held the pipe, the other hung limply at his side. Upon a nod from the officer, one of the Spahis stepped forward, took the weapons one by one, unstrapped the sheath on the forearm.

"Thou dost see," Lakhdar pointed out quietly, "that resistance here would cause bystanders to be slain. I came as Mohammend's guest and I swore no harm would befall him for doing me a favor."

"Those who know thee will also know it was not fear that made thee submit quietly," De Gerval approved. "Where are thy men?"

"They fled when thy soldiers first appeared."

"They will not go far, Lakhdar. I have other men outside."

ONE of the Spahis bound his wrists with leather straps, fastening them cunningly so that even a Berber could not slip out of their grip.

Lakhdar glanced toward Amar ben Amar, appeared to recognize him for the first time. He spat on the ground.

"It was that dog who sold me?" he asked.

"It was he."

"The second time," Lakhdar said musingly. "I should have shown no mercy the first time. Allah punishes me for being a fool. A dead dog does not bark nor bite."

Those present within the camp had gathered around, silent, staring at the two principal actors of the little tragedy. It was understood that the French lieutenant had not taken Lakhdar to do him a favor. Lakhdar would be executed. This scene would be worth recounting around the campfires, the final chapter of a famous raider's life.

"I was there when Lakhdar ben Lardaf, the Berber, was taken by the Bir-dahar lieutenant," they would say.

Lakhdar and De Gerval, aware of their rôles, endeavored to conduct themselves with dignity. One could not cringe, the other could not gloat. One fights, wins and escapes; one fights, loses and bows to the will of Allah.

Then suddenly the sharp slap of carbines in the night air resounded. Some distance away, shouts and the sounds of

pursuit. The companions of Lakhdar, crawling away in the darkness, had clashed with Martin's Spahis.

Martin arrived a few minutes later, with his men. Two carried a limp body, which they dropped near by, casually. Two others were holding up a wounded man between them.

"Got these, Lieutenant. I think there were more, but they sneaked by. Dark as pitch outside. You wouldn't believe it." The sergeant was very tense, excited. He looked toward Lakhdar, who was speaking to Mohammed, half turned away. "Is that the bird?"

"Yes."

"Good work, Lieutenant. I'll look at this fellow."

The wounded man was brought nearer the light, his *jellaba* lifted. He had been shot in the abdomen and through the lungs. Bright blood seeped from the tiny, dark holes onto the brown flesh. When the sergeant touched him, he lost consciousness and moaned.

"Gone, I guess," De Gerval commented.

"Even these birds aren't made of iron," Martin commented. "Wouldn't stop when we called. The other got it through the back of the skull."

The men crowded around. Weapons, blood, eager faces. De Gerval recalled a similar scene from the past. A vacation on the Swiss-French border; a farmhouse yard. On the cobbles near the dunghill and outstretched body, toward which strained eager, startled faces. Two men in uniforms standing near. A smuggler and two customs guards. The gulf between races was not as wide as one might believe.

Lakhdar was speaking to Mohammed.

"For the one whom you know about, deliver her to whatever men of my tribe thou mayest find further south. They will see that she reaches my home, and, Allah alone knows, I may join her some day."

"True, there is Mabrouka," De Gerval thought. He beckoned to Amar. "Here, thou! Seek thy sister."

Amar moved away, elbowed through the crowd, designated a girl of small stature. De Gerval could see only the shapeliness of the brows, the roots of a dainty nose and two long, dark eyes, startled, beautiful. To employ the Arab term: "As twin wells of night in which

stars gleam."

"Come here, Mabrouka ben Amar," De Gerval called.

THE girl was pushed forward by willing hands. The jostling caused the white garment on her shoulders to slip aside, and the Frenchman had a glimpse of very white skin, delicately veined with blue. Then a small hand flashed up; in a glint of gold bracelets slim fingers readjusted the folds. The frightened eyes glanced first into De Gerval's, then toward Lakhdar, then again to the lieutenant.

"I am here, my lord."

"This man is thy brother?"

"He is my brother."

"And that other one—" De Gerval indicated Lakhdar—"is he the one who took thee from thy father's house?"

"He is the man."

"He concealed thee in a village and ordered thee to come to join him with the caravan of Mohammed el Kettabi?"

"He did, my lord."

"Thou art safe now. Thy brother will take charge of thee."

"Ask of her," Lakhdar urged, "whether she desires to go with her brother or to my people, Lieutenant."

"Thy desire is mine," Mabrouka said, before the lieutenant could put the question.

"Lieutenant," Amar interrupted, "dost thou not see that she fears him? She will do as he orders. Our women are thus—when they fear."

De Gerval hesitated.

"How old is Mabrouka?" he asked.

"Sixteen, Lieutenant," Amar declared. "She was born the year the grasshoppers ate the crops."

"According to our law, then, she is still under her father's authority. Amar ben Amar represents his father here. She goes with him. If she has any protest to make on this, let her appeal to the tribunal in Mecharia. Bring horses."

Martin had finished dressing the man's wounds.

"Lieutenant, what shall we do with this fellow? We can't leave him here. The caravan moves on in the morning."

"Rig up some sort of a *cacolet* on a horse and bring him along. Hell!" he swore, adding in a lower voice: "You act like a woman. Haven't you seen a wounded man before?"

Martin shrugged, gestured for two of his men to take the wounded man aside, while a sort of pannier was being hastily made.

Lakhdar's horse was led forward and De Gerval ordered him to mount. Cords were passed under the animal's belly to fasten the Berber's ankles together. Other ropes were passed through the leather thongs binding his arms, fastened to the pommel of the saddle. This appeared a luxury of precaution, but if Lakhdar escaped after having been in his power De Gerval would have a difficult explanation to make to his superiors.

The Spahis who had remained to guard the horses arrived. They had heard the firing and knew that the episode was over, in one way or another. Mohammed willingly gave up the mounts of the four Berbers who had escorted Lakhdar to his camp, abandoned by them in the haste of flight.

One was offered to Mabrouka, and she mounted easily, like a man, without effort, her clothes hitched high on her legs. De Gerval shortened the stirrups, placed them within reach of her small sandaled feet. He smiled faintly. In spite of her recent fright and bewilderment the time would come when she would recall the episode with pleasure. For girls grow into women and women like to recall having been desired by young men. He wondered if it would not have been preferable for her to be the bride of a desert raider rather than a prisoner in a trader's harem.

"Thy troubles are ended," he said, looking up.

"I fear nothing," she replied. Above the veil, her eyes were hard and resolute. True, she was of Amar ben Amar's blood and would become fearless when safe!

"Go ahead," De Gerval ordered Martin. He followed his detachment on foot, holding the bridle of his horse. Mohammed strode beside him until they reached the limit of the camp.

"Mohammed el Kettabi, I know well that there are goods on thy camels which were not declared. I forgive thee this time, as I have been lucky in other ways."

"Taxes to the French, bribes to the raiders—where can one make profit, unless Allah is willing?" Mohammed retorted, smiling. He indicated Lakhdar.

"Unless he is watched well he will be gone by morning, Lieutenant."

"Thou dost warn me, yet he is thy friend?"

"My friend?" Mohammed gestured wide. "Many times he has halted my caravans, asked one camel in five, pack and all, for his share. I knew that he would get the whole if he risked his men's lives and fought, so I paid. But, by Allah, I was angered. Even the strongest lion is sometime shot by the hunter, however. Peace go with thee, Lieutenant!"

"With thee also, Mohammed!"

De Gerval mounted and caught up with the detachment. Martin rode beside the horse carrying the Berber who had been wounded. Then came a knot of riders, surrounding Lakhdar. Ahead were Mabrouka and Amar. Brother and sister were silent.

THEY traveled all night. When dawn came, the walls of Bir-Dahar were still a mile distant in the rosy mist. A few minutes later the *tirailleur* sentry before the gate presented arms. The sergeant left in charge reported all in order within the post.

Martin took the wounded man to the hospital established in a hut near the structures containing stores. De Gerval led Lakhdar to the prison, a small cell lit by a single small window, barred with thick iron rods, closed by a wooden door reinforced with steel. At the bottom of the sloping plank used as a bed were several sets of leg irons, for unruly inmates.

"Lie down," De Gerval ordered.

With his own hands he adjusted the irons, locked them around the Berber's thin ankles. He was cautious but not inhuman. He left behind a package of his own tobacco and ordered food and drink for the prisoner. Then he sought his quarters, went to bed, worn out by nearly twenty hours in the saddle.

At noon his orderly awoke him. He dressed leisurely, contemplating without pleasure the necessity of making out a full report of the capture.

Bir-Dahar was presumed to be connected with the outside world by telegraph. The credits had been voted years ago, plans made and materials purchased. An operator had been stationed at the post. But, with the typical energy

shown by some branches of the Administration, nothing had yet been done. Since the end of hostilities in the region, the relaying stations for heliograph had been discontinued. De Gerval could depend only on couriers for communication.

Martin, as ranking noncommissioned officer, took his meals with De Gerval. He greeted his chief casually when he came into the dining room—a small, square apartment, furnished with chairs and tables knocked together from the planks of packing-cases. Martin absorbed the usual *aperitif* without relish, showed less appetite than usual.

"Is the mutton tough?" De Gerval asked.

"No, Lieutenant."

"What are you making such a mug about then?"

"Nothing, Lieutenant."

"No?" De Gerval changed the conversation. "I want a man to go north this afternoon, or tomorrow morning at the latest, with my report. You select him, see that he has a good horse."

"Understood, Lieutenant."

They finished the meal in silence. The orderly brought the coffee. Martin accepted a smoke, sipped his coffee, but his efforts to keep up an amiable conversation were unsuccessful. His heavy face scowled, his eyes were brooding. De Gerval knew he was worried.

MARTIN was a fine man. Born in the slums of a large city, he had faced the world alone at the age most children don pants. Enlisted at eighteen, the Army was his real family. His patience, keen wit and courage were proverbial in the Spahis. Likewise, and in spite of his bitter childhood, his gayety of spirit. When Martin sulked he usually had good reason. He puffed at his cigaret, crushed it before it was one-third consumed, against all his economical habits. He waved aside the orderly who was about to refill his cup.

"I've got to go out and see about one of the horses, Lieutenant," he said, and picked up his *kepi* from a chair.

"Just a minute," De Gerval put in.

"Lieutenant?"

"Sit down. Light another cigaret. Have another cup of coffee." He stilled the sergeant's first movement of protest. "Orders!"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"You've got a grouch, Martin. I want to know what's the matter."

"Nothing, Lieutenant."

"That's twice you've said that. Now, tell me."

"Nothing you could help, Lieutenant."

"Private worries?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Yet there's been no mail for a week. And you've told me a dozen times you have no one in France you care about. In any case, if you need money—"

"Thank you, Lieutenant." Martin looked at his chief with evident surprise and real gratitude. "But money wouldn't help me."

"You're the first of the kind I've met," De Gerval said smiling. "Look here, you fool, it's something connected with a question of service. You know I'm not unreasonable. I hate to see you in this state."

"I can't tell you, Lieutenant."

"All right. You're gloomy without reason. You know what that means out here. I'll slate you for transfer before you go crazy on my hands."

The threat had the expected result. Martin had organized his life at Bir-Dahar to his satisfaction. The habits of a veteran Spahi noncom are as set and precious to him as those of an old maid. Moreover, the sergeant knew he would lose much of his independence in a larger unit, with several officers and many equals. A sergeant in a garrison town is a subaltern, in an outpost he is a friend.

"Please don't do that, Lieutenant," he pleaded. "I'll tell you—I promise to tell you as soon as—Lakhdar ben Lardaf is gone."

"I'll have to wait for orders in that case. He needs more men for escort than I can spare from here. But what has he got to do with you? Afraid he'll escape?"

"Yes, Lieutenant," Martin said, without looking up. "I'm afraid he'll escape."

"What an old woman you are!" the lieutenant laughed. "I tell you what I'll do. I forbid you to have anything to do with the guard of the prisoner. I hereby inform you that I alone am responsible. If he beats it, you can't be blamed. That's settled."

De Gerval followed Martin with his

glance until he was out of sight. In a way, he understood the sergeant's perturbation. Lakhdar was an important prisoner, and the man who lost him would be severely reprimanded. But he could not recognize this with Martin's usual matter of fact acceptance of his duties.

THE lieutenant went to the office, an oblong room facing on a low roofed veranda supported on palm trunks. He sought the shadiest corner, away from the thin rays of sunlight stabbing through the slats of the wooden blinds. Flies buzzed heavily in the semiobscurity. Odors drifted from the stables with the breeze, mingled with the scent of warm sand.

De Gerval picked up the pen, added ink from the big bottle to the thick stuff in the bottom of the glass container, piled white paper before him. Then he found his palms and fingers moist with perspiration, the lines blotted, nothing went right. He had a pleasant topic to handle, the chance to make out a good report, and was annoyed by material difficulties at every turn. He dried his hands, smoked, whistled, wrote a few words and halted.

"Orderly."

The Spahi on duty outside came in, slowly. Too slowly to suit De Gerval, who corrected his position, reminded him of his strict duties, scolded him for napping on the veranda when he was presumed to be awake. In fact, he knew he was at the start of a nervous afternoon.

"Get me Sergeant Dukers, at once," he finished. "Tell him to come immediately!"

Dukers, a tall, skinny young fellow, arrived, sweating and red. Probably the Spahi had warned him, for he quieted down at the door, stepped in with a soldierly tread, saluted impeccably.

"Dukers—" De Gerval paused, felt a sudden shame for his causeless irritation. It was hot for others as well as himself, and he must not fall into the easy pastime of venting his discomfort on his inferiors. "I wanted to see you about the prisoner. The sentry I ordered placed near his cell will be relieved every two hours. He has been fed?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. And he's a fussy chap. Asked me to make sure there was

no pork in that stew."

"Matter of religion."

"Sure." Dukers grinned. "Then he ate the biscuits, in which the cook puts lard. Seemed to like them, so I didn't spoil his meal."

"Slight sin," De Gerval admitted. "Have a look at him every so often. Make sure he's safe. You know those birds—"

"Ooze through keyholes, Lieutenant. I'll watch him."

"Dismissed."

Again he picked up the pen, musing:

"Let's see. Report to go direct to Headquarters. Copy to be sent to Regimental Headquarters from there. Copy for civil authorities to be made there, too. May need identification signed by Amar ben Amar. Maybe, by Mademoiselle Mabrouka, who fears nothing."

The pen creaked for a few seconds.

Lieutenant Jacques de Gerval, of the Seventh Spahis, commanding Post of Bir-Dahur, to Monsieur le Colonel Jerome Lehagre, Officer of the Legion of Honor, High Commissary of the South Oranese Territories, Ain Saffra.

Then his fingers drummed the table mechanically.

"What shall I say? Simple. Lakhdar ben Lardaf is in a cell here. What shall I do with him? . . . But, the devil! I want to mount this up like a diamond in its setting, so it'll scintillate and dazzle, and make obvious my great ability and unusual courage in a modest manner. The setting. All's in that, little Jacques. The difference between a nod of approval and promotion. There's a stripe, if I can make it foam up a bit. Casualties on the enemy's side. Martin's job must be presented neatly, too."

For some time he stared at the paper, agitating similar thoughts. Then he became aware that Dukers had again entered the room.

"Yes, Dukers?"

"I looked in at the prisoner a few minutes ago. And he says he wants to speak with you."

"What about?"

"I don't know, Lieutenant."

"All right," De Gerval agreed, after a moment's thought. "Unlock his irons and bring him here under escort. Not as safe, but more dignified. And, by the way, search him once more, to make sure."

LAKHDAR entered a few minutes later, the center of a group of four Spahis, preceded by Dukers. He was clad in the same brown *jellaba* but his head was bare. The lock of hair, by which the Angel of Death was to draw him to Paradise, as he does with all good Moslems, stood out startlingly on the smooth skull. The forearms, sheaths of muscles and bone in a tight envelope of tanned skin, were fastened together with leather straps.

"What dost thou desire, Lakhdar?"

"Merely a few words with thee, Lieutenant. Alone."

De Gerval looked at his prisoner steadily; then, unwilling to admit uneasiness when surrounded by the walls of his own post and fifty armed men, he nodded.

"Dukers, a sentry under the window. Shut the door and stay outside."

The door closed and the darkness increased. De Gerval lighted a lantern. A building designed to shut out sun and heat had other disadvantages.

"Speak, Lakhdar."

"What is to be done with me, Lieutenant?"

"As soon as my chiefs are informed of thy capture they will send soldiers to take thee north."

"There are not enough here, Lieutenant?"

"What if thy men should learn where thou wilt pass and try to free thee? Twenty-five men are needed and I cannot spare them. It means a couple of weeks in a cell for thee, but that is not my will."

"And in the north, what shall be done with me?"

"Thou hast slain a man in the city. Canst deny the killing?"

"No, Lieutenant."

"Thou'lt be tried, declared guilty, condemned to death."

"I hoped I would be judged and condemned by soldiers."

"Why?"

"Because, when a tribunal condemns a man to death in a city, that man is killed with the machine that cuts necks."

"Yes, he goes to the guillotine."

"Is there no way that I can ask to be killed otherwise?"

"No. The law is law. What business hadst thou in a city, killing a civilian? The evil comes from that."

"But I have slain soldiers before, several times," Lakhdar said hopefully. "There was the little lieutenant. He was tracking my *jish* north of Hassi-Brahim. We ambushed him, and it was my shot that dropped him."

"Lieutenant Bourgain?" De Gerval asked, his voice changed. Charles Bourgain had gone to military school with him, come to Africa for his first trip—and his last—on the same ship.

"I believe so. It was three years back, in June. And others, too."

De Gerval felt no hatred for his foes. They lived according to their code, were to be respected for fighting the people of an alien race and another religion, who, after all, won and ruled only by superior strength and organization. Border fighting was border fighting, and he who ambushed first was the one to survive. Bourgain, on that occasion, was not hunting Lakhdar and his men to do them a good turn.

Considering the known courage of Lakhdar, his calm acceptance of death after capture, the slight trace of fear in his eyes now was pathetic. Arab and Berber who will smile at the firing squad will shrink before the apparatus bearing the name of Doctor Guillotine. When the Angel of Death takes the faithful to the promised haven of Mohammed, popular belief has it that he does not bother to look closely and is apt to take the head up alone if it is separated from the body. Eternity without a body, in the Moslem heaven, would be worse than total oblivion. The slicer not only ends earthly life, but life eternal.

De Gerval himself agreed that it would be much simpler to take the prisoner out, stand him before a convenient wall and drop him without unnecessary display.

"I'll speak of this in the report, Lakhdar. I cannot take it upon myself to kill thee. The civil authorities claim thy head."

"Nothing can be done here, then?"

"No."

"Allah wills it. That was all I wanted to say."

De Gerval summoned Dukers and the prisoner was led away.

The report shaped itself after some effort and the lieutenant wrote on for two or three hours. There were many side lights to give, the part played by Amar

ben Amar, that played by Martin, and Lakhdar's demand for the firing squad. Even the brief conversation had contributed something new, the identity of the leader who had attacked and decimated Lieutenant Bourgain's detachment three years before. From such reports, with disclosures made at intervals of years, the history of South Algeria would be completed in the future.

MARTIN entered shortly before nightfall to make out his own papers. He was directly responsible to the squadron commander for several matters of detail, as he often acted in place of De Gerval when the latter was away on patrols. He apparently did not find his particular documents hard to compose and soon laid the pen aside. He appeared to be in a better mood, smiled when he saw his chief's eyes upon him.

"Lakhdar wanted to do you a favor, Martin," De Gerval said.

"How, Lieutenant?"

"Asked to be shot immediately and save himself the suspense. Afraid of the slicer . . ." De Gerval related his interview with the raider.

Martin grew sober again and the same look of misery slid into his glance.

"What's the matter, Martin? Ill?"

Martin, the stout hearted, who had won the Military Medal in the field, rested his head in his hands, and the lieutenant saw his thick fingers quiver.

"Lieutenant," the noncom said, at last, "I wish you'd lock me up."

"Lock you up! What do you mean?"

"What I say, Lieutenant." Martin now appeared sulky. "If you don't lock me up, you may be sorry. You must understand, Lieutenant, I'm not crazy. There are some things a man shouldn't do according to duty, but which he feels he may do anyway—"

"Let's get this clear, Martin." De Gerval brought his chair nearer to the table occupied by the sergeant, propped one booted heel on the edge of the rough plank. "You want to be placed in a cell; out of the possibility of doing something or other—exactly what?"

"Assist the prisoner to escape."

"Lakhdar ben Lardaf?"

"Who else?"

"Why do you want to do that? You're a good Frenchman, I hope."

"I'm wondering whether I'm a

Frenchman first, or just a man." Martin laid his clenched fist on the table, spread the fingers out bruskiy. "You mentioned Lieutenant Bourgain a few minutes ago. You know I am one of the survivors of the mess in which he ended. You think you know the whole story of my escape. But you don't. Nobody on our side does. . . ."

After a moment Martin went on with his story—

"Fact is I left the Meharistes immediately after. Did you ever wonder why I left a camel corps unit to go back in the Spahis, when most non-coms are eager to do just the opposite? I'll tell you: The Spahis usually don't get assigned far south, except in large places like Colomb-Bechar. They stay up at about this line. And Berber raiders seldom come this way, save perhaps once or twice a year. I left the Meharistes, where I was getting along first class, because I didn't want to increase my chances of finding myself drawing a bead on a guy who had done me a good turn. It was this way:

Lieutenant Bourgain was a nice chief, kind to everybody under him. But he was rash, considered counter raiding as a sport rather than a serious occupation. He had a lot of luck at first and kidded himself into thinking it would last forever. A bunch of Berbers, mixed with a few Doui-Meni, had taken camels from one of our pastures near Hassi-Brahim. They had a boy sergeant in charge there, a chap with only six months in the region. He was killed and his head cut off.

That made our bunch pretty sore. Bourgain, who had liked the lad, asked to command the detachment sent out. The captain granted his request. But, right in front of me, he told Bourgain to consult me if in doubt. I was an old-timer already and knew a few tricks.

WE started out, about twenty-five Arab privates, the lieutenant and myself. We had been trailing the Berbers eight days when we picked up a stray camel man who gave us information. He had fled from a caravan attacked by the very fellows we were after. He said they had taken shelter, probably, in a rocky stretch miles to the northwest.

I suggested that we drop the pursuit. I had been in the place before and knew

we couldn't do much. The lieutenant laughed, asked me what we were in the Sahara for if not to take chances. I shut up.

We went ahead. It was rocky ground, you can bet, that we traveled in. Huge black stone palisades glistening in the sun, gray and red boulders, all the trails narrow, winding in gullies, a regular labyrinth. If you set to work deliberately to build an ideal place for ambush, you couldn't do much better.

Lieutenant Bourgain used as much caution as he had in his system. From every point of vantage he swept the rocks for signs of the enemy. I told him that the sun shining on the lenses worked like the heliograph and warned of our coming. He said what you sometimes say, that I am an old woman.

We had been roaming in and out of ravines for a couple of days, when, early one afternoon, shots came unexpectedly. Naturally, the officer was first to drop. Fell from the saddle, seven or eight feet, and I heard his skull strike the rock. My own camel went down soon after and I guess I was knocked senseless.

When I got up all the men who were still alive had fled. I didn't blame them. It would have been foolish to stay there and try to fight. As I had not moved, they thought me dead. All that I learned later. They were new men and didn't try to take our bodies back as veterans would have done.

My first thought was that the natives would be coming down soon to loot the corpses. I dodged among the boulders seeking a hiding place. There must have been a little hidden stream running under that particular gully, for coarse grass grew near the bottom of every boulder where the sand was moist.

If you've ever felt your head about to leave your shoulders you know how quickly one sees things at such a moment. I had not gone two hundred yards when I noticed a larger rock which appeared to rise straight out of the ground. By instinct rather than reason, I knew there was a nook there for me to crawl into. To avoid leaving footprints I leapt from stone to stone, parted the grass, and found myself in a fashion of small pits, twenty inches high, screened by grass.

Something wriggled away when I landed flat on my stomach, probably a

snake. I never found out. Didn't bite me anyway. I intended to wait until the raiders had stripped the bodies, then start after what was left of the detachment. I can walk and run faster than most men and I could hear the detonations of Lebel carbines in the distance.

All was quiet for a while. Then the Berbers came, prowled around, talked among themselves. I could understand what they said. Their lingo is something like plain Druya. They were looking for me; knew I had fallen and could not locate the body. They gave up after about an hour. I was still in bad luck. They camped within fifty yards of me. They left four men on guard and I didn't dare move. One of the guards beat the grass to chase reptiles away, stopped within a foot of my face. At dawn, the whole lot stirred. They rubbed their hands with sand and then prayed.

Made me sore to hear them yelling to Allah, as if anything, even human, would like cutthroats like them. I had no use for any religion at the time; I had been a free thinker all my life, save when I was very little and tried praying for food one day instead of stealing it from grocers' stands.

They left a couple of hours after that. I heard them for a long time, the gullies carrying human voices like a speaking trumpet. Finally, I got up the nerve to get out.

The sun kissed my skull like a red-hot plate. I found the lieutenant's sun helmet, which the raiders had thrown aside, after poking a couple of holes in it for fun. I tore up my shirt and stuffed the rags in those holes. With my head shaded I started out to locate the trail of the detachment.

SOME of the pebbles were sharp as razor blades. My boots were cut to ribbons by the time I reached the sanded plain. Walking on bare soles is poor pastime. I tore my pants up and used what was left of my shirt to wrap my feet in, slipping the dilapidated boots over the bundles of cloth.

Until then, excitement had kept me from realizing that I was thirsty. I had had no water since noon of the preceding day. I managed to keep going all day, slept pretty well at night. But the west wind blew and when I got up I had lost the tracks. I had to go by guess and that

was not cheerful.

My naked legs were burnt red like raw beef. When I touched the hair on my face it was like tearing the skin away. I've been with you when you were thirsty. You talked about bottles of white wine set to cool in a mountain brook. You spoke of the ices you'd buy in a restaurant near La Madeleine, in Paris, when you got home. You had your pants on, you were mounted, and there was some water left in the water skins.

I was alone, without shoes, clothing, hope. I felt like an old bleached bone. Like a dried date. I was delirious, I suppose. When I'd get to a shaded spot in the lee of some boulder I'd roll on the cooler sand, pile it on my belly. I squeezed my chest with my leather belt, did all sorts of crazy things I thought might ease me. Then my head would clear a bit and I'd put on my rags and go on.

Where I fell, how I got there, I can't tell. I figured later I must have lasted four days. Some'll tell you that's impossible in the Sahara. I did it.

Someone rubbed a wet cloth on my lips. I grabbed at it, sucked it in, held it against my palate. I didn't let go until my mouth was touched with a wetter one. For a long time all I knew was that I was getting a little dampness from somewhere. Then I saw several men around me. One held a *guerba*, with rounded sides, a full one. It was not until much later that they handed me a tin dish full of water. They were laughing at the lot I swallowed. I drank like a camel. Too much water is supposed to kill you after you've been thirsty a long time. I remember thinking of that and not caring.

After my belly was full I fell asleep again. When I woke up they gave me food. There was one who was for killing me. He had a sort of washed out red beard; one of those Berber blonds that look something like an Alsatian pastor. I didn't even hate him. He was the fellow who had held the *guerba*. Another chap, the chief, said no. He handed me a fistful of dried dates, a chunk of hard cheese and a bit of meat. They didn't know I could understand their talk. I'd been too eager to grab for things to utter a word.

The chief told the rest that Allah's will had manifestly brought them to save me. It was a good thing for them, he

said—they who were constantly exposed to the danger of death by thirst—to help an enemy; thus showing that a good man would help even a thirsty dog in the desert. I would have barked had he asked me. He added that it would bring them bad luck to kill me afterward for that would seem to jest with the will of the Merciful. Moreover, he stated that I had not been a fool like my chief, that I had saved myself very cleverly. The others were sore and did not see it his way. Of course, they knew he was hiding behind words, that what ailed him was a soft heart, pity. As a last resort he quoted some verse from the Koran, saying that a man might be forgiving to an infidel once in his life. I've looked for that verse since and can't find it exactly. Probably he made it up, being smarter than they were.

Later, when I was walking beside his camel on the march, he talked to me in Arabic. He said that a brave man was a brave man and should not be killed anywhere save in battle. Twice a day he gave me water. I had an idea they were taking me back to their camp across the Draa. I didn't care much. I would have followed anywhere for the water.

One day—I had been with the gang about two weeks—the fellow dismounted, took me by the shoulder and indicated the east.

"*Kasbach maghzen*," he said. ("The Government's fortress.")

WITHOUT another word he got into the saddle, his kneeling camel rose, he yelled sharply, and the whole band ran off at top speed. After walking east a couple of hours I recognized my surroundings. I was near Hassi-Mazzer. A patrol picked me up and I went to see the captain. The detachment had returned after a few more skirmishes with the raiders, and I was believed dead. I was about to tell the whole story when it occurred to me that if I spoke the Meharistes would be sent after the fellows who had save me. So I said I had walked, escaped miraculously. After that—well, it was too late to speak. I passed up promotion and got a transfer. When I got North the reaction hit me and I was in the hospital for a few weeks. And here I am—and . . . (Martin wiped his sweating face.) I feel better now that I've got it off my chest to some-

one. You know who the Berber was. . . ."

In the mercy shown to the sergeant, De Gerval saw nothing extraordinary. Berbers were desert men, superstitious. Lakhdar ben Lardaf had probably believed he was giving a hostage to fate against death by thirst.

"What do you expect me to do, Martin?" he asked.

"Nothing, Lieutenant. Duty is duty. Just—keep telling me that I should not react to personal motives. And put me out of the way of temptation for the time he is here." Martin moistened his lips. "Also, if he doesn't like the idea of the guillotine, couldn't we arrange it some way? Sounds like a funny favor to do a man, but he'd appreciate it. Give him a chance to escape, then—"

"That's a craven's trick, Martin."

"I couldn't ask you to let him go, Lieutenant."

"No. But I can assume some responsibility. I guess there won't be much fuss made if he's shot down here, after courtmartial."

"What reason will you give?"

"His men resisted, arms in hand." De Gerval looked at the neat report ruefully, then tore it in half. "Favor for favor. He saved a Frenchman. We save him the shame of beheading. Let them howl at headquarters. On second thought, they will." He scribbled hastily. "Sign this. Participation in the court-martial. No need to bring him in here and go through the comedy. I'll see him tonight, tell him what I'm doing and why. Tomorrow, at daylight, it will be over. As for you, Martin, take sixteen men, ride out to the well we visited yesterday and ascertain if it is still there. Officially you'll be on police patrol."

"This won't get you into trouble, Lieutenant?"

"They won't drum me out for it and I can wait a year or so longer for my third stripe. Another thing."

"What, Lieutenant?"

"I'm going to kick Amar ben Amar out of this place tonight. The informer should not be rewarded both money and pleasure." De Gerval slid open a drawer, broke a package. A heap of large silver coins gleamed. "Two hundred *douros*. A thousand francs! Too much for a rat like Amar. However—in the name of civilization. . . ."

Martin walked to the door, turned and

came back.

"Lieutenant, I want to thank you. You're—"

"I'm fed up with your wailings, Martin. Get out of here!"

Thirty minutes later he heard the patrol leave. He then went to the prison, had the door opened, informed Lakhdar briefly of the new decision. The Berber smiled with pleasure.

"That man," he commented, "is good. His stomach does not forget what his lips tasted. So that I die tomorrow?"

"At dawn."

"*Maktoub*," Lakhdar concluded. "It was written."

DE GERVAL gave the sergeant final instructions that evening.

"Dukers, you will have six men ready at dawn. The prisoner will be taken to the eastern face of the post and executed. The entire garrison must be present. The body will be buried according to Mohammedan rites. I leave it to you to name the noncom to fire the *coup de grace*."

"I better do it myself," Dukers said without emotion. "Martin is away and the others are new out here. It won't get me as much as one of the younger men."

The expression on the faces of both men revealed nervousness, almost disgust. Neither of them would have hesitated to kill Lakhdar in combat. Execution was a different thing, grim, done in cold blood.

The conquest of a primitive land by a civilized people invariably drags down the conqueror to the level of his barbaric foes in ruthlessness and savagery. Humanitarian theories are speedily forgotten before raw fact and the eternal truth that they are often mistaken by the natives for fear or foolishness. Lakhdar's treatment of Martin had been a marvelous exception to a bloody rule.

Dukers had a bundle under his arm which he laid on the table. It contained the weapons and upper garments, turban and *gandoura*, of the man to be shot. As there would be no trial in the north those objects would be sent direct to headquarters.

At another table in the office was seated the official interpreter, a native who had studied in the Algiers *lycée* when a boy. De Gerval directed the form

of an affidavit to be signed by Amar ben Amar. This was to identify Lakhdar beyond all possible doubt. The interpreter lined his Arabic characters neatly, until they formed almost a decorative pattern on the paper. De Gerval wrote the language fairly well, Amar understood French and could read it; but red tape was red tape and the law exacted an interpreter. No chance for misunderstanding or error.

The lieutenant sent for Amar. The trader arrived and seated himself without invitation, obviously happy, jovial. Matters were going well for him. His honor was safe.

"I also requested thy sister's presence," De Gerval said.

"She is with the women, Lieutenant."

"Then I'll question her after thou dost go, which will be more regular. As for thee, merely sign this."

Amar read the affidavit carefully, questioned the wording from long habit. Then, majestically, he applied his large scrawl to the bottom of the sheet.

"Do I receive the reward in cash or a draft on the Treasury?"

"Here." De Gerval handed him the money.

The trader counted the silver slowly. De Gerval abruptly ordered him to leave the office.

"Dukers, bring his sister, will you?"

Mabrouka came immediately. She stood diffidently before the table. De Gerval scarcely glanced at her, eager to get the questioning over.

"Thou art Mabrouka, daughter of Amar ben Yacub?"

"Yes."

"Thou hast seen the man we arrested yesterday. Is he the one who entered thy father's house and took thee away after slaying thy father's guest?"

"Yes."

"Thou dost know him to be Lakhdar ben Lardaf?"

"Yes."

"There were, in the caravan, men loyal to him to watch thee?"

"Yes."

"That's all. Thou'lt be turned over to thy brother tonight."

De Gerval was alone. The flame of the candle vacillated in the glass case of the lantern. The shadows danced. Tomorrow, in a few hours, the rising sun would outline a shadow on a white wall. Guns

would crash out; the shadow would vanish and merge with the long body.

LATER would come official blame for taking the law into his own hands, or rather interpreting it to suit himself. Then men would forget Lakhdar; fame would cling to his successor until he, too, died. For many years it would go on thus, until peace, which had settled in the north, seeped down to the desert fringe. He stared around the room, saw that the interpreter had left. He would rewrite the report.

A few minutes passed. Then De Gerval heard the door open, close again. He was conscious of another presence but did not turn immediately, did not look up.

"What is it, Dukers?"

There was no answer. He shifted in his chair and saw Mabrouka standing where she had stood before, expectant, waiting. The light shimmered on the silk of her baggy trousers and the slim torso in the velvet, embroidered bodice rose gracefully from the hips. Between the veil and the scarf concealing her hair, her eyes were deep, black.

"*Sidi* Lieutenant," she said, almost in a whisper.

"Why art thou here, Mabrouka?" he asked sharply.

"I was told thou wert to kill Lakhdar ben Lardaf soon."

"He will be shot, yes."

"When?"

"In the morning."

"He must not be shot," Mabrouka said determinedly.

"Go away," De Gerval ordered.

He bent over his papers on the table, to signify the conversation had ended. Amar had sent her, no doubt, to exact full punishment. Bah! Kidnapping a girl was small sin for a raider like Lakhdar, the least of his many exploits. It was like Amar to send a woman to claim what he dared not ask himself.

"Go away," he repeated.

Mabrouka moved, but not toward the door. Instinct warned him. He looked upward in time to leap aside, knocking down the chair. The girl had picked up one of Lakhdar's knives from the table. Had the lieutenant not moved, he would have received the point full in the chest.

"Stop that!" he snapped. "Drop that blade!"

But Mabrouka came forward steadily, the dagger grasped firmly in her hand.

De Gerval found himself in a ridiculous position. He was ashamed to call for help. The dagger was nevertheless real. The girl was intent upon striking him and threatened alternatively throat and stomach. She circled the table. De Gerval retreated, stepped backward cautiously, spoke in a low voice, sought to reason with her. The next stroke he fended off with his left arm and the steel ripped the cloth of his sleeve. He stepped in closer, grasped her right wrist, kept her fingernails from tearing at his face. For a moment her rage enabled her to struggle. Yet she was a rather small, light woman, and he was a vigorous man. When she realized this, she dropped the knife and burst into tears.

In retrospect this episode seemed ridiculous. He laughed as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"*Sidi* Lieutenant," her voice rose sharply. De Gerval knew he must quiet her, or she would be heard from the outside. Few would believe that she had been the one to start the attack.

"Be still! If it is known that thou didst try to kill me, thou'lt be placed in prison."

"Thou'lt not tell?"

"No. Though I want to know why—"

"My husband will be killed. I want to kill thee."

"Lakhdar is thy husband?"

"Yes."

"Thou dost love him?"

"Yes."

"Yet thy brother and father gave him up to us."

"They are dogs!" Mabrouka said without hesitation.

"Everything may be purchased in the market place save a father's blessing, girl. It is not good to speak thus of one's father. Hear me: In ordering Lakhdar shot, I but fulfill his wish. He would be tried later and die a vile death for killing a city man."

"No. Let me be tried. I shall tell the truth then."

"The truth? Suppose I hear the truth first, Mabrouka."

"I FIRST loved Lakhdar when I was a very little girl not wearing a veil. He was only a youth then, perhaps the

age I am now. When he and his father came to see my father—”

“Thy brother told me he had known Lakhdar but a short time,” De Gerval put in.

“He lied. It was Lakhdar’s father who brought my mother to my father, long ago. She was a woman of the Berber people. Amar’s mother was a low woman from Tunis. She was already old and my father had tired of her. Lakhdar’s father, Lardaf, came to gather news of the caravans, to know where to locate them when they traveled south. My father gave him such news in exchange for safety for his own merchandise. After Lardaf was dead, it was Lakhdar who came.

“When I grew into a woman, Lakhdar remembered me, and asked for me. He paid a dowry as the Book orders. Even after I was veiled and ordered never to bare my face before men or speak with strangers, I met him when he came, in the garden at night. My father and my brother knew, but they said nothing. Among Lakhdar’s people women are not veiled, and what was right in his eyes was right for me.

“Then the reward for Lakdar’s head was offered by the French. At the same time a wealthy man, a friend of Amar’s asked for me as his wife, offering much more than had been given. My brother feared Lakhdar’s rage and decided to give him up. All is known to women in a household, although men do not believe this. I sent warning to Lakhdar, so that when the soldiers entered the house where Amar had lured him, he had left. Amar’s life he spared so that there would be no blood crying between us.

“Amar sent word of his escape and warned my father that he might come and get me. So my father called the man who desired me and the man armed himself with a pistol and strong knife to wait for Lakhdar on the stairs, in the darkness. One of the negroes heard and warned my mother, who told me. We paid the black man much money to wait outside and stop Lakhdar. My mother sent word to Lakhdar not to come in but to seek safety for himself and I would join him later.

“But he loved me and he feared I would be given to someone else. He entered the house, for he is brave. Only he did not climb the stairs erect like a man,

but on all fours like an animal. The gun was aimed at the level of a tall man’s head. Lakhdar grasped the man by the ankles, pulled him down and they fought.

“Never yet has the jackal bitten the lion. Lakhdar killed him quickly. Then he found me and bore me away. He had horses ready and we were far from the city by night. I became his wife. But he had to return to his people who needed him. So he hid me, saying he would send for me later. Mohammed el Kettabi came and gave the words agreed upon. I followed him. That is all. But as thou seest, Lieutenant, he did not kill from choice in the city, but to defend himself. He must not die.”

She was sincere in her belief that she could convince the jury. Contrasted with the greed of the two Amars the love between Mabrouka and Lakhdar was pleasing, refreshing. Too bad that in any event Lakhdar was lost.

“No, Mabrouka, they would not let him live,” he said. “Thy brother would pay witnesses who would call thee a liar; and he would be sent to the machine.”

“Someone will pay for his life,” she said stubbornly.

Mabrouka was partly of Berber stock, a race which considers vengeance a greater duty than chastity in women. She reacted to age old emotion, obeyed instinctively her people’s ancient code.

And Lakhdar was technically a bandit, an outlaw. Yet he belonged to a tribe not yet subject to France, outside her possessions. His deeds were therefore acts of war. This was so well recognized that, many times, when less famous raiders were captured, they were released upon giving an oath of good behavior toward the French. Lakhdar’s bad luck was that he was too well known, a marked man.

WITHOUT great stretch of imagination, he might be called a prisoner of war. And no civilized power shot prisoners of war. But there was the mandate of arrest by the civil authorities. His strict duty was to surrender the man and let justice take its course. Justice? A trial in which Mabrouka would be discriminated against because of her age and sex, with the accusation bolstered by false witnesses. . . .

“Pack thy belongings, Mabrouka,

then come back here," De Gerval said abruptly.

She looked up, bewildered.

"I do not want to go with my brother. I've told him so."

"Thou shalt not go with him."

He went out, found Dukers in the guardroom near the outer gate.

"Saddle two of the horses taken yesterday."

Then he opened Lakhdar's cell, unlocked the irons.

"Follow me."

Mabrouka had not yet returned. De Gerval handed the Berber weapons and garments. Lakhdar showed astonishment, but equipped himself wordlessly. The Frenchman looked at him with pleasure. It would have been a shame to execute such a good looking man.

"Why?" Lakhdar asked suddenly.

"I heard thy woman," De Gerval said, briefly. "I grant thee life and freedom. In return, swear that thou'lt not fight us again, or our allies."

"I swear."

"Swear also that thou'lt not incite thy people to fight us."

"I swear."

Mabrouka entered. As became a true man, before a witness, Lakhdar stilled her first move toward him.

"Thank the Lieutenant."

Mabrouka seized De Gerval's hand, and before he could stop her, she pressed her lips to it. Then all three went into the yards, where they found the saddled horses.

"I do not understand," said Lakhdar.

"Thou art young. I am young. Men such as we die in battle."

Lakhdar lifted Mabrouka to the saddle, mounted lightly.

"Farewell, Lieutenant."

"Farewell!"

"That's Lakhdar ben Lardaf you just let go?" Dukers asked.

"Yes," De Gerval replied shortly.

"Ah!" Dukers concluded. Being a good sergeant, he asked no more questions.

As for the lieutenant, now that Lakhdar was gone, he began to realize the enormity of his act. There was only one fashion to conclude the night's folly. He went to the office to fill that last duty.

An hour later, while he was still working on the report, Amar ben Amar came in. He had heard of Lakhdar's depar-

ture.

"The Berber will keep his word and go far from here," he said. "Thy sergeants are loyal to thee. The rest do not count. The wounded man has just died. I shall swear that his body is that of Lakhdar ben Lardaf. My oath will be believed and no trouble will occur."

"And thou canst keep the reward?" De Gerval prompted.

Yet the suggestion was tempting. Then he saw a smile on the informer's face, a pleased smile.

"Keep the money. I give it to thee myself. But the truth shall be told. As for thee . . ."

The lieutenant arose, grasped Amar by the shoulders and kicked him out into the yard.

Back before the table, he finished his resignation, giving a full account of his actions and addressed it to Colonel Lehagre.

"I'll be court-martialed, anyway," he thought. "But it was worth it."

In two weeks he received a reply to his communication. The colonel wrote:

You're a damned fool, and I am sending back your resignation. Tear it up. Lakhdar ben Lardaf surrendered to me the very day I received your letter. I had sent word to him several times through our Intelligence agents in his region that if he'd give himself up without being forced, I'd wipe the slate. He has declined to go back as our emissary among his tribe. But we can find use for him in Morocco, among the Atlas mountaineers who are much the same breed as the Berbers.

I settled that mess of his with the civilians by wire. They have dropped the case at my request. I must admit if they had proved unreasonable, you'd have been in a stew. It is also understood that the activities of Amar will be watched.

De Gerval read the letter to Martin.

"Make him an agent?" the sergeant remarked scornfully. "That's like Headquarters. He'd have made a better captain of cavalry than most—"

"Martin," De Gerval concluded sternly, "do not criticize your chiefs. The strength of an army is founded on unquestioning obedience to orders and cold carrying out of duty—"

"On those and accurate reports, Lieutenant," the noncom agreed.



Raw Gold

by LON TAYLOR

Raw gold! They could see it gleaming in its bed of quartz, but between raced fourteen feet of water, clear, cold, terrible in its swift power.

CHAPTER I

ONLY men of brawn and vision could have conceived the plan. Probably only wild eyed Norsemen would have executed it, for the Rogue is known, wherever pocket hunters meet, as a bad river. Lesser men, having glimpsed the gold beneath fourteen feet of speeding water, also would have seen the obstacles standing in the way of securing it. But Olaf and Skoog saw only the gold.

It was Olaf, the dreamer, who found the yellow metal as he explored the canyon, while Skoog, the slow and ponder-

ous one, waited for him on the ridge. Skoog had laughed at his partner for his willingness to descend the three hundred foot slope to the river, merely for the purpose of witnessing the miracle of the slanting afternoon sunlight piercing the green and amber depths. But he had been glad, nevertheless, to wait and smoke a cigarette, for both had been carrying hundred pound packs.

They were in the region where neither pack horses nor burros penetrate, the magnificent and chaotic wilderness that is the Rogue River country. Olaf and Skoog had come up from the Siskiyou; the intervening hundred miles of all but trackless forest had challenged and

lured them. It was a country of vast dimensions. They liked the sunlight on the giant ramparts, and the shadows of the gorges. Above all, they liked the forest itself—the unbelievably colossal firs of southwestern Oregon, trunks whose farthest extremities touched and interlocked so that the sunlight was all but excluded.

They did not discuss these things, Olaf and Skoog. But as they pushed forward through the long aisles they rolled cigarettes between broad thick fingers and smoked contentedly. They had prospected downriver for several days, finding nothing. Gold had been found heretofore only in the tributaries of the Rogue and not in the main channel itself, but the zeal of the pocket hunter had been upon them. At length they had turned north at last, away from the mighty channel; but having gained the first hogback up from the canyon, Olaf had looked back.

“Do not forget what the old Indians told us,” Skoog had laughed, his white teeth gleaming. “They said, ‘The Rogue is a bad river, hungry for the lives of men. Do not make your camp too long on its banks.’ We have escaped it thus far. Would you still tempt fate, Olaf?”

But Olaf had merely grinned sheepishly as he shed his pack. Down the long vista between the trees he could see to the foot of the rapids where the full flow of the river had merged into a narrow channel whose unbroken surface spoke of depth. “I will go back and look at it once, Skoog,” Olaf said, and he quoted an oft repeated proverb of the prospectors, “Who knows? Gold is where you find it.”

He did not really expect to find gold as he made his way down the rocky slope. He felt half ashamed inwardly at his own weakness. But he could visualize sunlight piercing those transparent depths where the foam of the rapids had dissipated. There would be steelhead and rainbow trout revealed momentarily in that flickering light as they pursued their ghostly courses upstream. There was, after all, but one Rogue. Bad river or not, its furious moods and transparent beauty fascinated him.

HE stood on a narrow ledge above the water's edge and felt repaid for his efforts. It was a beautiful yet sinister

spot. The dimensions of the river channel had been deceiving as viewed from the ridge above. It had appeared to be merely a narrow slit of vast depth, with the giant boulder in the current near at hand, downstream. But the boulder was fully fifty yards distant, the first break in the rapierlike sweep of the current through the cleft. He marveled that the full force of the Rogue could be squeezed into a channel less than twenty feet wide. It was, he could see by the shafts of sunlight playing like feeble spotlights through the translucent water, some fourteen feet deep.

By concentrating his attention, he could make out the remote contour of the bottom of the stream bed. It was bedrock of black basaltic material, its contours worn smooth by the ceaseless pull and surge of the current. He grew fascinated in the lazy moments by the progress of a certain shaft of sunlight along the bottom of the channel immediately below him. As it moved upstream, new contours on the bottom were revealed, little ridges and hummocks, miniature valleys; while others having been touched briefly by the light, slipped slowly but completely into outer darkness.

It was then that he saw the rotten quartz and the gold.

In the feeble patch of sunlight beneath those speeding depths a line of white slipped into view on the rocky bottom. It crept into the light, broadening slowly until a vein of quartz the width of a man's hand was exposed. Grasping the projecting root, Olaf leaned forward, staring fixedly.

Moving further, the sunlight revealed the diagonal white segment split like the branches of a tree. Where these branches joined, over a space as wide as the two hands of a big man, the sparkle of the quartz had given way to a gleam that was duller in hue. The white was spangled and permeated with yellow. Olaf knew that he was looking down upon a pocket in the quartz seam that was almost solid gold.

Even as he watched, the gold drifted out of the light. The end of the vein dipped into the solid bedrock toward the bank upon which he stood, and so was lost to view.

Awakening as from a trance, he leaped up, and shouted for his partner. Skoog,

the ponderous one, came immediately, covering the intervening distance with clumsy but terrific speed. "It is *gold*, Skoog!" shouted Olaf when the other came within earshot. "A vein of rotten quartz under the water, and in it a pocket of gold. Hurry, Skoog! Come and see!"

But when the two stood on the ledge again, the patch of sunlight had moved on. There was no quartz in view. Olaf explained what he had seen, describing the quartz minutely, picturing the gold.

"You call it a bad river, Skoog? It has shown us its gold. I had a feeling, all the time it was a bluffer, a loud and noisy one that would deal well by us in the end."

"But we have not yet got our hands on the gold," Skoog pointed out.

They discussed ways and means of securing it, Olaf hoarse in his excitement, Skoog listening almost stolidly, scratching his bristling jaw. It was late afternoon when they strode back up the slope to retrieve their equipment.

"Tomorrow," said Skoog as they made camp under the trees some distance back, above the edge of the bank, "tomorrow, I will dive under the water with your short handled pickax and see if I can pry up some of this gold."

"But the water is very deep and swift," demurred Olaf. "And very cold, also. I will dive for it, Skoog."

The other chuckled. "I am a powerful swimmer and my blood is cold, like a fish. You found it and I will dive for it. That's fair, eh, Olaf?"

CHAPTER II

BEFORE the early sunlight was slanting across the ridge, Skoog was all for making an immediate attempt to retrieve the gold. The big man's slow imagination had caught fire and he was in a fever of excitement. But his partner demurred, pointing out the necessity of waiting until the afternoon, when that same slanting beam of sunlight would shine again upon the gold.

The big man agreed after an examination of the channel. In early forenoon, the water was black and menacing, its depth shrouded in impenetrable shadow. During the long wait Skoog could not

be drawn away from the water's edge. He was fascinated by the thought that the yellow metal was so close at hand.

Olaf spent the intervening hours appraising the lay of the land. He followed the river bank up to the head of the rapids, gauging with his eye the volume of water roaring into the chasm. Where the river made its first leap downward, he remembered, the current was narrowed between two great shoulders of rock abutting from either bank. This rock formation he now studied with interest and the deep walls of the canyon on either side. The north wall was heavily timbered, the giant firs soaring upward from unbelievable footholds on the ledges and slopes. On the south wall, too, were great trees but they were fewer in number.

The feature of the south wall which caused his blue eyes to blaze with sudden excitement was a tremendous rock-slide extending from the base of the weatherworn cliff at the very crest of the canyon wall to the water's edge. So steep and sheer appeared this rock slide from where he stood on the river's bank, it seemed almost unbelievable that the great loosely knit mass could retain its position and not come roaring down into the canyon. The project in Olaf's mind took form and substance as he appraised the tons of materials lying dormant in the crumbling basalt.

He did not speak of his plan immediately to his partner. There would be time enough when the big man had made his plunge for the gold. He did not believe that Skoog, though a powerful swimmer, could be successful. It was not reasonable that the Rogue would yield up its treasure so readily.

As the hour approached, the pair made simple preparations for the attempt. They cut a sapling some twenty feet in length and sharpened it at one end. The big man slipped from his clothes, his hands trembling with excitement, and his big muscled body gleaming whitely in the shadow.

Olaf stood on the ledge, watch in hand. "It is almost time now, Skoog," he shouted above the roar of the rapids. "Look, it is that sunbeam yonder. That is the one that will soon show us the gold."

The pair stood with eyes fixed on the slowly moving patch of light on the floor

of the river. A great sigh escaped from Skoog as the edge of the white quartz seam moved slowly into the light. "There," cried Olaf, pointing. "Do you see it, Skoog?"

"Gold!" breathed the big man through his teeth. "I see it, Olaf. It is gold."

Together they laid hold of the sapling and thrust it into the depths. It required their combined strengths to hold it against the force of the current. But presently its sharpened point rested upon the gold, and Olaf braced himself on the ledge to hold it.

Pickax in hand, Skoog made his way up the channel to the foot of the rapids. He planned to come down with the current, gaining depth as he came. As Olaf watched the giant poised on the edge of the stream studying the black depths below, his heart misgave him. The water was bitterly cold. It was a dangerous business in any event to plunge into that sinister channel, but it was now too late to remonstrate. Skoog's great body plunged forward and down as he dove. The water closed over him with scarcely a ripple.

ALMOST immediately to Olaf's straining eyes, came a great, vague shape winging its ghostly way downriver in the depths. It was well that he was firmly braced, for the shock of his partner's grip upon the pole almost tore it from his hands. He could see Skoog's body swing around and snap into line with the current. There he hung momentarily somewhat like a great streamer of white moss.

Olaf held his breath. With startling clarity a shaft of sunlight resting on the man in the depths showed the great back muscles raised in knots and ridges. Slowly Skoog pulled himself against the current until his left arm was hooked around the pole. Olaf could feel the throb and tension of mighty effort imparted to the straining sapling against his shoulder. With his pickax in his right hand, the diver was gouging for the gold.

Suddenly, Olaf felt the strain on the sapling relax. The white form of his partner was speeding swiftly downstream. He scrambled up the bank, fear clutching at his heart as he paralleled the other's course, running fast as his

legs could carry him. Skoog was at the surface where the current split on the great boulder, his arms flailing feebly. The current tossed him toward the bank. Olaf, reaching forward, grasped an outstretched arm and drew him in.

The giant's body was blue with cold and his muscles were rigid. He could not speak. Olaf helped him into a patch of warm sunlight, tearing off his own flannel shirt. With this he rubbed down Skoog's clammy body vigorously. Slowly the circulation was restored and Skoog relaxed, trembling violently in every muscle. "It was too cold," he muttered, shaking his head from side to side. "It was too cold, Olaf."

"Get up," directed Olaf. "Swing your arms. Jump around. Get your blood into circulation while I get your clothes."

When Olaf returned, Skoog's body was overspread with a rosy flush. The big man had overcome the terrific chill that had held him in its grip. "I lost your pickax," he shouted, grinning. "Is that water cold? Br-r-r! It is like liquid ice. We can do nothing further in this diving business. But the gold is there, no mistake about that. Look." In his big palm was a segment of the decomposed quartz he had succeeded in wresting from the river bed. It was as large as a man's wrist, and more than a third of the bulk of it was gold!

Neither spoke as they made their way slowly back to the ledge, and so stood, staring down at the water.

"What should we do next?" demanded Skoog.

"I have a plan," returned his partner. "Come with me up to the top of the rapids."

The big man fell in behind him, looking back over his shoulder at the black water that held the treasure. "What is this plan?" he demanded as Olaf halted above one of the rocky ramparts guarding the head of the rapids.

His partner included the river, canyon, and forest in a sweeping gesture. "At first you will think I have a pipe dream, Skoog. But listen carefully. We have found gold but we cannot take it because it is covered with water that is very deep and swift."

"And cold," interrupted his partner. "Very cold, Olaf."

"But if there were no water," per-

sisted Olaf, "we could dig up this treasure in short order. How then, can we get rid of the water? We must put a dam across the river, Skoog, to hold it."

The big man stared at the other open mouthed. Then he shook his head. "It is a pipe dream, without a doubt. Make a dam across the river? Engineers with a hundred men could do it, perhaps, but there are only two of us and we are not engineers."

NEVERTHELESS, he cast a quick appraising glance at the giant firs and the canyon, and rolled a cigarette with speculative deliberation.

"We can do it, you and I, Skoog."

The smaller man was trembling in his excitement. "We have worked in the woods of the Columbia River. We will bring up saws and axes. That tree, yonder, the big one on the bank, we will fell across the stream so it will lodge between these two walls. This one behind us, yonder, we will fell uphill. It is so steep that it will slide down and lodge. There is one more here and those two yonder."

"But after that, what?" demanded Skoog. He strove to be doubtful but he had caught the fire of his partner's enthusiasm. "We could fell trees, yes, but that would accomplish nothing. The water would run between the trees."

"It would make a log jam," his partner pointed out. "We could then cut smaller trees and float them down the river with brush and limbs. But all that would not hold back the water. We would need many tons of rock backed up against the logs." The big man's gaze followed the speaker's outstretched arm toward the rockslide. "We would then put some dynamite in those rocks, Skoog, and it would come down to dam the river. Look!" Stooping swiftly, Olaf caught up a fragment of rock and hurled it across the canyon. It struck on the slide some forty feet above the water's edge. Rolling back immediately, the fragment dislodged others. A miniature landslide ensued, rolling and tumbling down to the water's edge.

Skoog stared for a long moment. Then he turned back to his partner and slapped his great thigh resoundingly as he chuckled: "It is an idea for a son of Hammerfest, Olaf! But there are two of us, and we can do it. We will make a dam across the Rogue, you and me, and

while the water is held back, we will dig up this gold."

CHAPTER III

THEY decided to go upriver for supplies. It was approximately an equal distance either way to the nearest outposts of the wilderness. But it is easier to pack downhill than up, all other things being equal.

Early the following morning, they cached their equipment securely on the slope above the channel and started eastward upriver through the timber. They traveled all day. Toward nightfall, they descended from the heights to a little settlement known as Holman's Ford where the Eureka trail crossed the Rogue River. It was a stage depot, postoffice, and outfitting point for prospectors and trappers.

The arrival of Olaf and Skoog caused no comment, though the partners walked in without packs from a forest extending many miles beyond the horizon. The pair volunteered nothing. They ate at the stage depot and passed the night in a hayloft above the feed barn.

No questions are asked at Holman's Ford. But a black bearded man sprawled in the early morning sun on the broad veranda of the general store, examined them narrowly as they crossed the dusty highway from the stage depot. He was loosely knit, great limbed, big chested, big in all proportions save his eyes, which were small and black beneath the brim of his battered felt hat. There was nothing unusual about his appearance except for the fact that he carried two guns, one on each hip.

Beside him, leaning against a veranda post, was a little man with bulging eyes and a retreating chin. As Olaf and Skoog passed this pair and clumped heavily into the store, the slouching giant indicated their retreating figures with a broad scarred thumb. Obediently the little man turned and followed into the store.

It was a weird assortment of supplies purchased by Olaf and Skoog. A cross-cut saw, a sledge hammer and wedges, a double-bitted six-pound ax, foodstuffs and twenty pounds of dynamite with caps and fuses—these and other things

made up the list.

"You gents are making up a pack train, I expect," said the proprietor as he assembled the order.

"No, we carry it ourselves," said Skoog.

The other looked at the partners with a faint gleam of wonderment in his eyes, not unmixed with admiration. The load would be of staggering proportions. But he said nothing and computed the cost of the purchases. "Eighty-two dollars and forty cents. We'll strike off the pennies and make it eighty-two, even up."

Skoog and Olaf looked at each other quickly as they reached for their wallets. They knew they had little more than half that amount in cash. After emptying their wallets Skoog fumbled in his hip pocket and drew forth a fragment of quartz and gold. "What's it worth?" he demanded, pushing it across the counter.

The proprietor took down his gold scales and weighed the fragment then moved along the counter toward the window to examine it more closely. Skoog, following, stumbled against a little man leaning on the counter, whose pale, prominent eyes were also fixed on the gold.

"About a third of it is the real dirt," conceded the proprietor. "I'll allow you forty for it. If that ain't suitable, you can take it out back to the mortar and pound it out and we'll weigh it exact."

"Forty's fair enough," said Skoog. "That was almost my own guess."

When they had adjusted their loads on their broad backs, to the proprietor's secret astonishment, they plunged forward without ceremony into the forest, Skoog carelessly balancing the box containing the explosive on the top of his load.

The proprietor came out on the broad veranda to watch them go. "If them two hombres ain't human pack horses, I'm a Chinaman," he chuckled over his shoulder to the two spectators as he returned to the store. "Keep your ears peeled and see if you hear anything like a half a box of dynamite when that big boy stumbles."

BUT the others paid no attention. They were talking swiftly in hoarse undertones. "It was a piece of quartz, rotten with gold!" The little man's fin-

gers were twitching nervously. "They've made a whale of a strike if that sample tells anything. It runs almost half gold. It aint right, is it, bo?"

The big man rose to his feet with deceptive swiftness. "We'll trail 'em, Slim," he ordered. "Let's get going. Well rustle up some light packs, and see what they're up to."

It was long after night fall when Olaf and Skoog arrived at camp. Both were utterly spent. More than thirty miles through the Rogue River country with packs of such bulk was a task for giants. They prepared food, gulped it down, and crawled wearily into the blankets.

They rose with the dawn, greatly refreshed. The roar of the rapids from the canyon in the morning air was like a challenge. Skoog stood erect, stretching his muscles and shook his fist at the river. "We'll tame you, Mr. Rogue!" he shouted, grinning. "You're big and bad, but we'll make you quiet as a brook, and you'll pay us for it well, eh, Olaf?"

They tore into their work like demons, attacking first a huge fir standing on the bank some thirty feet back from the water's edge. It was five feet in diameter with bark thicker than a man's body. Skoog, as a former boss timber cutter on the Columbia, directed the operations. When the deep gash in the forest monarch was completed, he laid the head of the ax in the cut, the handle pointing across the river. "We will drop it straight across, just missing the rock on the other side. If we are lucky, the top will break as it strikes the bank. It will break once more when it strikes the water, leaving it lying straight across the channel."

They cast aside their axes and leaped upon the saw. The keen cutting teeth of the steel ribbon bit into the green timber, raking out long strings of fiber as the pair swayed in unison. This was backbreaking work, and they halted at intervals to rest. At midforenoon Skoog paused, halted the sawing operations, and reached for the sledge hammer and falling wedge. He inserted the broad, thin falling wedge in the crack, and drove it in with measured tremendous blows. The great tree shuddered a little as the crack widened.

A few minutes more of frenzied sawing, and Skoog removed the handle from his end of the saw. "Pull out the saw,

Olaf," he ordered. "I'll wedge it down."

Each blow on the falling wedge imparted a distinct tremor to the spreading top of the tree, one hundred and eighty feet above them. Each blow moved it slightly out of the perpendicular, until Skoog snatched the wedge from the widening cut and both scrambled back to safety as the giant fell.

Moving slowly at first, but gathering momentum as its mighty bulk swung down in a wide arc, the tree crashed into the canyon with the force of uncounted tons, the noise of its falling momentarily drowning out the roar of the rapids. Its top splintered like matchwood as it struck the bank, broke in the middle with a crack like a giant pistol, and crashed into the channel above the two rocky abutments. The full bulk of the log lay across the stream.

"Fine!" exulted Skoog. "It's a good omen, Olaf. That tree is a fine beginning for a dam."

But when they leaped upon the log, they discovered a series of great lengthwise cracks splitting the fallen tree, above water.

"Well, anyway," said Skoog, "it's a good beginning. Now, we will fell one back from this other side."

In a week's time, they had created a terrific log jam in the canyon of the Rogue. Many trees had been toppled in from the north side and from the south. In addition, they had thrown in several more from an angle so that their spreading tops crashed into the tangle of logs. Limbs from the fallen trees and bush from both sides of the bank had been cut and thrown into the current, adding to the debris.

AT the end of two weeks of colossal endeavor, they decided it was time to dynamite the rock slide. They reached this decision in midafternoon. Skoog was all for planting the dynamite and bringing down the rock slide immediately, but Olaf objected. It would be better to wait until morning, he counseled, for no man could say how effective the dam might be. It easily might be hours before the water had lowered sufficiently in the channel to uncover the gold. Reluctantly the big man agreed.

Throughout the night, Skoog dreamed of the gold. In his sleep, he tore it from the rocks with his naked hands, played

with it, heaped it up in gleaming piles, dug up great masses of quartz and gleaming yellow metal larger than a big man could carry.

Olaf slept fitfully. There was long intervals when he lay awake staring up at the skies through the green canopy overhead. The days of toil were over. The suspense and waiting were at an end. Tomorrow, if their plans worked out, they would find the gold.

Strange noises were abroad in the night. In the unending roar of the rapids was an ominous note—a warning or perhaps a threat. In the silent watches of the night, it seemed to Olaf as he lay, wide eyed, that the river was as a live thing growling from its cavernous lair. He knew this to be a fanciful idea that sprang, perhaps, from the strain of the work; but fanciful or no, the thing laid hold upon him like something real and tangible.

Far and near, the gloomy forest was alive with night sounds—the rustle of creeping things, stealthy footfalls, snapping twigs. The realization came to Olaf suddenly that during the previous weeks of toil, there had been a feeling, a half submerged thought that they were being watched. It had been only a hunch, no more, that from some distant thicket, some far off ridge, greedy, curious eyes were upon them. The thought jerked him bolt upright; muscles quivering.

But his partner beside him muttered in his sleep, grunted, and sighed as he shifted his position. Olaf relaxed and grinned sheepishly. A great piece of nonsense, surely, this business of raising up scarecrows out of his imagination. Hidden eyes watching them? Squirrels, maybe, or porcupines. Perhaps even a bobcat. No men had passed that way. No mark of man save their own was upon the land. Tomorrow they would dig for the gold.

He lay down again, disposed himself more comfortably, and presently was asleep.

CHAPTER IV

AT DAWN, Skoog's growling voice roused his partner. Olaf was heavy with sleep.

"Up, lazy one!" shouted Skoog

in high good spirits. "Up! We have light already. This is the day we cut the river in half, Olaf. What? Would you sleep when there is gold waiting for us down yonder?"

At the water's edge, Olaf plunged his head in the icy current and felt refreshed. Sleep dropped from him like a cloak and he stood, shaking the water from his yellow hair. Directly opposite, across the river, was the rock slide extending from the water's edge three hundred feet upward to the base of the basaltic cliff. There were no large fragments except at the base of the slide, he noted with satisfaction.

It was forty feet between the great shoulders of rock supporting the log jam against the current. The trees they had felled were big, but could even those mighty timbers support the colossal forces that would be hurled against them when the rock slide had presently shut off the water? But he put the idea from him.

Skoog was at his side, the dynamite balanced on his shoulder, the coiled and capped fuse in his hand. "We will place the shot yonder among those big ones at the foot of the slide, Olaf. If we are lucky, we will loosen them up and that should bring down the rock above."

Olaf followed his partner across the jam to the great fragments at the water's edge. Here they worked like Trojans, furiously, yet with caution, for the removal of the wrong stone might bring down an army of rattling fragments from above. Without stopping for food or rest, they toiled on. Presently they were deep enough. They had uncovered a small arched space on the uphill side of a huge fragment, and in this cavity Skoog placed the shot.

Death was standing close beside them as they carefully replaced the boulders one by one over the dynamite. But they disregarded it. No time to think of danger when there was work to be done and gold so near. With clumsy but careful fingers they filled in the cavity they had burrowed out.

At last it was complete. Only the white stubby fuse projecting above the surface was significant of the tremendous dormant forces soon to be released.

Skoog struck a match and held it aloft with a flourish like one who proposes a toast. They stood facing each

other, breathing heavily. Then Skoog stooped and applied the match to the fuse. As they turned and ran across the barrier, the fuse hissed and spat like a live thing. A tiny spiral of tarry smoke rose on the still air.

They turned on the opposite bank to watch. Each was sure the other could hear his heart beating. The suspense seemed interminable. As they watched, they unconsciously retreated backward up the slope step by step. Skoog drew forth the makings and attempted to roll a cigarette, but his hands were trembling too violently. He replaced them in his pocket with a grin. Still the blast did not come.

"It was a bad fuse, Skoog," said Olaf hoarsely. "It has died out maybe." But he did not take his eyes from across the river and his partner did not reply.

Suddenly at the foot of the slide, came a great upheaval. Fragments of rock boiled up like a spouting geyser. Lurid flame flashed. A great cavern yawned momentarily in the slide and the report of the blast drowned out the roar of the rapids.

Up and down the river falling fragments hissed and splashed. A few buzzed whiningly through the trees near where Olaf and Skoog stood; but the pair were watching the rockslide. It was as if the whole world were in motion.

AT the impact of the explosion, it seemed that the mass had shivered throughout its length. Now its whole surface was moving down hill, slowly at first but gaining in speed and momentum, accompanied by a terrific rumbling that seemed to shake the very ground at their feet. Tumbling, leaping, crashing one against the other in a gray-black wave it poured down the slope in a thunderous charge, swept into the river, heaped itself against the log jam and choked the canyon. Here its momentum halted, the vast mass ground to a shuddering and protesting halt; but long after the main body of the slide had stopped, lesser slides and individual boulders poured down from the heights.

The dust born of the vast upheaval, which had billowed over the canyon like a tawny fog, dissipated rapidly in the breeze. The partners stared triumphantly at the results thus revealed. The

Rogue had been dammed!

They dashed down the slope to view the wonders they had wrought. It was almost unbelievable that in the space of a few minutes such a tremendous readjustment of natural forces had been brought about. The entire force of the current had been cut off. In baffled fury, the river surged against the barrier that blocked its path in a huge drift and rolled back in great circling eddies.

"Now," said Skoog, "let us go down and look for the gold."

The water was sinking slowly throughout the length of the channel. It was no longer clear but sallow and muddy. Previously, they had placed a mark on the bank above the gold so that when the water was shallow enough, they could start digging. Pickax and shovel had also been placed in waiting.

"It will be a half hour before the water is low enough," said Skoog, his hoarse voice quivering. "We must wait patiently, Olaf."

But the patience was not in them. They charged excitedly up the slope to watch the water rising in the dam. They halted above the barrier, staring in astonishment at the size of the great pool that already had formed. It had risen several feet on the sloping rocks and had backed a hundred yards up the canyon. Broadening, the pool had moved up the banks on either side and was now lapping gently about the base of the lowest tree at the water's edge. There was no current in the turbid water save for great eddies that circled slowly and majestically to and fro upon its surface.

"There will be a big lake here presently," said Skoog with a wave of his big arm. "We have dammed a river, you and I, a river that others have called bad and dangerous. Even if there were no gold, this still would be fun for us, eh, Olaf?"

At the mention of gold, both turned and charged again down toward the channel. The water was sinking fast. They were astonished anew at the depth of the narrow cleft. Its walls were unscalable, almost sheerly perpendicular, smooth and glistening.

There were still several minutes to wait. They climbed up the bank, a short space, and seated themselves with their backs to the forest. They laughed loudly

at each other because of their excitement and Skoog, to demonstrate his coolness, produced the makings and rolled a cigarette.

"Now you roll one," challenged Skoog.

Olaf produced a cigarette paper from his pocket and stretched forth his hand for the tobacco. But his outstretched arm froze into immobility. Half turning to face the other, his field of vision included the slope to the rear. Thus he could see, ten paces distant, two alien figures motionless as the trees about them.

CHAPTER V

ONE was a big man, black bearded. The smaller man was ratlike of face, standing a little back of the other, his fingers twitching spasmodically. The bearded one's hands were level with his hips. In each was a gun whose muzzles were fixed on the pair below like round unwavering eyes.

Skoog, too, turned to look. All four were rigid and motionless, save for the twitching fingers of the little man.

"Stick 'em up," ordered the bearded one briefly. The pair slowly raised their arms. Skoog's tobacco sack swung pendulumlike from a hand that no longer trembled.

The gunman moved slowly down the hill taking each step cautiously, the little man at his heels. Swinging a little to one side in their descent of the slope, they presently faced the seated pair. Then the big man spoke again.

"One funny move from you birds and I'll drill you. Do you get me?" His heavy voice was menacing. "Now listen, act like reasonable gents and we'll treat you right. All we aim to do is tie you up and leave you sitting here nice and comfortable while we duck into the river bed and give this pocket of yours the once over. You've done a nice piece of work here. We laid up back on the ridge and watched you do it. You've done the work and we'll take the gold. That's fair enough, ain't it?"

Still the partners said nothing. They stared impassively at the speaker, their broad faces expressionless.

Dumb, the bearded one told himself;

scared to death. "Remember," he said aloud, "I got the drop on you. You ain't got any kick coming at that. Lots of gents would have filled you full of lead and said nothing. Easy and peaceful, now. Slim, do your stuff."

The little man approached cautiously, dragging twin lengths of rope from about his waist. He edged to the rear of Skoog, halting behind the great up-raised arm.

An unspoken suggestion passed between the two partners. Heavy faces were passive but blue eyes suddenly were aflame. Before the little man could loop his rope about a broad wrist, Skoog twisted backward and seized the other about the middle. With a wrench of his mighty shoulders, he swung him clear of the ground, and hurled him down the slope. At the same moment, Olaf dropped his hands and sprang as from all fours toward the gunman.

The bearded one sidestepped the hurtling body of his partner as he fired into the face of the leaping Olaf. He sidestepped again as Olaf's body crashed to earth, inert, loose muscled. Through the smoke, Skoog roared down upon the gunman. There was no escaping him, no time to use the guns. The pair crashed to earth and rolled down the slope, locked in a tight embrace.

From below, the little man picked himself up, squealing. Now he came running back, sobbing between his teeth. In his hand was a heavy fragment of rock. He danced about the struggling pair, brandishing the missile aloft. A blonde head reared uppermost momentarily from the melée and upon it he swung the rock with all his puny strength. The ferocious energy was stricken from Skoog's leaping muscles. His great body sagged.

The bearded one rose drunkenly to his feet, his breath coming in hoarse, sobbing gasps. The little man came scurrying with the guns which had been dropped in the desperate battle down the slope. The gleam of the natural killer was in his bulging eyes as he stood over Skoog's motionless body and trained the guns upon the broad chest.

But the other seized his arm. "Come away, Slim. Don't waste ammunition on a dead man. We've got no time to lose. The water must be near the top of the dam. Leave them lay and we'll

get the gold."

He cursed ruefully as the pair hurried down the slope, replacing the guns. His thick fingers explored a hairy neck carlessly. "We might just as well have shot those birds from behind and not given them a chance," he growled. "That yellow haired grizzly near busted me in two."

The water had drained from the channel save for a tiny trickling stream flowing between murky pools in the slimy bottom. The pair seized the tools left by the late toilers. The walls of the river bed were too steep to scale. It was too far to leap in safety to the bed-rock below. They dashed upstream to the mouth of the channel, turned, and entered into it. The memory of their late combat dropped from them as they slid and scrambled down into the cleft where, like a segment of snow, the quartz vein gleamed and scintillated.

RETURNING consciousness came first to Skoog. He struggled to his feet then paused and looked back at his partner.

Olaf was lying where he fell, his head rolling from side to side. Skoog stumbled up to him, lifted him to a sitting posture. A long groove, clotted with blood, was in Olaf's scalp. The wound had stopped bleeding and Skoog's exploring fingers told him that Olaf had missed death by the thickness of a dime.

The wounded man raised his head slowly. The stupor had passed. Memory returned to him instantly as he leaped to his feet. "The gold," he muttered, gasping his partner's arm. "Did they get the gold?"

"Not yet," said Skoog. They stumbled together down the slope swinging to the left toward the head of the channel. Still on high ground, they came into view of the pair laboring like demons in the depths.

"Wait," said Skoog, his blue eyes smoldering. "We must steal around by the bank above them. Then we will drop down on them and tear them limb from limb, Olaf."

A sharp report, like the breaking of a taut bowstring came from the barrier. Olaf turned to look and a great sigh escaped him. "We are too late," he said, pointing. "Look, Skoog."

At first nothing happened. It was al-

most as if the world were holding its breath. Then, with the roar of a falling mountain, the huge logs snapped like matchwood as the dam broke.

The partners stood rooted to the ground. Not until that moment did they realize the colossal forces they had held in check when they damned the Rogue. Down through the shoulders of rock poured a wall of water thirty feet high—leaping, exultant—the epitome of immeasurable force and fury set free. The great logs that had held it, the loose rock that had barred its path were swept along like chaff and sand, as it roared down the slope.

“Look,” shouted Skoog hoarsely. He was pointing at the pair in the depths of the channel.

For a moment following the thunderous crash of the barrier, the two in the cleft seemed paralyzed. Then they dropped their tools and fled. It was too late to escape by the upper end of the channel. They tried to scramble up the sheer walls but the cold, slippery rock hurled them back. It was too late to escape by the lower end of the cleft.

Meeting death, men react to their oldest instincts. There was no remotest possibility of escape. In the split second of life yet remaining, the little man continued to run down the channel, squealing in terror as he ran. The bearded one also ran a few steps. Then he turned, his hands dropping to his hips in an instinctive and lightninglike movement as he faced the oncoming monster.

It came. The flood rolled into the channel, blotted it out at a gesture. Over the cleft and into remoter and remoter distance the wall of water continued its thunderous march.

Gradually the flood subsided. The glistening body of water pouring through the shoulders of rock above the rapids became lower and lower. Finally the normal flow only remained, sweeping down in a foam-lashed cataract. The channel was all but obliterated. The crest of the river was level with the banks, indicating that the deep cleft was choked with uncounted tons of broken rock swept down with the current.

The partners were seated, smoking. It is good to relax one's nerves after witnessing the passing even of lesser men. Skoog arose presently and stretched his great muscles. He turned

away from the river, facing north. “It is time to go now, Olaf,” he said, yawning. “They dug up the gold, those robbers. The flood has carried it away and filled the channel. It was only a pocket, anyway.

“Let us break camp and travel.”

“Wait,” said Olaf, “I want to look at the channel again.”

“Once before,” grinned Skoog, “we started away and you came back to look at the river. It brought us no good luck, Olaf. It is a bad river, no doubt of it.”

Olaf persisted, nevertheless. Skoog waited above the edge of the bank where the late flood had gouged into loose boulders and earth and down to sloping bedrock.

Olaf descended into the great scar and stood for a moment at the water's edge. The channel was indeed choked with loose rock that had sluiced down under the terrific head of water. The rapids of old were no more. New contours had appeared in the long slope. Its roar had changed in tone. It seemed to Olaf that the sinister and menacing note was gone. It was as if the river, conscious of its power, were chuckling in colossal humor at some joke known only to itself.

Thus Olaf's idle gaze swung around to the freshly cut bank behind him. He turned, took a step forward.

“Skoog! *Skoog!*”

His partner came, bounding. His gaze followed Olaf's outstretched arm. In the sloping bedrock below the freshly hewn bank, a segment of a great quartz vein gleamed and scintillated. Here was no pocket, no chance gathering together of nuggets and fragments of precious metal. The entire formation, from where it emerged to the point where it disappeared again under the bank, was permeated and seamed with raw gold! The partners leaned against each other for support.

“Hundreds, *thousands* to the ton!” breathed Skoog. “It is the same vein, Olaf. The river has uncovered it for us.”

“What do you say now, Skoog?” demanded Olaf exultantly. “You will admit now that it is a good river after all, eh?”

Skoog, grinning, made no reply, and the pair turned their backs on the chuckling Rogue as they moved closer to inspect their bonanza.

Deep in Borneo

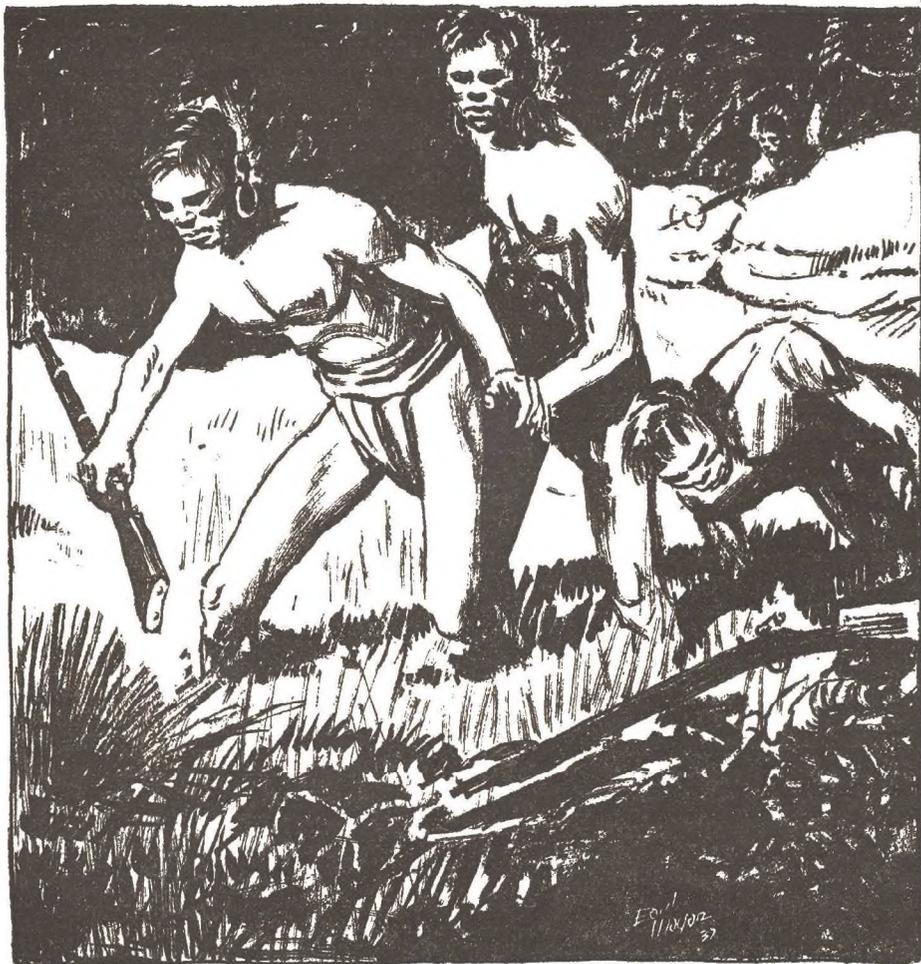
by J. ALLAN DUNN

A tale of the hinterlands of Borneo where peril was at every man's elbow, and where Captain Fred Barnes proceeded on a strange quest, its object the fatal gems of Li Yuen.

LI YUEN got up from his chair of carven teak, his gross body shaking like a jelly beneath the silks that covered it as he waddled slowly to the wall, touched something in the panelling, and stooped as a section slid noiselessly aside and the delicately-chiseled wood gave place to the steel front of a modern and eminently Occidental safe.

His pudgy fingers, despite the long silver nail shields on some of them, deftly spun the combination, opened the heavy door and took a package from an inner receptacle. He came back smiling to Fred Barnes—Captain Fred Barnes of the merchant service, or any other service that called for a man of much experience, halfway between thirty and forty, strong as a lion and considerably





braver than that overrated and mis-named king of beasts.

Li Yuen put down upon the table the stack of unincreased bills he had taken from the safe, counted them dexterously and slid them across to his visitor. There were not many of them, but the denomination made up for the lack of numbers. Barnes had counted them with Li Yuen, mechanically following the action. There were exactly twenty-five five hundred-dollar bills of the Bank of China.

"If that is not enough, there are more in the safe," said Li Yuen. He spoke English that included command of the idiom and with only a slight difficulty with his r's.

Barnes pushed the money back again.

"I came to you, Li Yuen," he said, "because when a man is out of luck in these latitudes, as I am, he isn't looking among those of his own color for the chance to give him the cold shoulder. I don't have to tell you that out here a man who gets the name of being unlucky

isn't wanted.

"It wasn't my fault that I lost my last ship. No navigation can offset a seaquake. Balkan Reef lifted right under me when a submarine volcano blew off, and fairly split the old hooker in half beneath my feet.

"But I lost her. I also broke my leg and spent my spare cash before I got out again. Now, when I go to an owner's office—and chances for a berth are none too many—he either offers me a job as mate, or shakes his head and says there's nothing doing. I'm not above a mate's job, but I don't care to accept it from men who know well enough my capacity.

"I'm not looking for charity, either. I need a berth and, if I can't get what I want from my own, I'll take what you have to offer, if there is anything."

"To loan money to a man who has once saved your life is not charity," said Li Yuen. "I think my unworthy existence is worth a great deal more than that sum."

"I did not know you when your cart was rushed by those crazy beggars," said Barnes. "There is no question of reward. I would have done as much for any man mobbed by that filthy pack."

"They would probably have killed me, however. The Beggar Brotherhood goes far when its members start a riot. Moreover, a worthy deed is ever rewarded."

"Then find me a berth. Your business reaches from Hankow to Shanghai, Canton to Saigon. Your patronage is large and, if you place me, you will be well served."

"Beyond doubt. And, as you say, the gods have been good to me."

Li Yuen looked with an air of complacency about him. His surroundings bespoke his wealth and influence. The rare wood of the panelling, so delicately carved it resembled lace, lined with green silk. Embroidered panels and rare wall paintings elaborate screens, rich-deep-napped rugs upon the tiled floor. Here and there were cloisonné vases and urns in which grew dwarfed shrubs and flowering orange trees; here and there an antique bronze. Beneath an arch, half concealed, half displayed, an ornately lacquered coffin, awaiting Li Yuen's demise.

THE merchant-contractor stuffed the little bowl of his pipe with tobacco and consumed the dried herb meditatively. To a foreigner his moon face might have suggested contented stupidity, but Barnes knew him for not only the richest, but the cleverest of his rank within the territory he had just mentioned. And that was no slight rating. At last Li Yuen removed the jade mouthpiece from his full lips and laid down his pipe.

"I can give you a commission," he said. "It will pay well, but it is dangerous, however well you play your cards and understand the game."

Barnes nodded an affirmative to Li Yuen's slightly quizzical look. The mandarin went on. He was not actually a *kwang*, or public official, but he had been granted the rank of the blue button, of fourth order, for certain services rendered the State, and he wore the lapis lazuli emblem on his hat, as became a man of high estate and recognition.

"It is often said that a Greek can out-

deal a Jew, a Japanese a Greek, a Chinese a Japanese, a Singapore merchant a Chinese and a Dutchman the man from Singapore. Some say the Dutch beat the devil. I don't know how far that is true. It depends upon the individual. But I am in partnership with a Dutchman at Benut and, it is in my mind that he is trying to get the best of me. I want to find out.

"Benut? That's way inland in Dutch Borneo?" Barnes queried.

"Headwaters of the Kapuas River. Navigation end for steamers and *prahus*. Sometimes the steamers cannot run up that far. This man, his name is Van Schaack, has back stairs influence with the Dutch Government."

"It's all rotten," put in Barnes. "Back stairs or front?"

"They sweep the front stairs occasionally. But Van Schaack stands in well. I needed his aid to obtain a concession which we have worked together. He made the discovery, and I supplied the money. He is resident manager of the mines."

"Jade?"

Li Yuen went once more to his safe and returned with a bag of soft leather and a lacquered box. From the first he poured out a heap of gray pebbles that here and there showed a break of light. From the box he brought slips of thin paper folded as a druggist puts up powders. Each of these contained from three to eight diamonds of assorted sizes, well cut, giving out a dazzling play of color.

"They come from the Kapuas Valley," said Li Yuen. "In Dutch territory."

"They look like fine stones," said Barnes. "Not that I am any judge. They're not what you call bluewhites, are they? Little off color?"

"For most markets, not for the Chinese. These represent my share. I am not sure of the true merit of the representation."

"Figure he's holding out on you?"

"I think that Van Schaack has not only gathered the best of the fruit, but that he is contemplating leaving me in the shadow of a too well shaken tree. He is in a good position—as a Dutchman—and I am in a poor one—as Chinese. Unless I can produce absolute proof, crushing proof, of his double dealing, my case before Dutch officials would

be a weak one. And, as I have said, there are certain indications that Van Schaack believes the plum season nearly over and that this is the time to market—probably in Amsterdam.

"I have made some plans, but there have been delays. My agent is not the best I might have chosen and will have limited opportunities. Had I known you were in Peking I should not have commissioned this party at all. What evidence they may gain will be contributory to yours. It is perhaps best that you should remain in ignorance of each other. You cannot conflict."

KNOWING the Oriental mind somewhat, with its delight in secret ways and means, Barnes felt no umbrage at the suggested lack of confidence.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Go to Shanghai. Call at the godown of Quong Sue. I will give you directions. You will go in as yourself, you will come out later as—let us say, Amos Brown of New York. You will have shaved your beard, and Quong will blend your skin where the sun has not reached it. He will give you exit on another street, and there will be a room reserved for you at some hotel. Whichever one you choose. You will be supposed to have come up from Canton. Quong will arrange that, and attend to the passenger list and any questions that may be put.

"Amos Brown will be a wealthy American going to Borneo to shoot alligators, honey-bears, wild pig, orang-outangs. I will provide you with introductions that will not be traceable to me. You will forget me after you leave here. You have been recommended to Benut. Through my letters you will be able to manage others to Van Schaack.

"You hear of diamonds. They are your bait. Wear this on your finger."

Li Yuen took from his own hand a diamond ring of magnificent water, all of three carats weight, mounted in black enamel.

"That is not a distinctively Chinese setting," he said. "See where it fits best."

"You are trusting me with this?" Barnes asked involuntarily as he appraised the enormous value of the stone.

"Trust all or not at all, my friend.

Moreover, when you go fishing, use the best of lures. Van Schaack will see the diamond. He has never seen it before. It will open the way to talk of diamonds. You have heard of diamond mines. You are an amateur connoisseur of stones, but you have never seen them in the rough. I think that Van Schaack will offer to show you the mines. He may offer to sell you an interest. I believe he will, the tree being already well shaken.

"He may talk too much or—"

"I should naturally want to be informed as to his annual returns," said Barnes.

"Exactly. I see that details are not necessary. You are to secure the evidence."

"How about the diamonds, the rest of your share, if you have been defrauded?"

Li Yuen refilled his pipe.

"I leave that to your discretion, my friend. My main end is to recover whatever I may have been defrauded of. The larger the amount the greater your compensation. The evidence is the first means to that end. I will cover all your expenses and assure you two thousand dollars, or fifteen per cent of the value recovered. Whichever amount is the larger."

"That is a generous proposal," said Barnes.

"Not for the risks. There will be many. Some commence the moment you leave the house. Others will depend upon how your disguise holds. I cannot warn you of them all. Van Schaack has lived in China—in Peking. It is most probable that he has his spies watching me if he is contemplating going to market. He will not return from Europe.

"Had I known you were here I would have sought you out secretly. That cannot be helped. But it is more than likely you are already a marked man. Quong will try to wipe out that marking. It is on the knees of the gods. Trust on one. Van Schaack uses Chinese miners—Kehs, the Malays call them. They come from the neighborhood of Kwang Tung. They are treacherous and more or less allied with secret orders. A maze of such societies exists all through Borneo. One man I can arrange for you to meet. At Benut. Mata, a hunter. You will want such a man. He will apply with others.

He is the one exception about trusting. He is faithful. Do you accept?"

"Yes."

"Good. Here are five thousand dollars. You can give me a receipt for them and an account of your expenses. This is a business matter now. One more thing. Are you armed?"

"Not at present. I have a gun at the hotel."

"Take this. You may need it before you get your own."

BARNES' face showed no more emotion than that of Li Yuen though he knew the latter had not spoken idly of possible imminent danger. Li Yuen slipped the loops from the gold buttons of his silk blouse and produced from a holster beneath his left armpit a flat automatic. Barnes stowed it beneath the waistband of his trousers while Li Yuen nodded approval.

"You speak Malay, a little Dutch, some Mandarin and Chinese dialect?" he said, as if checking off an inventory already taken.

"As a trading skipper goes. I can get along. I shall leave in the morning. Do you want to communicate with me again?"

"Not at present. You may see me before you are through at Benut. I cannot leave at once. My body is not accommodating to travel. Neither would it be wise for me to enter rashly upon Dutch territory. But I think that you will see me. Until you do, good-by."

They shook hands, the silver finger guards resting strangely on Barnes' hand. Then he went out into the swarming native quarter of Peking. Going toward the foreign quarter, he crossed the great market, largest and noisiest of all the world. There was a mingled roar of a human orchestra, added to by the squealing of pigs and the squeaking of the wheelbarrows, with small sails set to aid the trundler. Everybody talked at once.

The treble notes of excited bargainers, the shouting of the professional story tellers, the laughter of the nondescript crowds about the jugglers, the comments of hangers-on near the letter writers' tables, all blended in an indescribable din, together with the cries of men pushing their wares, bamboo sprouts and vegetables, live fish, game in abundance,

venison and jewel-mailed pheasants, fruits and the famous white ducks of Peking. Pork-stalls, druggists with magic drums of staghorn, tiger's claw, ginseng, powdered staghorn. Barbers twanging a sort of jew's harp to attract trade, beggars beating their clapdishes, men on donkeys or shaggy camels from Tartary, on mules and ponies, driving carts or acting as bearers to men-borne palanquins, surging along the center of the place on a thoroughfare raised from the general level. Mangy curs and wrangling idlers, a pandemonium through which Barnes pushed sturdily, conscious of curious, unfriendly eyes. The cry of foreign devil was repressed, but there was no doubt of his being considered an intruder. Restraint proceeded merely from caution, and a false move on his part, a lack of diplomacy, might result in the instant rising of a howling, stoning, beating mob, eager to annihilate the foreigner, and thereby acquire virtue.

A handsome cart came arrogantly through the crush, outriders brandishing whips and shouting as they cleared the road. The conveyance swerved and passed close to Barnes. He saw the silken curtains drawn aside, caught a glimpse of a white, appealing face—that of a white woman beyond a doubt—a scrap of folded paper was thrust into his palm, and the cart lunged on.

Barnes closed his fist about the note. He knew that there were not many white girls in Peking; to see one in a native cart betokened something out of the ordinary, yet he was aware that there were white women who formed part of the hidden life of the Chinese.

That he held in his hand an appeal of some sort Barnes never doubted, and his sailor heart responded involuntarily to the cry of a woman in distress, whatever the circumstances. If she were under the protection of some wealthy Chinese libertine it might go hard with Barnes if he interfered. If she sought him as catspaw—but the face he had seen did not suggest that of anyone who had voluntarily entered into a bondage from which she was now eager to escape, and to which she might be tied by certain terms of abhorrent contract. In any case she was a woman—and a white woman—in the midst of a heathen city, appealing to a white man.

BARNES stepped off the raised street and joined a group about a juggler, finding cover to read the note without attracting too much attention. The fine feminine script was easily read. It suggested education and refinement.

They are taking me to the house of Fen Chau, close to the Chu Mien gate. Tomorrow they take me to Tsientsin. I write this in the hope of meeting a white face and passing this note . . . If you are able, for God's sake rescue me from a horrible fate. I have no present friends I can reach. I am guarded because I am valuable. A big sum has been paid for me. For God's sake hurry. I have bribed an amah who may prove faithful . . . If she does, she will be waiting near the house and talk over what may be done. I am desperate. Please help me.

Aileen Ridpath.

The amah can talk a little English.

The last words were scrawled as if in a desperate hurry. The note rang true. For a moment it flashed across Barnes' mind that this might be a frame-up, but he could not count the risk. A white girl bought and taken to Tsientsin in slavery to yellow lust—such things were done. And he had the pistol of Li Yuen. He would always despise himself if he ignored the appeal.

He tore the note into tiny fragments and wormed out of the gaping mob. He knew his Peking well enough and, if the attendant *amah* were there, it should be easy to find the house of Fen Chau. Not hard in any case. He made a traverse through narrow street and alley toward the Chu Mien gate, and then checked his pace, strolling as a curious stranger might, engrossed with new sights and sounds. He did not seek the *amah*. She could pick him out without trouble.

In the shadow of the gate itself an old woman brushed his elbow in passing then turned and looked into his face, her own showing brown and wrinkled with age beneath a sort of dark blue hood.

"You lookee Aileen?" she whispered. Barnes gave her a slight nod. "Allee light, you come."

She slipped through the crowd and stopped beside a doorway, bending to pick up some imaginary object.

"Allee same open—you go in," she

said as she stopped.

Barnes tried the door and quickly stepped inside, the *amah* following. He had a swift memory of Li Yuen's injunction—"trust no one"—and he did not intend to go forward too blindly, or to leave his exit too far behind. Once through the door he had entered China, he was swallowed up so far as the white world was concerned. They would never bother about him on Legation Street. He halted close to the threshold, finding himself in a small hall. A screen stood in front of the far wall, a lighted lantern dimly illuminating the place and revealing a flight of stairs, a landing.

The *amah* passed him, finger to her lips, gliding up the stairs with surprising activity for her apparent years. Barnes put a hand behind him and tried the latch of the door. It worked, the way was open for retreat.

Suddenly a figure appeared at the top of the flight, a girl in American clothing, the woman of the cart. She descended halfway, her eyes large in the light of the lantern, her white face colorless, filled with fear. As Barnes started toward her she shook her head, came down a step or two.

"We must wait," she whispered, and her low voice trembled.

"The door's open," Barnes answered.

"No. We must get a cart. I must go back. They will miss me. Yin is up there now. She will get the cart. Hide behind that screen. Keep close to the wall or they may see you if anyone comes up or down. I—thought you would come—" she gasped, her speech hurried, gratitude shining in her eyes, showing on her quivering lips. Then she stood rigid, listening, stark with terror.

"Quick."

The *amah* thrust her ancient head over the landing, like a turtle, one arm and hand beckoning. The girl fled up the stairs and Barnes stepped catfooted to the end of the hall, back of the screen.

It seemed plain to him that the girl had been immured in a room with the *amah* on guard, that the maid had locked the door while she went out to look for a possible rescuer, risking little on discovery, since she had turned the key. Now they were prepared to repeat the trick while the *amah* got a cart. While the girl ventured downstairs the *amah* had stood guard in the room with some

ready excuse of the girl sleeping.

It seemed on the surface as if, with the *amah's* aid, they might have won free without Barnes' aid, but he knew well what the sight of a lonely white woman entering a cart in that quarter would lead to—jeers, insolence, a crowd gathering as if sprung up from the ground, after the swift manner of Chinese crowds, almost instant recapture, if worse did not befall her.

A FOOTFALL sounded, the tread of a weight far heavier than that of either of the women, creaking the stair for all its felt-soled shoes. Barnes found that he could see a portion of the stairway, therefore he could be seen, and he pressed back close against the wall.

Instantly it opened back of him, without sound, sliding in oiled grooves, the sense of space warning him too late as he staggered and was beset by a dozen hands dragging him backward. Arms linked up with his, were about his throat and body. Struggle as he did with all his strength he was helpless against such odds, fighting in the dark.

The panel slid back, the faint light from the hall vanished. He did not shout. He would have mocked himself. He was trapped. What had Li Yuen said—"when you go fishing use the best of bait!"

He stopped struggling, fearful that they might discover the pistol or that it might become dislodged. He expected to be searched and bound, but now he was alert, his brain at work. The girl who had signed herself so cleverly as Aileen Ridpath was a decoy and an accomplished actress to boot, an ally of Van Schaack's beyond a doubt.

As he ceased to resist he was dragged and flung into a corner on a pile of sacking. Strips of cotton cloth trussed him, hands and feet, with wide swathes of it about his body. Then silence.

The room was close, it smelled with the foul reek of garbage. As he silently fought his bandages he was soaked in sweat. But either he had greater strength than his assailants anticipated, or they had been too hurried and unskilled in their work. Expanding his chest to the utmost—he had exhaled all his breath and shrugged his shoulders closely while they secured him—bringing all the muscles of his arms into play,

Barnes felt the swathings give slightly. He forced his thighs apart, got play for a knee, hunched himself into a corner, attempting an upright position.

Three times he failed. On the fourth effort he heard and felt the rip of cloth, found himself half suspended on some sort of spike and, for the first time, grinned. He did not know how long he might be left there, but he dared not try to tear the cloth too swiftly because of the noise. It was plain that he was alone, long before this. Slowly he raised himself and let down his weight. The spike worked through his own clothes and tore his skin and flesh. He felt blood trickling down his back—a minor evil, for there was play now in the wrappings—and soon he stood upright. Presently his wrists were free and then his feet.

He did not immediately clear himself from the strips of cloth, but arranged them so that he could step clear, and sat in a corner with his back to the wall and his head close by the friendly spike, exhausted, recovering his strength, still marveling why they had not already searched him and taken away the good gun whose grip now comforted his hand, concealed in the binding swathes.

He had not waited long, his breath was barely normal again, before he was conscious once more of opening space, this time above him. A square of dim light spread overhead, and he hurriedly took a prone and huddled position as a lantern attached to a cord descended and stopped midway. He saw a yellow face, with parchment skin stretched tight over the bones, and two eyes that gleamed as they gazed down at him.

"Oh-he!" said a thin voice in Chinese, almost falsetto in its evident enjoyment, "the gander thought he was an eagle, but some strange geese convinced him he was only an ordinary fowl. Oh-he! And even gander feathers are worth the plucking, if the bird is tough."

Barnes paid no attention. The lantern was lowered cautiously, and the speaker craned over the edge of the trapdoor for better inspection. He seemed to be satisfied, for the light was drawn up and the door closed.

He knew the Chinese delight in metaphor, guessed that the gloating captor underestimated his knowledge of the language and guessed also that he had been dragged from the wall by women—the

geese of the little parable. It was a humiliating thought, but it had its comfort. Many Chinese women were equal in strength to men, being the harder workers in many cases but, being women, they had not thought to search him for a weapon. It was barely possible they believed he did not have any. His present lodging was not of high degree, he had inquired there from the half-caste clerk the way to Li Yuen's. He might have been a suspect from the beginning by some streak of luck, good for Van Schaack, bad for him—so far.

But now—

ONE of the silent openings to the dark room was again working—the one from the hall, he judged, though his sense of direction had been spoiled in the tussle. He got his heels under him and waited, looking like a helpless bundle, his face registering the rage of a prisoner. If the false Aileen Ridpath could act, Barnes was not without some knack of it.

The man of the lantern entered, active and on guard. He held the light high, showing his greedy, triumphant features, bringing out a gleam from a long knife he carried.

"What's the idea of this?" blustered Barnes. "If you don't want to land in a heap of trouble you had better let me loose."

"Maskee. Wha's mallee you? No feel too good? Too bad. I think you catch um allee tubble this time. I think you allee same too heap sma't. Not so sma't as lillee gel, mebbe?"

He broke into an exasperating cackle, licking his thin lips, showing his yellow teeth as he cautiously advanced, his knife ready. Barnes writhed as if he struggled vainly with his bonds, really trying to be sure his gun was clear. The Chinaman's flung blade was not to be despised.

"You fool along too big pidgin not belong you!" said the man. "You plenty big damn fool."

"I've got friends," said Barnes, as he gathered himself together, "who'll make you pay for this."

"Flend plenty good when he savvy some place you stop. Suppose he no savvy—not much good."

His cackle stopped in his throat as Barnes' gun showed its blunt muzzle and

the voice of the prisoner changed to harshness.

"This name, my friend," Barnes countered. "You drop that knife. If you let a squawk out of you it'll be your last. Not quite such a damn fool after all. That's right. Turn around, now march to the door and open it. You're going to take a walk with me. First fool move you make will be your last. Savvy?"

The disgruntled Chinaman was meek enough with the hard barrel against his spine as Barnes shook off the wrappings and spurred his late captor to the door, which had closed by some mechanism that answered again to a touch.

Barnes knew his clothes must be ripped and that he would be a sorry figure to venture through that quarter, but he had his plans made.

"If anyone comes down those stairs you're out of luck," he said grimly. "Open the front door and call a cart. We'll ride instead of walk. Open it."

He was half minded to make some retort about the "geese" but repressed the inclination. There was no sense in giving away his knowledge of Chinese. From now on he would go very warily. A mule cart came up, its driver squatting on the shafts, in answer to the hail of Fen Chau, and Barnes caught Chau by his wide sleeve, wrapping it in a twist about his wrist. Before the rabble could do more than stare they were in the cart, side by side, lurching along toward the Tartar City. At the entrance to Legation Street Barnes took his gun out of Fen Chau's ribs.

"Get out," he said curtly and, to the *mafee*, "drive on till I tell you to stop."

Curiosity and presentiment made him examine his room carefully. He had little baggage, but it had been carefully overhauled in his absence. His gun was gone. He resolved to say nothing about it. There would be no results in that semi-reputable hostelry where the hard-up whites gathered.

The geese had not touched his money or the diamond ring. They had left his plucking to Fen Chau. Changing his clothes, he paid his bill and registered at Peking's best hotel. The next morning found him on the railroad.

In the godown of Quong Suo, at Shanghai, Captain Barnes disappeared

through a back door when the store was temporarily empty. He never emerged. Two streets away the wealthy hunter and globe-trotter, Amos Brown, clean-shaven, clad in immaculate pongee with topee helmet and smoked glasses, was bowed out of the curio shop of one Lee Fat, some purchases in his hand, others to be delivered to the hotel to which Amos Brown repaired by way of the bund, timing his arrival carefully, registering for his reserved room.

AMOS BROWN was a little stouter than Captain Barnes, and there were a lot of subtle differences about face and build that made up a perfect and easily maintained disguise. Though he slept with a cord ankle-high above his doorsill, another fastened to the catch of his window and also to the wrist of his left hand, a gun handy beneath his pillow, together with an electric flash torch, nobody disturbed him.

The flora of Borneo is rich and beautiful in the aggregate, but the northwestern coast-line fails to even suggest that splendor. In May, with the torrential rains still lingering, the climate was that of an overworked steam laundry. Mists, malaria and mosquitoes haunted the banks of black and stinking mud, rank with mangroves and fever. At times rolling hills covered with rank grass changed rather than relieved the monotony.

The bluff-browed, short-engined Dutch liner wallowed her way from Singapore to Pontianak with the action of a carabao cow in a rice field, and with not much more speed. Her passengers sweltered in their bunks or beneath the awnings, panting and perspiring more than ever at the energy of the fool American, Amos Brown, with his flashing diamond, his baggage, his guns and his eternal interest in alligators, orang-outangs and honey-bears.

Guttural Dutch expressions gave vent to what they thought of his folly. Rich—and spending his money in such fashion! American, therefore more or less crazy and, of course, wealthy.

He asked questions all the time. Someone had told him Benut was the best point for him to make for, did they think so? One and all assured him Benut was without doubt the spot of entry, hoping

to check his inquiries, hoping that an orang-outang would some day avenge them for what they suffered from his confounded activities.

The purser carried the news ashore that they had a mad pig of a wealthy American aboard who was bent on killing orang-outangs, and it was not long before all Pontianak knew all about Amos Brown—or thought it did. More, the gossip spread far and wide, chattered by Chinese and Malay, spreading up to Benut where the talk left many hunters, carriers and guides eagerly waiting for the sportsman—and his money. Among them Mata. Mata—after his repressed fashion—seemed excited as the rest, but he had long ago received word of the coming of Amos Brown.

Barnes—as Brown—presented his letters and was entertained, given peppery meals, liquors from old Holland, advice, introductions to Mynheer Van Schaack, who held a mining concession at Benut and was the big man of the district. Brown must be sure to call on him; his coolies worked the mines in the Kapuas range; they would be able to help him locate his game. Also he might run out of schnapps and Van Schaack had a notable cellar.

There was no mention, Barnes noticed, though he probed carefully if lightly, of Van Schaack being in partnership with anybody. So far as Pontianak was concerned—and doubtless the rest of Dutch Borneo—Van Schaack controlled all interest, as he paid all “squeeze” money.

On the fifth day, surfeited with food and drink and Dutch conversation, Barnes took passage on a small river steamer manned by dirty, jabbering Malays and half-breed coolies, mastered by a hybrid who appeared to be three parts Arab and one part Dutch.

The craft was abominably dirty and ill-found. Its chugging machinery made an infernal racket that threatened to leave the screw stripped from a broken shaft in the silt of the marshy delta of the Kapuas River or drive a crank-beam through the hull.

This excuse for a steamer was to take Barnes up as far as Sintang. It was a flat-bottomed craft and could navigate the channel that, owing to the rains, averaged six feet as high as Sintang. After that he would have to use a *prahu*.

With the good will of his Pontianak ac-

quaintances and the liberal use of money, Barnes secured the whole of one dingy cabin on the starboard side of the upper deck. The steamer was apparently overcrowded and the Arab purser impressed the fact that he was doing Barnes a great favor, contrary to all regulations, at a risk of losing his own job—all of which merely meant graft. But it was better to be squeezed in that way than to be penned in with bibulous, snoring Dutchmen, and Barnes capitulated and viewed his empty cabin with relief.

HE continued his rôle of eager sportsman, a crank who bothered people, but was willing to buy drinks at the tiny bar. All the Dutch aboard were of the merchant or planter circles and knew little or cared less about hunting. They referred him to Van Schaack as the last word and the last man he could tackle on the subject; they swapped cheroots for cigars and cigarettes and they unfolded the mysteries of pepper growing *ad nauseam*.

They bored Barnes as much as he did them, and he was glad when the river widened above Tajan, twisting in a series of squatty S's in a region of marshland and lagoons where the mosquitoes made life on deck unbearable and drove the passengers to lie panting and pajama clad in their net-protected bunks. They came to meals in the same unconventional attire, venturing on deck only after dark when a breeze sprang up which, muggy though it was, combined with the speed of the steamer to foil the insects in some degree.

Now and then he gleaned news of Van Schaack that was personal. He seemed to be a full-blooded man, successful, and who believed in catering to his own comfort. The one who appeared to know most about him, and to be the most disposed to occasionally bring up his name, was a clerk for a pepper plantation at Sintang, bound back there after a vacation, sallow of complexion and tormented with a liver complaint that threatened before long to give him a longer rest than his duties ever included.

His name was Blommaert, and he suffered terribly with the heat. Barnes found him one night on a deck chair, feebly combating the mosquitoes that had raided the boat despite the breeze. The man was pallid with sweat, ghastly and

close to exhaustion, in the light of the ray Barnes flashed on him as he paraded the deck in search of a book he had left in his own chair.

"I cannot schleep in dot cabin," said Blommaert. "Four of us is too much und I haf a lower berth—no pordhole."

Barnes was genuinely sorry for him. Lean himself and spare of flesh under the light padding of his disguise, he was long since inured to the tropics. For one thing he rarely touched liquor in which the Dutchman sought relaxation. Blommaert looked as if he were ready to pass out, but explained that he had had no sleep for three nights.

"They schnore und grunt too much," he complained.

"I've got a cabin to myself," said Barnes. "Turn in with me. Take the upper berth and open the porthole. It is screened."

Blommaert was valuable in his thanks and, Barnes' book retrieved, they turned in. Barnes did not read; he had only wanted to make sure of the book, one of travel in Borneo. After a while he heard the slow and even breathing of Blommaert above him and dozed off.

He woke up in the middle of the last half of the night with the splash of something warm on his face—warm and sticky, not water. As he stirred, a second drop followed, heavy and with an unmistakable odor that brought Barnes up on his elbows feeling swiftly for torch and gun. He switched on the beam and sprayed the little cabin, then turned it above him. On the one thin covering of his bunk there was a puddle of blood. Through the slats of the upper berth, through the thin mattress and its matting top, crimson spots were oozing. Blood trickled down the grooved paneling back of the berths.

His first thought was that Blommaert had suffered a hemorrhage. He wiped the mess from his face with his handkerchief, thrust aside the netting and landed in mid-floor. Stepping on the edge of his own bunk he drew aside the netting of the upper and saw the body of Blommaert lying with the throat cut, gaping wide, horrible.

Barnes jumped to the door, opened it, drawing the bolt, and yelled. A Chinese steward came first, then the mate and lastly the captain, all of them yawning, half asleep.

THERE was no doctor aboard, and no need for one. Blommaert's body was a quarter emptied of its blood supply through the severed jugular. No weapon was to be found. The purser arrived and took charge, herding out the morbid, inquisitive mob, closing the door on everyone but the captain, the steward and Barnes. The skipper's face showed suspicion.

"How did this happen?" he demanded of Barnes. "There is blood on your face where you half wiped it off."

"That's for you to find out," Barnes answered, eyeing the man, his voice incisive. "Blommaert's throat has been cut on your boat. I'd advise you to get busy."

"How did he come in here?" asked the purser.

Barnes explained briefly.

"I'd get busy if I were you," he suggested. "The man who did this may be still on board. Better round up your crew, to begin with. Then the passengers. Search berths and quarters."

"You go fast. *Ja*, too fast. How about you?"

"Don't be a damn fool," said Barnes. "This was done with a knife, sharp and big. Looks like a *kris*. I have none. I was friends with this man. I had no motive to kill him. Don't stand there pop-eyed. Get busy."

In the back of his brain there was the conviction that Blommaert had saved his life at the expense of his own. There was no open motive to murder a comparatively poor clerk, but Barnes, with his wealth, with the big diamond on his finger, was another matter. There were plenty of men aboard who would be tempted. No one knew that he had asked Blommaert in. On the contrary, anyone aboard might well know that he had hired the cabin for his own use and that he slept preferably in the upper berth beside the open port.

Or, if it was not the diamond or the money he carried, perhaps someone had penetrated his disguise. He did not think that very likely, though possible, since Li Yuen's warning had already shown its soundness.

The purser and the steward lifted the body from the berth and laid it on the floor. Barnes climbed again to investigate the screen over the porthole. It had not been disturbed. He surveyed the

panelling at the head of the berth and discovered a shuttleshatch, probably placed for better ventilation. And here was tangible evidence—a tiny fragment of cotton goods, like that the sarongs affected by the Malay sailors and the half-breeds, caught on the snagged beading of the panel.

The shuttleshatch did not open too easily, but Barnes forced it and found it had been hooked on the far side. He flashed his torch into the next cabin. It was empty.

"That's how it was done," he said. "This cabin is unoccupied. I thought you said they were all crowded, purser? How about it? Who took that cabin?"

He caught a glance passed between purser and captain. Evidently the purser did not care to be made the one to be questioned. But Barnes was imperative.

"It was me they were after," he persisted. "Who were they?"

"Two men who got off at *Tajan*," said the purser sulkily.

"Then come on."

Barnes swept them along and into the cabin. The berths were made up, the door unlocked, no signs of recent possession. But there were drips of blood on the top bunk covers and, on the jamb of the door, a smear of the red fluid with just the suggestion of fingerprints. That was all, and fingerprints meant nothing in Borneo. Sorry as he was for Blommaert, Barnes could not help worrying about possible delays and an investigation. Yet he knew that it was more than likely that the Dutch authorities—unless they fancied he was the murderer, which was absurd on the face of it—would conduct their inquiries and render their judgments behind closed doors, so far as any foreigners were concerned.

"I'm taking this cabin," he announced. "Have my things brought in here and nail up that panel. I'd advise you to round up your crew first. If one of them is missing, that's the man."

"I can attend to my own business," said the captain sullenly.

"See that you do. Part of that business is my safety. Blommaert's gone. If I am annoyed any further there will be something started."

THIS was pure bluff. Dutch officialdom is stolid to outside interference. The captain retreated, Barnes' clothes

were brought in for him with his guns and baggage and, after seeing the panel closed and making sure there was not another in the room, he locked the door. In no mood for sleep, he smoked the night out, conscious of poor Blommaert's dead body beyond the partition.

If the murderer had been after the diamond and the money he might well have retreated on finding he had killed the wrong man. But there was the possibility that Barnes' disguise had been penetrated, that he had been followed. It seemed to tie up rather too closely with the episode at Fen Chau's. Had the assassin attempted to kill him on orders from some Chinese end or was Van Schaack already warned, apprised of his coming.

Li Yuen had said there were risks and he had evidently not exaggerated. But there was nothing for Barnes to do but be doubly wary and go on. He could not turn back at this stage of the game.

"That's twice," muttered Barnes between his teeth, closed tightly on the amber of his pipe. "The third trick ought to be mine."

The sun broke heavily through the mists of the valley and turned the port hole glass, ruby, crimson as blood. Barnes washed, changed and went out on deck. To his astonishment he saw a woman, slender and, at the first glance young, reclining in a deck chair, fanning herself. The thought leaped into his mind that here was Aileen Ridpath, but he dismissed that fantasy. It was the result of nerves after the night's horrors, he concluded, as he passed the chair on his way to the rail.

The woman was only a girl, he assured himself, with a swift side-glance. And she was blonde. The Ridpath *intriguante* was a pronounced brunette.

A woman, seemingly traveling unattended was unusual, and he had had no idea there was such among the passengers. She did not look Dutch. He wondered if she had not got on somewhere in the night, though he had not noticed the boat stopping and he did not believe he had slept that soundly. She might have been aboard since Pontianak, staying in her cabin. Quite naturally she would have had her meals served in the cabin rather than join the pajama'd crowd in the salon with their boorish talk and manners.

He walked to the stern, watching the mud banks where the alligators lay like logs or slithered into the yellow water. He had no wish to appear intrusive. When he turned the girl had disappeared. The purser stood grinning before him. Apparently he bore no umbrage against Barnes.

"There is a Malay missing from the crew, sir," he told Barnes. "I theenk he is the one who try to keel you. It is veree unfortunate for the man who is keel, for you I geev thanks. There weel be no trouble."

Barnes slipped him the money he so obviously bid for. It would save him some risk of delay, and he was glad to have the affair disposed of. Then the man, who would have sold his frayed remnant of a soul for a gulden, winked.

"You see that lady, sar? She is American lady. She go to Benut also. I theenk she teecher for one reech man. Yes, sar. For Mynheer Van Schaack she weel teeche his cheeldren. You like I should introduce?"

"No," said Barnes curtly, feeling the girl insulted by the suggestion.

Was this another play to find out just who he was, to gain his confidence? It might be just coincidence. Again, he remembered that Li Yuen had mentioned engaging the services of another party in his cause. Was it this girl, consenting to play spy on her employer? It behooved him to be careful.

If she were regularly engaged he was sorry for her from all he had heard of Van Schaaek. The man ruled his wife absolutely. This girl was pretty — undeniably, and she seemed refined. He had obtained a better look at her than his fleeting glimpse of Aileen Ridpath.

Barnes shrugged his shoulders. She would transship with him at Sintang. He would contrive to get aboard the same *prahu* and make a study of her.

It was hot and muggy. The motley crowd in the salon insisted upon discussing the murder and spoiled Barnes' faint appetite. Out on deck again, he did not feel like acting up to his assumed character and potting alligators. The close air seemed to bear a hint of trouble; he could almost feel the floating strands of a web being woven about him, mesh by mesh. The heat and the want of sleep dulled his brain, made the general oppressiveness a personal thing,

hard to be endured without irritation. And he knew he would need his wits at their best.

BY sheer stress of will, banishing all thoughts that crept in—the grim suggestion of the faint fingerprint, not cleaned from the jamb, the smears on the upper berth cover, the still body in the next cabin, if it had not been already disposed of in the exigencies of the climate—Barnes forced himself to sleep.

The girl's name was Florence Henshall.

She appeared on deck again in mid-afternoon. It was plain that several of the Dutch passengers were eager to make her acquaintance. Once Barnes saw the purser go to her after a talk with one stout planter, but she dismissed the man in swift fashion so that he cringed away and Barnes chuckled.

He endeavored to be just in his estimation of her and so far all appearances were with her. Aside from Van Schaack and other possibilities, the Kapuas Valley was no place for her, he decided, as he paced up and down, rifle tucked under his arm, considering himself a ridiculous figure and wondering how she regarded him. This wonder was not born of vanity, yet he felt himself anxious to stand well with her. The feeling was instinctive. Something told him she could be trusted. That, he knew, was a superficial reaction and, on his guard, he sternly dismissed it to be taken up later in the cold light of reason.

She was winsome, she appealed, but then, so had the woman in the cart. The appeal there had been based on the expression of fright, this girl's features as she lay with her eyes almost closed, languid in the heat, were—Barnes hesitated for the adjective and supplied it almost unwillingly as he recognized its truth—indicative of feminine sweetness.

He was not a woman's man. He was too fond of adventure, too jealous of his liberty to attach himself, though ready to afford protection and help if needed. And now his sentiments were dedicated to his mission. Fair play gave her the benefit of the doubt. She did not look like a spy, a decoy. Once bitten, twice shy, he told himself, as he laid plans to know her more intimately.

Finally he went to her frankly and introduced himself as a fellow American.

She gave him a long look and accepted the unconventionality, giving her name in exchange. The rest of the passengers looked at him enviously.

"I heard a cry in the night," she said. "Do you know what it was about? Everyone seems to be discussing some mystery. I asked the purser, but he said he knew nothing about it."

That was purely official caution, Barnes reflected. There was no need to shock her with the gruesome affair and he fabricated.

"They ran ashore on one of those wretched sandbars," he said. "The river shallows as we go up." To ask her destination was natural.

"To Benut and then up-country," she said frankly. "I am going to teach the two children of a Dutch diamond miner, a rich man who has a very fine place, I understand. His name is Van Schaack."

"I have letters to him," said Barnes. "I am going up that way to shoot. We can take the same *prahu*, if you like. It is not easy travel. But perhaps Mynheer Van Schaack has made arrangements for you?"

He thought he read relief in her face, a change of expression beyond doubt, but he did not consider himself apt at reading the eyes of women as he could men.

"I should be glad," she said. "I have only general directions. You see, the circumstances are rather unusual. I was touring the Orient as governess for a Mrs. Denby, an American with one child—a dear little chap—who died of cholera." Tears filled her eyes suddenly and her voice trembled.

So had that of Aileen Ridpath, Barnes reminded himself, though an inner mentor chided him for suspiciousness.

THERE was a sudden crowding to the rail, the steamer sheering off to allow a downriver boat to pass. Crew and what passengers were on deck exchanged greetings. It gave the girl time to recover herself, and Barnes punctiliously interested himself in the other vessel.

"While Mrs. Denby retained me as companion," she went on, "it was pure kindness on her part. Then she met somebody she had known before. She was a widow. The man traveled with us and, the upshot was, that she married again. That was in Singapore. They

went to Hongkong and I——”

“Left you alone in Singapore?” Barnes’ indignation was spontaneous. He was beginning to be drawn to the plucky girl despite himself.

“They were kind and liberal to me,” she said. “Naturally they wanted to be alone. More than I did. And I had to get another situation. The manager of the hotel told me that he knew of one. It seemed most opportune and I accepted. But I was delayed. A boat was laid off for repairs. And I do not know whether Mr. Mynheer Van Schaack has got my letter of explanation. It may be on this boat.”

“Find out much about Van Schaack?”

“The assurances of the landlord and those of the manager of the steamship office determined me. I did need a position.”

“Stayed at the Imperial, I suppose. Good hotel.”

“I could not afford that after Mrs. Denby left. So I stopped at the Oriente. The meals were queer, but I had a nice room and the service was good.”

Barnes frowned, but he did not let her see it. The Oriente’s reputation was not especially savory to those who knew Singapore, although a stranger might not have suspected it. He had a poor opinion of its proprietor, a specious individual who pandered to the amusements of his male guests.

“I see,” he said. “You speak Dutch, of course?”

“Yes. I come from Pennsylvania. My grandmother was Dutch. I lived in Holland for a while.”

He shifted the talk to the time they would arrive in Sintang, about noon the next day, and volunteered to see her aboard the *prahu*, which he resolved would be his own. He had an uneasy feeling that her personal description had been sent to Van Schaack, that the landlord of the Oriente had chosen her more with a view to her undoubted charm than from her educational qualifications, or necessity. Moreover, a man was a skunk who would let the girl essay the trip without making full arrangements for her. He realized that he was becoming prepossessed in her favor, but he persuaded himself that it was good judgment.

He got hold of the purser and had luncheon served on deck, watching her

attack with a good appetite certain things that he, as an old traveler, had provided himself with.

“I haven’t been eating much,” she confessed. “Things are so spiced.”

“That’s the polite name for it. The natives never touch meat until it is putrid, and I think the stewards follow their example. There is no ice aboard.”

“I’ve been living off bananas and mangosteens. Nice, but not nourishing,” she smiled at him. “This is much more satisfactory.”

“Thanks to the American canning industries,” said Barnes. “And American fisheries. This tuna came from California. So did the peaches.”

The talk turned easily on the Pacific Coast. Barnes found her altogether charming. He still preserved a degree of caution, but the more he thought of her teaching Van Schaack’s stolid, squatly, spoiled children, uninformed as he really was about the household, the more he resolved to try and make life easier for her while they were together. If she were all he thought she was and the position did not turn out to her liking, he resolved to see her safely out of Borneo. In any case he meant to keep an eye on her after they reached Benut. It should be easy if he managed to become a guest of Van Schaack, as he hoped.

EACH *prahu* inspected by Barnes at Sintang, seemed dirtier than the other and, after a swift inspection of three, half fearing any moment might come a warrant on account of Blommaert’s murder, he chose the first. He stipulated that no other passengers be carried in the crude cabins of the high-pooped stern and paid through the nose for the accommodation. He came close to punching the purser of the Pontianak steamer as the latter leered at the girl and himself. His thoughts must have hardened his eyes and stiffened his jaw, for the purser’s smirk changed to a look of malevolence harmless, perhaps, but slightly disturbing. He would have to be careful how he passed through Sintang on his way out Barnes decided.

The waist of the *prahu* was jammed with an unwashed, smelly crowd, a piratical assortment of Lascars, Chinese, Malays and interbreeds. There were no other white passengers for Benut. But,

once away, after all the shouting turmoil of departure, the *prahu* sailed well enough and, when the wind failed, the crew got out their sweeps and fought the current with a will that promised a landing in the morning. Barnes had got the two so-called cabins furnished with new matting, with two cots of bamboo and light blankets after they were thoroughly cleansed with broom and mop. He bought a mass of pink, sweet-scented blossoms from a shoreboat, commanded a jar and set them in the girl's room.

"It's only one night, thank all the little gods," he said to the girl. "If you get frightened, call out. I can break through that partition. I think you can make out. I've got plenty of grub for our meals. We'll picnic. Lots more in my baggage."

"I don't know what I should have done without you," she answered, as they stood looking down on the milling rabble amidships.

They stayed up late, watching the turbid river flowing like a quicksilver serpent under the moon, the crew chanting as they worked the sweeps, the native passengers gambling, eating, settling for the night on their mats, talking in drowsy singsong.

The Kapuas Range, six thousand feet at the summits, loomed ahead, a strange region of wild forest and wilder beasts, of savage men, rich minerals and gems and glory of tropic forest. It was the Sarawak, British protectorate.

The banks began to be high and timbered. The wind brought the mingled essence of spice, the never-to-be-forgotten odor of the Far East, a blend of cloves and cinnamon, camphor and nutmeg. At midnight he saw the girl to her cabin and decided on a last pipe before bed. She had turned out, in his opinion to be the most charming woman he had ever met. He looked forward to intimacy with her, certain that she was all that from the first he now realized he had wanted her to be.

He leaned on the poop rail, looking down into the mass of men, mostly sleepers, packed everywhere, crowding to the bows, a huddle of low-grade humanity. The breeze was drawing in the defile they had entered and the rowers had withdrawn their sweeps to set two square sails of matting at main and miz-

zen. The *prahu* was slowly wafted along through the perfumed night.

There were no lights except a lantern by the helmsman. The moon was full and brilliant, amply sufficient for navigation. Its white light divided the details of the boat into dense shadows and spots of high detail. A husky Arab stood at the heavy steering sweep. There was another forward, watching the channel, calling the course, now and then casting a sounding line. The rest of the crew slept against emergency.

Barnes finished his pipe and knocked the ashes out on the rail, bending over a little and thereby saving his life.

Something whizzed and flashed up out of the blackness of the main deck, soaring at an angle, flicking the broad brim of his braided hat and fanning his face as it passed to whip into the matting of the mizzen, hang there for a moment and drop to the deck—a throwing kris, upright and quivering. If Barnes had not shifted his position it would have found his throat.

He moved again, swift as a cat, gun in hand. The dark shadow of the mainsail lay heavy on the deck, but he had caught the faint suggestion of a man's figure rising from among the recumbent natives and springing to the rail. He now stood with one hand balancing himself by the shrouds, the other still forward in the act of throwing, the fingers just within the zone of moonlight. An almost naked native with a hint of rolling eyes, of bared teeth in a ferocious grin, as if the assassin were still uncertain of the result of his aim.

Barnes dispelled the doubt with a bullet and the figure dived outboard. A hundred jabbering heads bobbed up. The steersman, his eyes widened to white circles about blackly shining pupils, stared stupidly.

"Fired at something on the bank," said Barnes in Malay. "Think I hit it."

He descended the poop ladder and made his way through the startled, squirming mass of humanity to the rail, as if to verify his shot. There was no sign of his man. The tide had covered him. If Barnes had killed him the alligators would bury him.

The third trick had been played and he had won it, but by a narrow margin.

The bowman came aft and Barnes repeated to him his explanation to the

steerer. They evidently regarded the occurrence as the demonstration of a lunatic foreigner and, as their superiors had not been aroused—no easy job since they never considered the day ended without becoming drunk—they accepted the coins he gave them and dropped the subject. The bowman went forward again to his duties, cursing the chattering passengers and enforcing silence. The steersman drooped again over his tiller. He had had his share of rice wine and Barnes believed he had been half asleep when the knife was flung, responding subconsciously to the calls from forward.

At all events, the knife was still in the shadow of the mainsail, its point maintaining it upright in the hardwood plank. Barnes retrived it behind the man's back and took it into his cabin. It was a throwing kris, wavy and keen of double edge, heavy bladed, its silver inlaid teak handle set at an angle. The steel was scrupulously clean, but Barnes fancied that it had drunk the life of Blommaert.

He scrubbed off a wet splotch of blood from his palm where it had rested on the rail, from which he had completely and surreptitiously removed all traces. There was no use in arousing trouble on the *prahu*, and he felt satisfied that the man would never report to Van Schaack. Whether Van Schaack's general orders against possible emissaries from Li Yuen included murder remained to be proven. Barnes had small doubt on the subject.

His intention to go on was doubly cemented. No attempt as yet had been made upon the girl, but the coil was becoming complicated, tightening, and he felt sure that Van Schaack held one end of it. Whether he knew yet that Amos Brown was Barnes from Peking was another matter.

Barnes slept lightly, but he was used to that and he got up feeling fit. Hazards to him were stimulants.

Again he said nothing to the girl. The attempts had failed and that ended them. If she knew of them she was likely to speak of them to either Van Schaack or his wife. Quite naturally. If Van Schaack did not know who he was, if all this had been done from the other end without communication with Benut, which was quite probably the case, considering the modes of travel, any talk of such attacks might rouse his suspicions. Meantime Barnes hoped sincerely that

the alligators had worked in his behalf.

He roused the girl up an hour after sunrise and she soon appeared, fresh and smiling, to share the breakfast of powdered coffee dissolved in water boiled over solid alcohol, crackers, jam and native fruit.

At ten o'clock the *prahu* was still an hour from Benut, the air calm and the sweeps going under a broiling sun. Barnes caught the unmistakable *put-put* of a launch, and saw a sizeable craft coming swiftly down the river, its white paint and brass appointments dazzling in the light. He noted its speed—a good ten knots—and made a sudden resolution.

"If that's Van Schaack's boat, and I've a notion it's for you, Miss Henshall," he said, "he does himself well. Perhaps his wife is along. I don't care to introduce myself until I have got my party together. If you don't mind I'll say good-by now. I'll undoubtedly show up at Van Schaack's within the week."

This procedure was a hasty decision. He had to bank upon the girl's integrity. The launch's unexpected arrival had precipitated the move. It might not prove wise, but he had little fear of that. It was natural not to force himself upon Mrs. Van Schaack. The girl showed no curiosity.

"Certainly," she said. "They are coming alongside. I'll say *au revoir*, and save my real thanks until I see you again."

"I'll not forego them," Barnes said, shook hands and went into his cabin.

HE wanted to lose all risk of speculation on the part of Van Schaack. Now the girl—he was sure of it—would not mention the trouble he had gone to in traveling on the same boat with her and making her comfortable. Van Schaack, if he intended the shaking of the fruit tree, was crafty enough to make much of small things. It did not look as if he intended a quick departure by his engaging a teacher for his children, but he might intend to take her along. Barnes trusted Li Yuen's judgment.

A voice from the launch hailed the captain, inquiring if he had a passenger for Van Schaack's. Barnes saw the launch leave, gliding swiftly upstream. He questioned the native skipper care-

lessly and found out that Van Schaack lived twenty miles on the other side of Benut on a tributary that came from the north, sourced in the Kapuas foothills, flowing by the diamond deposits exploited by the Hollander.

Landed at Benut, finding indifferent accommodation in an insect-ridden bungalow, Barnes announced his intentions for a trip into the recesses of the Kapuas Range and daily held receptions of numerous and voluble applicants who thronged in and vaunted their merits as tent strikers, cooks, burden-bearers, gun carriers and expert junglemen.

On the third day Mata arrived, a fine-looking Malay, bold of eye, scarred as to his muscular body. He gave Barnes no sign of recognition, but presented his testimonials from two Englishmen under whom he had served in Sarawak.

"These are good writings," said Barnes in Malay. "Is there anything else you have to tell me?"

The hunter lifted his head and his eyes looked straight into those of the white man. In them was the expression of a faithful dog of high training and pedigree.

"I will serve the *tuan* as I would my own son should serve me," he said simply.

"I can ask nothing better," Barnes answered. The two understood each other. The applicants gathered round to listen to the talk. There might well be men here anxious to curry favor with Van Schaack if not specially so instructed. Even as Barnes considered this, Mata began to talk — evidently for their benefit. Barnes wondered how much he knew of the situation.

He plainly believed in both the value of silence and of talk at the right moment.

"There are plenty of wild pig in the foothills," said Mata. "Also there are clouded tigers, bears, *mayas* and *wah-wahs*."

Barnes knew that *maya* was the real name of orang-outang, the compound word only meaning wild man, but *wah-wah* was new to him. He asked, simulating a keen interest in his hunting trip.

"The *wah-wah* is a jungle man, not so big as the *maya* nor so fierce," said Mata, ignoring with disdain the crowding contestants for jobs.

"I am glad to kill *mayas*. One tore my

brother in many pieces before I could kill it, for they were very strong, and I myself was nearly killed. These," he said touching long welts across his broad chest, "were from the nails of the *maya*. But I slew him and I shall slay many more.

"Let the *tuan* be sure that the men he picks to go along are brave," Mata ended, looking contemptuously about the circle.

Barnes felt an increasing respect for a man who would tackle an orang-outang at close quarters. He commissioned Mata to choose the men and congratulated himself on his acquisition. He was now in the enemy's country where Van Schaack's powers would be eminent and, busy as he often was with the details of his equipment, he could never shake off the feeling that there was something gone wrong—not necessarily for himself, perhaps for Florence Henshall — Van Schaack at the bottom of it all.

He was eager to confront the man, but he thought it wise to wait, as a confirmed hunting crank would be likely to, and complete his outfit before presenting any letters. Mata selected three men after much discrimination. The morning of the fifth day found them ready to start. Mata had hired a native boat and rowers to take them up-river, thence up the tributary that came down from the foothills. He intended to set up camp on this latter stream opposite Van Schaack, do some preliminary scouting and shooting and, after a day or so of this—if no accidental opportunity offered, if Van Schaack himself did not pay him a visit—make his call.

Following out this program, Barnes left his camp early and got home late. For these reasons, he argued, he caught no glimpse of anyone but servants through the field glasses with which he surreptitiously viewed the Hollander's house and grounds whenever he got the chance.

The residence was low and large, surrounded by wide verandas, shaded with awnings and with blinds of slatted bamboo, all screened against observation. The gardens were laid out with a good deal of elaboration and well tended; there were beds of brilliant bloom in the green, sloping lawns that dropped to the water and boathouse, and magnificent tropical trees flung shade.

BARNES shot two small deer, some partridges and pigeons, explaining to Mata that he wanted to get his hand in before tackling big game where every bullet must count. Mata was imperturbable. The *tuan's* word was law, and again Barnes wondered just how much the man knew. But he respected his silence and did not seek to draw him out by mention of Li Yuen's name. It was quite possible that Mata did not even know it. Here was a man of simple make-up, not designed for intrigue; a man of bravery and truth and faithfulness, binding him to those with whom he took service. Known to Li Yuen perhaps through many links of a chain.

Van Schaack, in person, did not entirely fit the preconceived idea Barnes had formed of him. He was of medium size, slim, trim-bearded, with sleek, black hair; somewhat of a dandy. His shirt was of the finest mulberry leaf silk from Hankow cocoons and looms, and it was plain that he took pride in his own appearance. His smooth hands were manicured, there was brilliantine on mustache, Vandyck beard and hair.

Barnes did not like him, reading the signs entirely apart from any predisposition. Van Schaack was too suave, he showed his white teeth too often in a smile that was automatic, and his eyes, like sloes, never smiled, but were ever watchful. They were heavy-lidded and they had the beginnings of pouches under them, his nose suggested cruelty and rapaciousness and his half-masked lips were sensual. His glance was apparently frank in that it looked straight at Barnes, but there was as much expression in smoked glass.

He read the letters of introduction through carefully and then greeted Barnes with excessive cordiality, ordering cheroots and liquors brought in by silent Chinese servers in white drill, well trained, but with fierce Keh faces set rigidly to one expression. Barnes felt sure that beneath each of their tunics was a sharp knife.

"You'll stay to dinner," said Van Schaack. "You must. I see so few people, it is an occasion when one comes along recommended as you are. I'll not ask you to break up your camp, for I know you American sportsmen. You know how to make yourselves comfortable and you prefer your own arrange-

ments. I am no hunter myself. But we must see something of each other and I will give you a good dinner. Afterward we will talk. Just the two of us."

Van Schaack spoke excellent English, not quite as well as Li Yuen, but fluently enough. Barnes was a little surprised at the plan for a tête-à-tête dinner. Why not Mrs. Van Schaack; why not Florence Henshall? The latter elision caused him to greater concern. But he remembered the hints of Van Schaack's dominance over his wife—who was not overstrong. After all, Florence Henshall was only ranking as governess and might take her meals with the children. On the whole, Barnes preferred that idea. He did not at all like to think of Van Schaack's cold eyes fixed on Florence—he thought of her as Florence by this time—during numerous meals.

The dinner was excellent, the table heaped with fruit and flowers while six of the fierce-faced servitors catfooted about and overlooked nothing. Several kinds of wine were served with Van Schaack discanting on their merits. At first Barnes was disposed to think him a braggart, but soon he realized that it was the talk of a connoisseur, a true lover of vintages that pleased the eye, were approved by the nose, as well as tickled the palate and warmed the stomach. Here was at once a hobby and a weakness, encouraged by isolation.

With the cordials and cheroots Van Schaack actually began to brag a little. He had drunk heavily, twice as much as Barnes, and the tendency to boast was the only expression of its effect upon him, whereas Barnes was fully conscious of an effort of will to keep his brain alert and unmuddled.

As Barnes reached out his hand to take a match from the stand—the servants being dismissed—Van Schaack remarked upon the ring. Barnes felt his nerves in sudden coherence, his mind crystal clear. Van Schaack was nibbling at the bait.

"That's a fine stone," he said. "An old mine stone. We don't get them here. That's South African beyond a doubt. Came out of the clay. Ours are more like the Brazilian stones and we find 'em in gravel."

"I suppose diamonds are diamonds wherever you find them," said Barnes. "I always think of them tucked away

here and there as prizes in a big grab bag. Gold the same way. The lucky ones get rich."

A gleam showed in the Hollander's eyes.

"That's the general idea, of course," he answered, "but it isn't all luck, my friend, by a long shot. Expert knowledge, where to find 'em and how to judge 'em."

"Nevertheless it's a gamble," said Barnes. "That's what would make mining appeal to me. You never know what you may turn up—a Kohinoor or a flawed pebble. Gold or worthless ore. Trumps and honors or a hand of low cards without a trick. That's the excitement of it. Beats hunting, I'd imagine.

"But I never thought you could do, yourself, as you do and carry on diamond mining. It has always seemed to me as if the world's treasure houses were always placed in the wilderness. But this sort of thing—your house and grounds, the shooting and the diamonds! By Jove, Van Schaack, you're in clover!"

He spoke with growing excitement, finishing his Dantzig brandy, replenishing his glass without invitation. Another gleam shot from the eyes of Van Schaack, and then the heavy lids drooped.

"I'll show you the diggings some day," he said. "Not much comfort up there, and this place took time to develop. I suppose you'd hardly credit me when I say I'm sick of it. I'll own up that I want to get back to Europe. I've made my pile, and here you can only vegetate at the best. I've had enough of it. We haven't uncovered half the deposits, but I've made a good pile. The climate begins to get you after a few years. Then there's my wife. She has become almost a permanent invalid."

Van Schaack took up the square, white bottle and looked at the tiny fragments of gold dancing in the clear liquor.

"There it is," he said a little thickly, and Barnes saw his eyes had become slightly bloodshot, perhaps at the thought of the pleasures of the capitals of Europe, within his reach at last. "I've made life here pleasant enough after a fashion," he went on, "but I'm no hand at shooting, now the novelty is off, it's all like plain water. I'm going to get out. Your glass is empty."

Barnes, playing the game, was forced to absorb more liquor. He had to summon the full resources of his will to offset its insidious effect. But the last glass was swinging down the balance of Van Schaack's control.

"Look here, Brown," he said, leaning forward, "you've got money, or you wouldn't be wearing that kind of a stone, and you wouldn't be hunting away off here. I'll show you some of the stones and then I'll show you the mines. Plenty more there—only half developed—good, Government concession. I'll show you how to grease the ropes, and the whole thing's in working order. I'm of the mind to quit. Why don't you come in? I'll make it reasonable. The house for comfort and all the shooting you want to satisfy your roughing-it inclinations. I'm not a hog. I've got more than I can spend."

"Where do you market your diamonds?" Barnes asked, slurring his words together a little. It was not a hard trick after the brew he had swallowed.

"Amsterdam for me. I'll put you on to that. I've sold only a few. Got to control the output. You can sell out to the big men like the De Beers outfit and let them hold the bag. That's what I'm going to do. Look here."

He drew aside a wall hanging of rare fabric and showed a built-in safe. From it he brought a number of diamonds. They were nearly all larger stones than those possessed by Li Yuen, although, being uncut, Barnes could not determine their value.

VAN SCHAACK might be slightly drunk, but Barnes felt that he was lying about the value of the untouched deposits. Half might be still unworked, but the best half had been exploited. There must be no other reason for selling, save that he had been cheating Li Yuen and wanted to get clear before he was found out. Barnes passed his hand across his forehead and made a visible effort to pull himself together. Van Schaack was covertly watching him.

"It sounds good," he said, "but I wouldn't want to make up my mind right away. There's this hunting, y'see. I've come a long way for that and looked forward to it. But it'll give me time to think the proposition over. I suppose there's no divided interest?"

"None."

The prompt lie exposed Van Schaack completely.

"But you'll have to act quickly," he said. "I can't give you a long option. I've got hunting of my own I'm eager for—over in Europe." He laughed, showing his teeth. "You understand. I'll use diamonds for bullets and I'll bring down my game."

Barnes nodded.

"If I sell, I'll sell right away," went on Van Schaack. "Half a dozen men in Singapore would snap this up. No telling how long you may be away hunting."

"I'd want to see what your yield has been, for say, the last five years," said Barnes. "Make it tomorrow. Then we can take in the mines. If it suits I'll make up my mind in ten days. I'll delay my hunting that long if I think it's a good thing. But I'd want to be assured, y'know."

"You Americans!" said Van Schaack admiringly. "Don't take long to strike a bargain, but you're no fools when it comes to business. We'll make it tomorrow. I'll show you my books. Come over to tiffin. Now, let's finish this bottle."

Van Schaack might well have two sets of books, Barnes reflected. One for the benefit of Li Yuen's inspection, the other for his own. But he would show a purchaser his private accounting with the true yield. In the ten days he would have to make up his mind as to the next move—if Li Yuen did not put in an appearance. Barnes felt fairly sure he would. He had practically promised to do so. Li Yuen would know how long it would take Barnes to arrive, and he might now be on the way. If Li Yuen did not come, he would know the difficulties besetting Barnes once he tried to prevent Van Schaack from leaving Borneo.

All the Dutch officials would favor their fellow countryman. Van Schaack was a rascal and a dangerous one; a man not to be allowed much rope, a slippery customer with the odds on his side and a way of making loopholes in the law. If Li Yuen did not come, Barnes might have to take strenuous measures.

It was late when Barnes left and his host escorted him to the launch that he insisted should take his guest back to camp in style. Barnes was glad to have a look at it. He had a vague idea that he might have to use it. He was going

to see that Li Yuen got his share of the output of the mine, and he wanted to know what resources he could count on if he had to resort to strong-arm methods.

There was a getaway to be planned for himself—and for Florence Henshall. He could not leave her with such an employer, although he imagined she could take care of herself under the cover of Mrs. Van Schaack's protection, weak though that might be. How he could persuade her to go was yet unsolved. That his desire to take her was charged with self-interest he acknowledged.

She was in his thoughts as he walked down to the launch. The moon shone on the front of the house, reflected in its upper window panes, the lower being masked by the awnings.

He heard a sound, slight enough, but unmistakable like the rap of a hand on glass. He turned his head and, for a pulse beat, he thought he saw a face appear at a window at the corner of the house. He was not sure of it, the glare of the moon on the glass being confusing, but he had a vague idea there were two faces. They disappeared instantly.

Barnes let his gaze wander on aimlessly across the façade as if he were admiring its proportions. Van Schaack lit a new cheroot, saying nothing, and they went on down to the landing.

THE rap bothered Barnes a little, but it might have meant nothing. He was returning to the house for tiffin the next noon, and he meant to get a glimpse of Florence, even if he had to mention their acquaintanceship on the boat and ask to see her.

In the meantime Van Schaack was anchored for a few days. He had swallowed the bait, clever as he was. Thanks to Barnes' bullet and the alligators, no messenger had reached him, unless by mail. So Barnes reasoned as the launch crossed the tributary, but he was not entirely content. He sensed danger for the girl, for himself. He was not quite satisfied that Van Schaack was hooked though he had taken the lure. The man had brains. Even as Barnes had pretended to show himself affected by the wine, so might Van Schaack. He was more used to the contents of the bottles. Was the Hollander playing him all this time? He could determine that when it

came to examining the books. There would be a showdown.

The thing was rapidly coming to a climax and the situation found Barnes' brain clear from fumes, assembling all the possibilities, working out moves ahead, from Van Schaack as well as his own.

Barnes had gone to the house unarmed. It was impossible to conceal a weapon under the light linen of his mess jacket and there seemed no need for it. To show that he carried one might spoil matters.

His coolies slept in a pup tent, the boatmen would stay in their craft that had leisurely followed the launch across and moored in a little creek, hidden from the camp by heavy foliage. Mata had a habit of camping out alone under a screen of leaves. Barnes sometimes fancied he slept in a tree. Barnes' tent was apart, in a clearing.

As he walked toward it through the trees, tall ironwood *tupans*, whose shadow heavily checkered the ground, he thought he saw a shadow drift across the clearing toward the tent. It looked more like a moving bush than a man; it might be some beast attracted by the stores. It seemed to squat by the tent wall, a blot against the shaded canvas, listening—or wajting—hardly distinguishable.

Barnes walked warily. The blob did not move, and he was sure it was nothing that went on four legs. He entered the tent, humming, lit his lantern, aswing from the ridgepole, and allowed his shadow to play pantomime as he seemingly undressed. His pulse beat normally, though he was aware of a pleasant tingle in his veins. Here was danger, close at hand, tangible, and he was beginning to enjoy himself.

As he moved about, stooping now and then, he loosened three of the pegs that held down the opposite wall. He got his gun, blew out the lantern, gave the cot a shove as if his relaxed weight had sent it against the canvas and slid like an eel under the loosened side of the tent. His shoes were off, and he glided round the tent in silence, halting crouched on all fours like a runner on the mark at an angle by the head of the cot.

His midnight visitor was a breed with Chinese predominant, showing in his face as he held up his head and a blotch of moonlight revealed it. Barnes' eyes be-

came accustomed to the dark. He could make out the difference between the man's comparatively light skin and the breechclout he had for clothing. A lighter patch was a bandage about one arm, high up.

Barnes smiled grimly, watching the watcher. Here was his friend of the steamer and the *prahu*, not killed, not swallowed by the alligators, but very much alive and intent on mischief. He wondered whether Van Schaack knew he was there.

The assassin's cheek was lowered to the canvas. He seemed to become suspicious, hearing no breathing. Barnes did not want to kill him. He wanted a talk with the man. He cleared his throat. The killer wheeled to see the gun covering him.

"Keep still," said Barnes quietly, speaking Cantonese.

The Oriental mind does not work like that of the white man. Not being killed instantly the man made a fight of it. Once more a knife was flung. It came from the hip, like an arrow, straight for Barnes' heart.

He swerved, warding it off with his gun. As the metals clinked the man, agile as a great cat, leaped, flinging out clutching hands.

Wounded as he was, he was made up of steel and wire, his body was slick with grease and Barnes' grip failed to hold him. They tripped over a tent guy and fell sprawling.

THE interbreed—probably part Keh—fought like a wild animal with claws and fangs, his attack dynamic. His teeth sank into Barnes wrist and the white man lost his gun. The knife was under him. They writhed and rolled, striving to secure a weapon, and at last the Keh's slippery body got away, the loin-cloth coming away in Barnes' grasp.

The moon had found a path to the tent through some opening in the trees and he saw the naked Keh, his face that of an exultant demon as he leaped clear and stooped for the gun. Barnes shot out a hand for it and the other kicked it away, seeming to grasp it with his toes. Barnes secured the knife, but the Keh had bent, supple as a tiger, and retrieved the pistol.

Barnes saw the flash of the blued steel and flung the knife. The Keh swung

his lithe body to one side and the blade flew past him. The gun lifted.

A shadow seemed to slide down the trunk of a *tapan*. In the moonlight of the base it looked like a great ape as it bounded across the space in prodigious leaps. Even as Barnes prepared to fling himself flat in an effort to dodge the first bullet, he glimpsed a turban and knew it was Mata.

The Malay hunter's sinewy forearm clamped about the neck of the Keh, his hand closed and twisted the wrist of the hand that held the gun. Barnes jumped into the scrimmage and, between them, they had the Keh down, struggling in vain. Mata had rubbed his palms with sandy dirt, and Barnes now sat on the prisoner's chest while the hunter deftly secured him with his own loin-cloth and Mata's turban.

They toted him into the tent, where Barnes lit the lantern and Mata gagged the Keh with a bamboo tent peg. The would-be murderer glared up at them vindictively.

"Now," said Barnes, "you are going to talk, whether you want to or not. Take out that gag, Mata. If he starts anything but answering my questions quietly, thrust it back."

There followed twenty minutes of persuasion, bribes and threats, but the Keh remained obstinately silent and sullen.

"Better let me, try," said Mata. Barnes saw the prisoner's eyes roll uneasily toward the Malay, and he nodded. He had small scruples at that moment.

Mata went outside and came back with a tin plate filled with hot ashes from their camp-fire. These he blew into redness about the blade of the Keh's knife.

"It will spoil it as a knife," he said, "but it will have its use."

It was evident that the Keh understood Malay and that he was getting uneasy.

"The kris, *tuan?*"

Barnes gave it to Mata, sure that the Keh recognized it. Mata felt the edge.

"Sliced feet are better than bonds," he said, and the Keh wriggled. "And the blind are better off seated."

Barnes did not propose to allow the man to be tortured, but he saw that a bluff would work. Mata was eminently businesslike as he blew on the coals and shifted the kris, the point of which was turning cherry red. The Keh studied

Barnes' face. He could not believe that this white man who seemed to have a charmed life would hesitate to wreak a frightful vengeance.

"All right, Mata," said Barnes, lighting a pipe and seating himself on a campstool as if to watch proceedings. "Take your time."

The diaphragm of the prisoner quivered with nervousness. He blinked his eyes and Barnes took out the gag.

"Going to talk?" he asked.

Sang-Tu was his name and he came from Kwang-Ti, which made him an ancestral enemy of Li Yuen. For all his present nakedness, his barbaric attacks, he was an intelligent type, resourceful and remorseless. He had been headman for Van Schaack, an employee trusted with authority, sent to Peking to keep an eye on Li Yuen, whose letters had, to Van Schaack's guilty mind, hinted at suspicions that the books of the mine were not quite in order.

When Barnes visited Li Yuen, Sang Tu smelled a rat and set a trap that Barnes slipped out of. The connection of the woman who signed herself Aileen Ridpath with Feng Tu was not creditable to the lady, who, it appeared, also knew Van Schaack upon occasion. In Peking she was the lure of a fantan house backed by Chinese money, frequented by members of a society to which Sang Tu belonged.

SANG-TU followed Barnes to Shanghai. It was through the society again that he was suspected, if he did not know details of the American's disappearance in the go-down and reappearance as Amos Brown. The coincidence of Amos Brown, who had been in Shanghai, turning up in Singapore, bound for Pontianak, strengthened the suspicions of his identity. His shipment to Benut confirmed them. But it was, after all, the diamond of Li Yuen that had turned the trick. While it had not been recognized as belonging to Li Yuen it was known as the same ring that had been on the finger of Barnes when he was decoyed to the house of Fen Chau by Aileen Ridpath.

Every link in the extorted confession was not present. Sang-Tu volunteered no information; it was sweated out of him. It was Sang-Tu who had thrice attempted Barnes' life, trusting to earn

special favor of Van Schaack. After his wounding on the *prahu* and a perilous swim ashore with the blood from his wounded arm tempting all the alligators, a personal motive had entered into Sang-Tu's murderous impulse.

But he had not yet reported to Van Schaack, waiting until he could take the news of Barnes' death and, incidentally, gain possession of the ring, also the money.

So much told, he protested that his tale was complete, and Barnes would have been satisfied, but Mata insisted that he was withholding something.

"He was too quick to say 'that is all,' *tuan*," said Mata. "Now, I have been thinking that we might save the hot blade for his belly and, instead of blinding him, we might use the kris to cut off his upper eyelids."

He spoke as impersonally as if he had been one surgeon discussing with another the dissection of a corpse. He went as far as lifting a top eyelid, kris in one hand, shortened by holding with a cloth about the blade. It was too much for the Keh.

The last items added a sinister touch to the situation, spurred Barnes to action. Van Schaack's crookedness and desire for getaway were already exposed. It remained to show how he had prepared his way. Neither his wife nor children were at Benut. They were in Singapore, or on their way to it, perhaps beyond it, hastening to a rendezvous.

Van Schaack had taken them down the river to Sintang. They might have been in the steamer that passed the one on which Barnes and Florence Henshall traveled. Sang-Tu was not sure of dates.

Meantime, at Sintang, Van Schaack must have received word from the landlord of the Oriente at Singapore that Florence Henshall had started. There had been the delay of her steamer, but the mail had gone out on a boat leaving too early for the girl to catch after she had accepted the position. Barnes remembered her telling him that she had found one steamer with its accommodations all taken.

Van Schaack's decision to get his wife and family out of the way might have been sudden. He might have temporarily forgotten that he had advertised his need for a governess, but he had deliberately met the girl in his launch, prov-

ing his knowledge of her coming and his determination to take her back to his house. For what end?

Barnes did not doubt that it was because of the description the landlord had sent on of her charm. Now she was at his mercy. Barnes remembered the tap at the window, the impression of a face—or two faces. One must have been that of a guard. For a moment he wished that he had Van Schaack naked instead of Sang-Tu. The arch villain instead of the tool. He would not have stopped Mata.

"This man must have a canoe somewhere, Mata," he said. "Come and find it. I don't trust those local boatmen. Get the extra rifle and take this pistol."

"First I will cut the throat of this pig."

"No. We'll deal with him later. Come on and find that canoe."

His eyes were like steel, his voice hard as the grit of steel. Mata reluctantly fingered the kris.

"It will be much better if I kill him now," he said but, at Barnes' frown, thrust the kris in his belt, took the guns and followed, shaking his head. The ways of the white man were often incomprehensible. Sang-Tu had played at murder with his life as forfeit, and had lost it. The *tuan* had won and would not gather the stakes. He left Sang-Tu another chance to play.

MATA found the canoe at last, carefully hidden, and they made the discovery that their own boat had vanished. It might have meant nothing; the men were paid. Barnes was in no mood to take up the matter. He thought only of Florence Henshall in Van Schaack's house. Li Yuen's diamonds had taken second place, though they were included in his desperate intent.

It was graying to dawn before they found the canoe and landed on Van Schaack's lawns where the dew lay thick as they silently crossed.

Barnes had an express rifle he had brought for orang-outangs which would have stopped an elephant. The extra rifle borne by Mata was a Wesley Richards with the shock-force of a ton. The hunter had also his own Winchester, the automatic Barnes had given him, his own knife and Sang-Tu's kris.

Both were weighted down with ammunition. For their present purpose

rifles might prove only a hindrance, but Barnes was not sure of his ability to return to the tent or disposed to leave his guns again in camp, now Mata was with him.

He was determined on strong-arm tactics, but he did not want to break into the house. The odds would be against him, and he had not forgotten the fierce faces of the servants at the table. Doubtless there were others. That Mata would stick to him he did not question.

They crouched behind some shrubbery and waited for the opening of a door, preferably the front one, knowing the early rising of Oriental servants. They were not kept long. A Chinese major-domo, portly and important, came out on the veranda close by them and stretched himself lazily in the first rays of the sun. Barnes rose slowly, shoving the barrel of his rifle carefully through the leaves while Mata, swift as a lizard, slipped up the steps and cut off the man's retreat. The fat butler saw his position, with eyes goggling for all their slant. He started a squeal, as Mata touched him with the kris, smothered it as the point pressed deeper with a warning to keep quiet.

Pricked on ahead he led them to Van Schaack's bedroom. The Hollander was asleep back of the mosquito nettings, and he awakened looking into the barrel of an automatic.

"Bit early for tiffin," said Barnes. "But we are in a hurry. Get up."

Van Schaack clambered out in his silk pajamas with his face twisted in a snarl. Barnes grinned at him, partly because the early call revealed the fact that most of the Hollander's sleek hair was absent in a toupee discarded for the night. He turned to the butler, still literally on the edge of the kris.

"If there should happen to be any trouble with the servants," he said grimly, "Mata here will separate your spinal column. As for you, Van Schaack, you'll lose the top of your head. Now, where's Miss Henshall?"

Van Schaack said nothing, but his black eyes were venomous. He led the way, marched along the corridor at pistol point by Barnes, the butler impelled by the sharp argument in Mata's hand.

They halted at a door across which stood a bamboo cot. On it slept a powerfully built woman, a hybrid like Sang-

Tu. Her yawn widened at the sight of her master with his escort and his bald head. They made the butler tie her up, and Barnes knocked on the door.

"It's Brown, Florence," he called. "Get some clothes on for traveling as soon as you can." He slipped two bolts on the outside of the door and Mata made the woman disgorge a key.

"If you've harmed her, Van Schaack, may God have mercy on your soul!"

The Hollander only sneered. The sight of the woman on guard had relieved Barnes somewhat, and the appearance of the girl in a few minutes stilled his apprehensions.

"You've not been hurt in any way?" he asked her. She shook her head. There was a light in her eyes that looked like mirth, the ghost of a dimple playing beside her mouth. Marveling, Barnes followed her glance and saw the reason in Van Schaack's almost apoplectic countenance. To have been caught without his hair wounded the vanity of the man and hurt him more than the defeat of his plans. The girl's smile entirely reassured Barnes on her account.

THEY thrust the bound woman into the room the girl had occupied and, with the butler, marched to the room where Van Schaack had first received Barnes.

"First we'll have a look at your books," said Barnes. "Not the ones you cooked up for Li Yuen, but your own. Spin that combination."

"You'll not get away with this robbery," Van Schaack snarled vindictively.

"I'll have you all stopped."

"You'll open that safe," said Barnes, "or I'll stop you here and now. We persuaded Sang-Tu to talk, we can handle you. Don't forget that Sang-Tu tried to murder me when he was acting under your general instructions. He was smarter than you are, Van Schaack, he knew who I was."

The Hollander's eyes flickered. Again Barnes doubted his ignorance. But he had the upper hand. It did not matter now.

"I don't want to send Miss Henshall out of my sight, Van Schaack," he said, "but her presence will make no difference to what I intend to do if you don't open that safe."

The Hollander shrugged his shoulders

and capitulated. It was a little too easy, Barnes thought, but he was not complaining. He had the data given by Li Yuen, mailed to him at Shanghai, and it took but a moment to see the discrepancies between the actual mining reports and those sent to Singapore.

"I am taking all the stones," he said. "There is no use trying to use the law against you here. If you want an accounting, Li Yuen will give it to you." It occurred to him that by forcing matters he might upset Li Yuen's calculations of arrival, but he was quite sure Li Yuen did not intend to come unwarily into Dutch Borneo. And the matter of the girl had, after all, got him possession of the stones.

Van Schaacks' face was a study in chagrin and malice. When he could he would strike back, but Barnes had no time for that possibility to bother him. He trussed and gagged both Van Schaack and the butler, and the three of them hurried down to the launch. They passed two or three garden coolies, but these were slow of brain and though they stared, it was uncertainly. Back in the house the other servants would momentarily be arriving from their quarters, but they might go about their duties without looking into the library. Every second gained was important.

Barnes knew that, sooner or later, Van Schaack would get the machinery of the government working and, once within its clutches, they would have short shift, but he trusted to get provisions from his camp and to beat any message by the swift launch which he would drive at top speed clear to Pontianak, even up the coast, if necessary, though he trusted to bribing some skipper to put to sea once he reached the port. Money would do anything in Borneo and he still had plenty of that.

There was petrol in the tank, enough to take them far below Sintang, where they could replenish. It did not take many minutes to reach the opposite bank. Looking back, there were no signs of alarm at the bungalow. Van Schaack would not normally breakfast for several hours.

But the camp was empty. Sang-Tu was gone, gone the coolies Mata had chosen. They had not looted, but departed in a hurry, by land or stream.

"I told you it was better to kill that pig," said Mata. "Better to have killed

the Dutchman, too."

For more than a century and a quarter, Chinese Dyaks and non-Mohammedan natives had formed in secret orders, largely protective, powerful enough to make formidable opposition even to the Dutch Government. It seemed plain that Sang-Tu and the coolies were allied in one of these. More, Sang-Tu was recognized as high in Van Schaack's employ. If this local importance was sufficient, they might have to combat both Dutch and natives unless they overhauled Sang-Tu speedily. He could not have had a great start.

Barnes did not strike the tent, but threw provisions hastily into the launch and sent her at top speed down the tributary into the main stream speeding for Sintang. The launch made nearly eleven knots and they threw up a sharp wave before them while the screw sent the brown water swirling in their wake. Barnes nursed the engine and Mata, better acquainted with the channel, steered, the girl in the cockpit.

THEY rushed around a curve and Mata's exclamation brought Barnes from under the engine hood. Across the channel a boom of heavy logs, chained together, had been swung. It was evidently kept there for purposes of closing the river on occasion, dating back to piratical, revolutionary times, for there had been no time for its special manufacture to stop the fugitives and the logs were slimy and green. Beyond the boom was a scow-hulled steamer Barnes had seen at Sintang, the up-river patrol of the Government. It flew the Dutch flag and, as Barnes slowed up, and Mata began to swing the launch in the shortest possible half-circle of retreat, there came the flash of a deck-gun and the spurts of water as a projectile, badly or mercifully aimed, came skipping in their general direction.

Sang-Tu had played in luck. He must have met the patrol steamer and, known as Van Schaack's headman, have spun such a yarn as determined the commander of the patrol upon the detention, if not the arrest, of the American if he attempted to come down the river. This accomplished, Sang-Tu was probably returning to Van Schaack's

The channel was all too narrow for turning. They had to back while two

more shells screamed close to them. Barnes made the girl lie down in the bottom of the cockpit. That would not have helped much if the shell had struck the launch, but he momentarily expected a closer attack. Sang-Tu was somewhere in the vicinity, waiting to make sure of Barnes.

His presence was announced. Figures of natives appeared in the timber, opening fire from rifles and more ancient muskets. One man ran out ahead of the rest to the end of a ready point, climbing on a stranded log, resting his weapon on a withered bough for better aim.

His bullet came straight for the launch, but it was too high and ripped through the top of the hood. Like most natives, unskilled in constant practice of firearms, the man had misjudged distance or misused the sights. But he was far more dangerous than the rest on the bank whose lead hit everything but the flying target. The patrol steamer had stopped firing. It was probable that they had no real intentions of creating possible complications by blowing the launch out of the water. Barnes fancied the boom had been swung into position by Sang-Tu and the men he had gathered, without authority from the patrol commander, for the men were now dragging it back to the bank.

A second shot from the point tore through the rail, narrowly missing the girl's head. Barnes did not see this. The engine was beginning to skip, back-firing and protesting as if there was too much petrol flowing into the carburetor. He tinkered with it feverishly. A stop would be fatal. They would be riddled before the Dutch patrol boat could save them by taking them prisoners.

Mata bent and spoke to the girl.

"Missy," he spoke in beach-talk, "you think all same you can holdum wheel like this one minute?"

Crouching down, Florence Henshall made shift to grasp the spokes. Mata reached for the Wesley Richards. They were closing on the point about which the river curved. A third shot actually ripped the girl's blouse, but she did not flinch. On the same second Mata pressed the trigger. The marksman on the tree trunk received the impact of the bullet fairly in the chest after it had smashed through his forearm, as he held his rifle for a fourth attempt.

The force of the blow knocked him from his perch and he lit, feebly thrashing, in the reeds. Almost instantly the fire from the timber began to cease, from lack of a leader, or of ammunition.

It was Sang-Tu that Mata had toppled over with grim satisfaction.

"Too much trouble along that man, missy," he said to the girl as he took over the wheel, and the launch once again resumed its best efforts. Barnes came out into the cockpit and Mata showed him where Sang-Tu lay, half in the reeds, half on a mudflat.

As they gazed, the snout of a reptile emerged from the high grass. A crocodile showed half its length, shuffling with rapidity that did not at all match its ungainliness. Great jaws opened, clamped on a leg and the brute scuttled down the mudflat to the water with its lifeless prey.

TO GO on up-river and take to the banks when they struck the shallows and the rapids of the higher course was one solution that did not appeal much to Barnes. The hue and cry would be out after them and they would be hunted down. He discussed the problem with Mata while the launch bucked the current.

"We can go up stream by the Dutch *tuan's* house," suggested Mata. "Perhaps seven or eight miles. Then the whitewater commences. But we can go fast through the forest, and past the mines to a pass that leads to Sarawak. They will not follow us far over the British line."

Barnes nodded without exuberance. It was the better chance of the two, he fancied. Van Schaack might still be tied up in his library. It was quite likely that the sound of firing had not reached the bungalow on account of the heavy timber and the distance. If they passed that gauntlet they might get through. They had the Hollander's launch; no messenger to the mines to intercept them could head them off. But this was no time to shout. They were a long way from being out of the woods.

They turned into the tributary. They had shaken off the natives, the patrol steamer was still fussing with the boom. For a moment Barnes hoped they were going to get by unnoticed, but a white

figure suddenly appeared on the upper deck of the veranda and a bullet came humming malignantly close, frowning through a deck plank.

Mata was still steering. Barnes caught up the glasses and focused them. Van Schaack's face showed intent as he cuddled the rifle against his cheek, his eyes squinting down the barrel. He had replaced his toupee. Another figure appeared and Barnes, with a queer thrill of premonition, brought the second face into view.

It was Aileen Ridpath—at Benut! She was speaking volubly to Van Schaack, pointing vindictively at the launch. Whatever she said disturbed the Hollander's aim, irritated him. Barnes saw the flash of his teeth as he snapped something at her. The woman shrugged her shoulders, a gesture eloquent of her contempt, and went inside.

As Barnes set down the glasses, puzzled at this knitting up of the plot against him, wondering what had brought the woman to Benut, when and how she had arrived, Van Schaack's second bullet hit the small steering wheel. It broke it, and a fragment cut Florence Henshall's forehead, starting the blood.

The launch swerved before Mata could clutch the remnants of the spokes and control it. They had been running up a clear reach, but they grounded on a spit of gravel. Instantly Mata leaped over to shove them off, setting his shoulders to the bow. A bullet sniped into the water so close to him that its spray splashed on his body. For a man who cared nothing for shooting, Van Schaack was making wonderful targetry. He had them hung up.

The red of the blood on the girl's white forehead spread out like a mist before Barnes. It cleared, but still he saw red, as if he looked through crimson glass. He took up the heavy express rifle, estimated the distance, raised the sights and rested the barrel on the top of the hood, squeezing the trigger. There was a globe-sight on the end of the short barrel, and through it showed the head of Van Schaack. There was an explosive bullet in the breech, designed to stop a savage brute.

Just as he fired, Mata heaved, and the launch slid backward off the spit. Whether he hit Van Schaack directly or

not Barnes never knew until long afterward. The movement of the launch might have preceded the stroke of pin on primer. The bullet appeared to land on the butt of Van Schaack's rifle at the Hollander's shoulder. The shock sent him backward, spread-eagled, driving him through the long-paned French window, smashing the casement.

Barnes started the engine up again, and they shot around a loop and lost sight of the house for a while. A few white figures were racing down the lawn, white puffs of smoke showed where they fired, but without effect. After a while, with the water growing swifter every yard, they caught a glimpse of the bungalow again. Smoke was coming through the upper windows, through the roof. The explosive bullet, passing on, had started a lively diversion.

"We're by that," said Barnes. "And I fancy that's the last of him. Though I don't believe I hit him—only his gun. Must have stunned him though."

"You saw the woman with him on the veranda," he said to the girl. "Did you know she was in the house; did you meet her?"

"Yes. She came the night before last from Sintang in a launch. Arrived soon after dark."

THAT was the night that Barnes had got back late to camp, having trailed a wounded deer, cooking supper with Mata in the forest.

"She is Mrs. Desmond, I believe, and she had known Van Schaack before. So I inferred. She told me her name."

"I was locked in that room with the *amah* on guard. Van Schaack said"—the color flooded her face, leaving the strip of adhesive Barnes had put over the cut in the forehead like a little island of white—"that I should stay there until I consented to go away with him. He said that I had been chosen for the place according to instructions, that he was even willing to marry me, and that he was tired of his sick wife."

"This Mrs. Desmond came up to the room. She seemed to be ridiculously inclined to be jealous of me, and when I told her just what I thought of Van Schaack it made no difference. 'You are much too young,' she said, 'we shall have to get you out of the way, my dear.' I didn't know whether she meant

to contrive at my escape or not. Van Schaack found she was with me and he was furious. So was she.

"'You left me in the lurch once,' she told him. 'This time it will not be so easy.'

"They stormed off and then the woman was set outside my door to guard me. She tore me away from the window when I rapped for you. I was not sure that you had seen me. But—you came."

Barnes nodded. He was almost praying that his bullet had gone home. As for "Mrs. Desmond," she must have followed swiftly after Sang-Tu, planning to reach Van Schaack before he disappeared, demanding pay for her services, though she had not been really successful. Any more than she would be now, with Van Schaack foiled, more or less damaged and in the devil's own temper, the diamonds safe in Barnes' pocket.

Not entirely safe, perhaps, but it began to look like it. The stream narrowed, but it was still navigable, the engine was behaving itself and the cliffs of the range beside the notch that Mata pointed out as the pass to Sarawak were not very far away.

"Did you know her?" asked Florence.

"I met her once," said Barnes. "That was enough. Why didn't you mention her before?"

"I did not think of it. Has there been any time until now? Did you want to see her?"

There was an acidity in her last sentence strange to the usual sweetness of Florence Henshall's voice. It was not lost on Barnes, though he could not account for it, not being sufficiently conceited. But Mata, who knew enough of English to follow the trend of their talk and whose instincts were keen, looked ahead at the swirling currents and his eyes smiled.

"I have not the slightest desire to see her again," said Barnes frankly. "She is one of Van Schaack's spies. I represent the partner he defrauded. I am not a rich American, but a sea captain working in the interests of Li Yuen, the best Chinaman I have ever known. He furnished the money to exploit the mine. If I get through with these diamonds I shall have made a good stake. I lost my last ship through a submarine quake."

"I am sure it was through no fault

of your own," said the girl softly, and Barnes' heart beat strongly. "I think you have been wonderful."

There was one point he wanted to clear up. Not that he longer doubted her.

"Did you ever hear of Li Yuen?" he asked. The blackness of her face answered him. "Or did anyone ever warn you against Van Schaack?"

"Why—the captain of the steamer from Singapore was very kind to me. He told me that if I did not find the place to my liking, if the position was not just as I expected it—he seemed to suggest it might not be very permanent—and I would get word to the steamship office at Pontianak in a letter addressed to him, he would be glad to help me. He hinted that he might have something better for me later on, that he sometimes heard of people who wanted traveling companions. He startled me a little, but I had contracted to come."

"I see," said Barnes contentedly. If, as it appeared positive, she were the person mentioned by Li Yuen, who had been delayed, it was plain that she had not willingly played the rôle of spy but, should Van Schaack show indications of leaving, she would all unwittingly send on news through the captain to Li Yuen.

"I thought of writing him," she said, "but I was made a prisoner—and—I thought you would come. You see, it was a little strange that you did not want to meet anyone in the launch that came for me. Of course Mrs. Van Schaack was not there. He told me she was not well that day."

"You had some suspicion that everything was not quite right?"

She shook her head.

"Only a feeling intuition, perhaps. It made me trust you."

MATA looked straight ahead. Things were progressing rapidly, he thought, and quite naturally. The *tuan* and the blonde "missy" were looking into each other's eyes. For himself he did not like fair-skinned women. But he understood. These affairs came to fruit and blossom quickly in the tropics. Fair skin or dark, men and women were alike in the ways of love. Soon these two would be holding hands.

It might have come to that. It looked as if the way were clear. Mata warned

them that they would soon have to leave the launch and take to the forest. Rifles were ahead, they could hear the murmur of rapids. They would have to pass close to the mines, but Mata could keep them out of sight, although it was not at all likely the miners would molest them. No runner from Van Schaack could have made better time through the jungle than they had in the launch. He had probably imagined them en route to Benut until they had reappeared in the tributary. He had not been in communication with Sang-Tu.

But he had known who Amos Brown was when Barnes appeared in that character. He had been laughing at him all the time with no intention of selling out. There would have been some trap set for Barnes at tiffin that morning. Instead the three of them were now enjoying a tardy, but satisfactory meal from the stores out of the tent.

They would have to rough it after they passed into Sarawak, without canvas, without netting, with no bearers for their possessions. It would be heavy marching order for the two men, no light task for the woman, to work their way through jungle and mountain pass under a tropic sun. But Mata was a mighty guide and the worst seemed over.

They abandoned the launch reluctantly on the western bank of the stream. They were close up to the foothills, almost within them. The blue ridges of the range, with the deep notch of the pass, gave them their landmark as they entered the forest. They were grateful for its shade, for the sun was overhead and every bit of metal work on the launch had become too hot to touch.

Mata worked on ahead, discovering a fairly well beaten path. But it was the girl who made the discovery that brought them up short with a sense of futility, hardening to desperation in the realization that they could not go back.

She pointed to a white object overhead, not the parasitic growth of a tree as Barnes first thought, but attached to it by man—porcelain insulator of a telephone line!

It was poled over clearings, led from tree to tree, running through the jungle, along the river, bridging the forest, stretching from Van Schaack's residence to the headquarters at the mine.

Unless he had been killed outright by Barnes' shot, the vindictive Hollander must have managed to send a message over it, voicing his orders to capture or kill the man and woman who had baffled him, the hunter with them. For Florence Henshall the outcome might be far worse than death. Van Schaack wanted his diamonds; he would leave the manner of getting them to his Keh foremen and the coolies, with all the cruelty of beasts and the imagination of barbarians, let loose to work their will on foreign devils, man and woman, and on Mata.

How many they were, how armed, from what direction they might break upon them, could not be foretold. They might be ahead of them, ambushed along the trail. They might be coming at a tangent or spread fanwise to intercept them.

MATA'S face was grave as he made them leave the trail and work their passage through the bush, stopping to listen, even to smell, warning them to go cautiously. It was not long before the jungle took toll. Anxiety did not help conservation of the strength that the struggle sapped from them. The girl was in pitiful case though she went gamely on and was as enduring as the men bearing their burdens of heavy guns and ammunition that they dared not cast away. Barnes dripped with sweat, clothes and flesh were ripped with thorns. The girl's skirt and waist were in shreds. Mata's uncased skin was torn and bleeding through forcing the way, choosing the spot where they could forge ahead. Lianas tripped them, looped waist high, swung from overhead to snare them. The underbrush was packed so thick between the trees, so wattled with interlacing vines that, time and time again, they had to fight back through territory hardly won. Often they crept along on boughs of trees that joined together, a perilous and precarious path that was yet a relief from the encumbered ground.

At last, Mata, climbing a tall pole, came down again with a smile. The pass, he said, was close ahead. They took heart of hope again. Van Schaack might not have been able to telephone. Barnes told himself that his face and mouth could hardly have escaped injury.

Fifteen minutes more and they broke through the tangle, panting, exhausted, forced to rest. Before them were two wooded spurs that formed the mouth of a wide valley, swiftly narrowing to a gorge with precipitous cliffs. A torrent rushed and roared down the treads of a giant's stairway, the spray of it going up like smoke, showing scant room for any trail.

But this, Mata said, was the road to Sarawak. The border was close to the top of the cataract.

"We had better eat," he said to Barnes. "It is a hard climb."

The Malay gathered some fruits in place of water, and Barnes opened up a can of pork and beans and one of sardines. They seemed incongruous provisions in this savage wild, but they put strength into them. Between each mouthful Mata seemed to strain ears and eyes, his nostrils dilated. Big butterflies flitted by them, gorgeous birds sailed between the trees, with mailed insects humming among the flowers.

"We've won clear," said Barnes in a low voice to the girl for her encouragement. All color had gone from her face and there were dark circles under her eyes. He longed to take her in his arms and comfort her. Once through the pass they would rest while he and Mata made a litter for her, he resolved. She met his sympathetic—more than sympathetic—glance and smiled back at him.

"It looks like it," she said. And then Mata stiffened.

Half naked men, some in loin-cloths, some in cotton, baggy breeches, were stringing across a bare space of cliffs, high up. They halted, clinging to the rocks, gazing into the jungle. The three dropped flat and wormed their way back, Barnes watching the Kehs through his glasses. Soon they clambered on and disappeared. But Mata glanced back fearfully.

"There are men behind us," he said. "Listen."

They could hear nothing. Then a faint sound of shifting branches.

There was cover of sorts leading into the valley, and through this they literally crawled, coming to the banks of the stream at last. Now the growth grew sparser, masses of rocks breaking it up. Shoulders of granite thrust out

from the cliffs, and at last they were forced into the open, racing between great boulders in the hope of escaping observation.

There was an instant yell from the opposite side of the gorge, sounding above the roar of the water. Kehs were leaping down the side of the rocky wall. They could see the flash of knives, long, heavy blades used for clearing the jungle. The light glinted on the barrels of a few guns. The shouts were answered from the rear. They were cut off, with only the towering crags, down which the torrent rushed, for a way of escape. There was a way up them and Mata knew the path. But—

Bullets began to hum overhead like angry bees, whipping into the soil, thudding against the rocks.

"Can you fire a rifle?" Barnes asked the girl. "We've got to hold them off."

"I can try," she answered.

HE gave her the Winchester, explaining the mechanism. The girl took the rifle in hands that did not shake. Her blue eyes were clear, hard as crystal, her lips were closed firmly.

"You plucky girl," he whispered as he adjusted the sights.

They fired in unison at the Kehs scrambling like apes over the rocks. Two men toppled headlong and the yelling band of hybrids halted and hid behind projecting boulders as the roar of the elephant gun and the Wesley Richards echoed through the gorge. The girl fired again and a Keh leaped high in the air, clutching at nothing, to come hurling down, rolling over and over in the turbulent stream. They fled for the heights. It began to look again as if they might get through. But the path was steep, even for unencumbered men. Again bullets began to whine and flatten on the face of the cliff. The girl was tiring fast. It seemed to Barnes' anxious glance that she was close to the end of her strength. He himself was borne along by his will. Every ounce of him was an ache, his limbs dragged heavily.

A half score of miners, led by a bandit who flourished a curving blade, essayed a rush, rapidly overtaking them as they toiled up the trail. They had flung away the last of the food. A little ahead of them was a niche in the cliff, a narrow terrace.

"Give Mata the repeater," said Barnes.

She obeyed, while he took her in his arms and hoisted her up as the Winchester barked. The leader came on, clambering like a goat, unscathed, though Mata had aimed for him. Two others fell, impeding the rest. Barnes, beside the panting girl, got a bead on the leader and fired. The Keh turned a back somersault as the explosive bullet ploughed through his body, and swept the following man from his hold. The leader went plunging down, crashing to the foot of the cliff trail, kicking for a moment spasmodically.

They had a brief respite, gasping for breath, as the remainder of the little band fled, dismayed.

"There will be more at the top," said Mata in Malay. "I'll go first."

He got a handhold, pulling himself up, the great muscles working in his supple body, turned to help the girl, and then Barnes. For a while they swarmed on, the path better, but slippery with windblown spray.

Mata had guessed the worst. The rush had been a device to induce delay and draw the fire of the fugitives while a horde of others raced along the tops of the cliffs to where they converged at the head of the fall.

Suddenly there came a crash and a mass of rock slid smashing down upon them, diverted by a massive boulder and splitting into stony shrapnel. Barnes dragged the girl down to comparative shelter, but a fragment struck him on the side of the head and he fell, trying to hold himself back from unconsciousness as the blood poured into his eyes, rose in his throat. He felt the convulsive grip of the girl on his arm, steadying him with a desperate strength, drawing him into a niche where he collapsed.

Shot after shot came from up the gorge, leaving leaden smears on the hard surface. He saw the girl's face through a mist, bending over him as she tried to staunch his wound.

"You go on with Mata," he managed, his voice sounding queer and far away in his ears. "I'll hold 'em off. Maybe you—can—get—help. There's shelter here for one—not three."

"I will not," he heard her say. "I'll stay with you."

Above them, crouching in a crevice,

Mata was firing with the Winchester, picking off a man with every other shot. But there were too many of them. It was the end. More rocks came down.

BARNES' hand found his rifle. He feared it had fallen down the cliff. Dull recollection came to him of a metal flask of brandy in his pocket. He groped for it and gulped the fiery stuff. It ran through his veins like fire. With his last reserves he clawed his way to his feet, a fearsome sight, with the blood all over his face and tunic. Though he felt as if his legs were stilts the deadly numbness vanished, leaving a pounding headache.

"Come on," he said thickly. "Can't—stay—here."

Mata's aim was too accurate for the Kehs to expose themselves. Their lateral rain of bullets faltered. Up the cliff the trio climbed, dodging the falling rocks that were constantly obstructed by outstanding ledges.

They gained a hollow beneath an overhanging rock and Barnes thrust the girl into a hollow cave. A flinty mass, hopping down, fell like the hammer of Thor on the roof of their shelter and shattered it.

When he regained his senses, brought back, he fancied, by the intolerable pain in his head, Barnes saw the girl lying beside him with the shoulder of her torn blouse soaked in blood. Mata had disappeared.

Down a trail that monkeys might have left untried, clinging to vines that they used as ropes, calling to each other as they came, clambered the Kehs.

Barnes got some of the brandy between the girl's lips, half wondering whether it would not be more merciful to leave her unconscious. He knew he would have to kill her before those devils reached them. Then himself. He did not care so much for what they might do to him. Save for his head, his body had lost sensation. But he knew the ways of the pirates of the Chinese seas.

She opened her eyes, stark with terror until they met his.

"What happened?" she gasped.

"They got us. Guns are smashed. Got my automatics left. Mata's killed, I fancy."

She saw the shouting Kehs and shuddered.

"Is—it—the—end?" she asked him in a whisper.

"In a few minutes. I can get one or two of 'em."

"I—I—am glad it is going to be together," she said.

Their lips clung together for a moment. Then Barnes felt, rather than saw, a shadow, fired, missed his man and fired again. The Keh came sliding past them with a hole in his forehead. There were a dozen more behind. He had six shells left—four for their enemies. There was no chance to get in another clip. There were fresh shouts from somewhere. He could not locate them. The gorge was spinning like a great top. He dared not take the chance of capture. He looked at the girl, her face nebulous, only the brave spirit shining distinct in her eyes.

"You will?" she asked.

He kissed her for answer.

Then, with a genuine prayer on his lips, he waited to make sure of each shot left to him. Now, at the last, his vision cleared. He felt strangely calm, sure of the future. It would not be in this world.

One he got through the belly and the Keh sprawled writhing like a scotched snake to within ten feet of them, striving to reach them with his knife. One he got through underjaw and brain, the third over the heart. The fourth—

The girl touched him. There were Kehs climbing up toward them, naked blades in their teeth.

"I am ready," she said.

Barnes bit deep into his lower lip, striving to keep still the hand that would wobble, to control the brain that began to whirl again. He slowly lifted the pistol. The nearest coolie, the man he would have killed with the fourth shot if he had not been so damnably weak, stood poised above them, ready to leap down, waiting until the first climber should help him make sure.

THERE came a crackle of rifle fire through the gorge, followed by reverberating echoes that sounded like thunder to Barnes, swaying on his feet. The girl suddenly caught at his gun as the Keh above them dived into the abyss, the grin on his face wiped out. Two more figures fell like dummies in a film play. The coolies on the cliff dropped

and scrambled to its foot. A man in midstream shouted and collapsed. Another round of shots burst out, concentrated like a volley.

There was a hail from Mata that Barnes answered with a croak of gladness, leaning against the cliff sick in the revulsion of relief. Figures in white drill moved along each side of the pass, turbaned and sandaled, firing now at will. Mata swung down, nimble drill-clad figures back of him. Barnes saw the girl taken up, felt friendly arms about him and was borne to the top of the cliff, laid down on the grass while a flask was pressed to his lips.

Someone was bandaging his head, a cold, wet compress. He heard the gush of the water over the lip of the gorge. Things seemed disjointed, like the happenings of a nightmare. Then the cordial he had been given began to almost miraculously bring back coordination. He looked for Florence, but saw instead the stout figure of Li Yuen.

"I told you I should probably arrive," said Li Yuen. "Naturally through the back door, though I did not expect to find you coming out through it. We heard firing and hurried. The young lady is all right," he added, interpreting Barnes' circling gaze. "Everything is all right. British territory. And Sir Alfred Slingsby, also hunting orang-outangs. I joined forces with him. In fact we are old friends. Mata met us half a mile back."

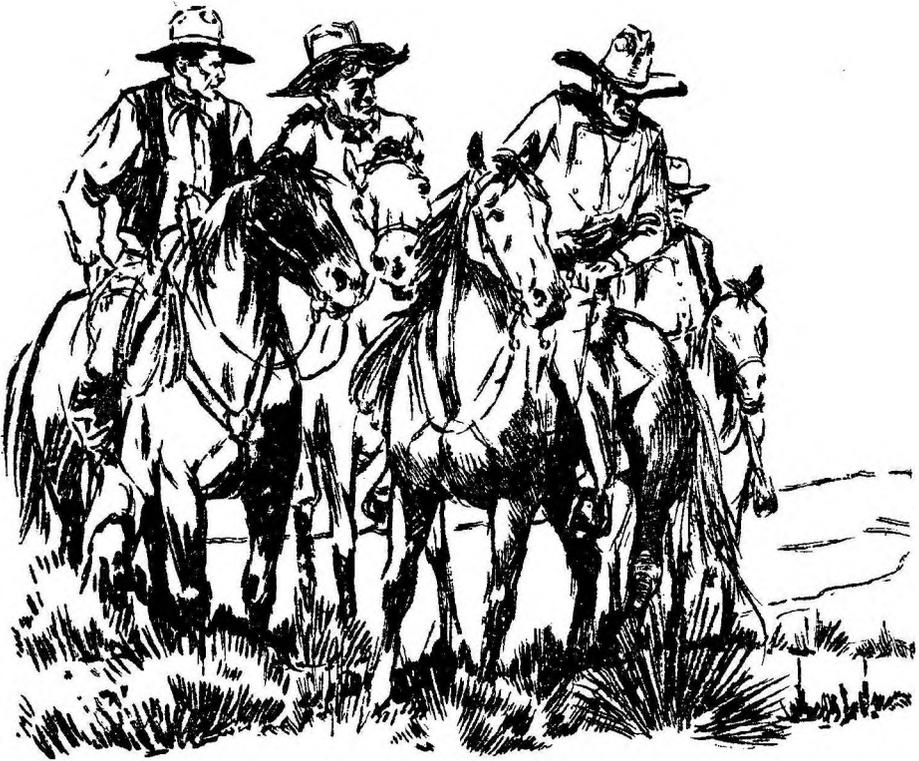
"Glad to meet you, Mr. Barnes," he said. "Jolly glad I came along with Li Yuen. Glad to oblige him, you know. Old debt. Want to get up? Steady. Pins a little groggy, what?"

With the Britisher's arm under one elbow, Li Yuen's under another, Barnes was escorted to a litter, a rather elaborate affair with a canopy.

"I'm not much on walking," said Li Yuen. "Glad to give it over to the lady, though. She has nothing worse than a broken collarbone, Barnes. Sir Alfred has attended to it."

"Splintered a bit," said Slingsby. "Not at all serious. Jolly lucky, all round, I say. Haven't been introduced to the lady yet," he added as the girl looked up at Barnes with the shadow of a smile. "Mrs. Barnes, I presume?"

"Not yet, Sir Alfred," Barnes said unsteadily. "But soon."



Shooting Fool

by JOHN CARLISLE

You can't tell a fighting man by his clothes.

THE Kid came riding—to down the Dude. He was a queer sport, the Kid. Now he slouched in the buckskin's saddle, a boyish figure but with a strangely wizened, old-young face. With hatbrim low, he seemed half asleep, but the small, faded, blue eyes were never still—never that anyone had ever seen. Whatever the hammer-headed buckskin's maneuvers might be—and they were many and vicious—always one brown, slender-fingered hand curled close to the butt of a triggerless Colt, as by instinct. The Kid wore two guns low on his thighs, butts front, for he used the deadly cross-arm draw.

The job before him gave his brain no

more than superficial work. He was going to down the Dude. There were several ways of working up to the actual climax of this, but doubt that the intended climax would occur gave the Kid no more worry than did the thought of the killing itself—and a mere killing more or less was hardly the sort of thing to worry him at all.

The Kid had left Gurney the day before, heading south. He had come into Gurney expecting to meet his partner, Ben Cassaday, at the general merchandise store of their "business associate," fat, rich Sam Albers. But Ben had been dead nearly a week; treacherously, cowardly shot in the back by this Dude.

Sam Albers had given the Kid a second-hand account of the killing, with many and colorful details which had produced no change in the Kid's wizened face. He had merely stood silent, his eyes upon his boot toes, his shoulder-points writhing—first to the right, then to the left—in a queer, sinister way he had. But the Kid was a queer sport anyway.

"I never seen it myself, yuh understand," Sam Albers had explained sympathetically. "But that damn' feather-duster, 'Sardines,' o' mine, he ain't got the brains to make up a lie. Sardines, he seen Ben Cassaday a ridin', Kid. So he humped hisself off the trail—yuh know how Ben was always rawhidin' Sardines, just for fun.

"Sardines, he says this Dude met up with Ben right below the rock that he was hidin' behind. Ben, he played a few pranks on the Dude—yuh know how Ben was always havin' his fun with the dudes—an' then he started to ride on off. Then the Dude commenced shootin' at Ben's back! Sardines, he says Ben jumped his pony off the trail, makin' for a rock so's he could shoot back, the Dude him havin' a Winchester an' whangin' away at Ben.

"The Dude, he missed the first three-four shots but finally drilled Ben plumb deadly. After Ben slid off his pony, the Dude rode up and shot him twict more—all in the back. Then he went through Ben's pockets an' took ever' cent an' rode on south. Me an' Sardines, we buried pore old Ben. I never took no steps to abolish this Dude—he's been here in the store a time or two—because I knowed yuh was comin' in pronto an' yuh'd want to handle the job yourself."

"Where's the Dude hangin' out now?" the Kid inquired, still without any particular change in his face, nothing but that queer, snaky writhing of his shoulder-points to tell of the killing-instinct that was boiling up inside of him.

"He's camped down on the Two Squaws. Sardines, he trailed him, figgerin' I'd want to know which way he went. Yeh, yu'll find him some'r's nigh Monument Rock. Yuh want to straighten up our business 'fore you ride out? Ben, he had his divvy on him; we'd squared up all pleasant-like for the last few deals. This damn' Dude, he got ever'thing Ben had on him."

"Let 'er ride till I come back," shrugged the Kid. "Just give a hundred or so. None o' them bills—gold! Bills makes for questions, right now."

SO the Pecos Kid came riding—down the Dude. Ben Cassaday had been the only human being in all the world that the Kid had ever really taken to. True, he had worked with many men, from time to time, but that was always a mere working relation—pertaining, generally, to the swift movement of strange cattle, or similar stealthy jobs, so the bond between the bunch had been a doubtful tie; like the sort of honor that is said to exist among thieves. But Ben Cassaday, happy-go-lucky, gay, straight-shooting, daredevil Ben Cassaday—why, he had been the Kid's sidekick for three years.

For an hour the buckskin had been climbing over a trail that twisted up and up the slopes of the mountains. The track wound back and forth among great pines and cedars and jumpers. There was much undergrowth—oak saplings, mostly. The buckskin grunted and panted; they were six thousand feet up and the air was thin. The Kid slouched in his saddle, eyes roving over the woods ahead.

They neared the top of a hogback and the Kid pulled in the buckskin and dismounted. His Winchester he left in the saddle-scabbard. He was no rifle-shot; it was with the belt-guns that the slim fingers played their symphonies of death. He could shoot a Winchester, but it was never his chosen weapon. The buckskin he tied to a sapling, having kicked him impassively a couple of times in the belly for luck, then edged up-hill to look over the crest.

There was a long slope, dotted with underbrush for the most part. At the bottom on the canyon-floor, a silver line split the green, daisy-starred meadow. This was the bed of the tiny stream named—for its perpetual babbling—the Two Squaws. Somewhere beyond the tall, gray rock upon the river bank should be the Dude's camp. Remained only to locate it and do the job he had come to do, then the Kid could remount his buckskin to ride back to Gurney and have an accounting with fat Sam Albers, who had handled all the money coming from rustled cattle and raided money-

boxes, the actual work of which had been performed by Ben Cassaday and the Kid.

For a long time the Kid searched the opposite bank of the stream without finding any trace of man. A trout jumped in the deep pool below Monument Rock. A pine squirrel streaked around and around a juniper trunk, to drop finally to the grass and race to the water for a drink. The Kid, attracted by the silvery flash of trout, the tawny streak that was the squirrel, now found what he hunted.

It was a brush lean-to near the stream's edge, blending with the woods. He studied it with unwinking eyes for a time. Then, with the stealth and patience of an Apache, he wriggled forward and over the ridge, taking advantage of all the cover that was before him, lifting his head frequently to see that the blanket-swathed figure before the lean-to had not moved.

The ground was carpeted with slippery pine needles, with dry leaves of the oak. The slant of the slope was steep, broken by little ridges, by brush-crowned, well-like holes of indeterminate depth. Sometimes the Kid slipped on the pine needles and shot forward on his belly as if riding a toboggan. But always he managed to check himself and go with surprisingly little noise. Always he peered through the underbrush at the figure before the lean-to and found it undisturbed by his approach.

HE came at last to the edge of the timber. Between him and the water stretched a grassy meadow perhaps twenty feet wide; then came the ten or twelve feet of the river's width and—ten feet beyond—the blanket-wrapped figure. He wriggled across the grass swiftly like a snake. At the water's edge he came cautiously to a squatting position. His hand flashed down and, like a live thing, with soul of its own, a Colt leaped from its holster. He held it upon his knee while faded, yet murderous, blue eyes bored into that moveless shape across the babbling stream.

He knew exactly what he would do, now. He would wake the Dude tell him who he was and why he came, then let the hammer down—and that would be that!

"Roll out!" he cried, in his thin, harsh voice. "Out you come!"

There was no movement across the water. The Kid's thumb moved restlessly upon the big hammer.

"Drop that gun!" a tense voice invited, from somewhere upon his right.

Instead of obeying, the Kid whirled. In one movement, it seemed, he trained his right-hand Colt in the speaker's direction, and drew the left-hand gun. But thirty feet away the black eye of a Winchester stared him out of countenance, the holder of the rifle being out of sight behind a great boulder.

"Drop those guns—"

The Kid was no fool. He let the Colts fall at his feet, but his shoulder-points began to writhe as he stood there staring expressionlessly at the rifle muzzle. Give him just the shadow of a chance and—

"Step back slowly! Turn your back to me. Move!" came the hidden voice.

No sound behind him, but he felt the Winchester's muzzle prod his back significantly. A hand slapped his sides, came around to investigate his shirt front.

"All right! Let's cross over to camp."

Obediently, meakly, the Kid stepped into the water and splashed across. He stared hard at the motionless, blanket-wrapped shape that lay before the lean-to.

"Just a couple of gunny-sacks filled with pine needles. With a blanket around 'em for looks."

The Kid turned slowly to face the owner of the mocking voice. The Dude was hardly older than himself, a big-boned figure of middle height, but thin to emaciation. His face was square, with high cheekbones, wide, tight mouth and brown eyes that were whimsical and steady by turns. There were telltale hollows in his cheeks. He held his Winchester naturally, easily, yet always it covered the Kid.

"I saw you up-hill, a while ago. So I just waited for you. I've been keeping a pretty sharp watch for several days, now. Fix this dummy every morning, just in case, you know."

"In case o' what?" The Kid spoke for the first time, taking stock of the man he intended to kill; of all the situation, hunting for his chance.

"Oh, just in case any hard characters should come along."

"Guess yuh are pretty jumpy," nodded the Kid. "Sports in your line o' business most generally are."

"My line of business?" repeated the Dude, staring hard.

"Helpin' yourself to our beef," explained the Kid politely. He had figured his best line of action. "We find that a gent usually gets hisself a reckless runnin' iron an' a jumpy mind right together."

"Are you calling me a rustler?"

"Ain't yuh?" demanded the Kid flatly. "If yuh ain't, why all this?"

HIS double-nod indicated the dummy and the Dude's Winchester.

"Why, if you have to know, I'm a health-seeker. Lungs. This is the best place I've found between Maine and El Paso. I'm actually getting better up here. I heard that a rough gang was working this way—rustlers and gunmen. I was warned to keep my eyes open. So I have. I'm a tenderfoot in this country, all right—a 'dude,' as you people say, but I'm a fair woodsman, Maine-style."

The Kid pretended to study him. At last he shrugged.

"Well, mebbe so. An' likewise, mebbe not. I do' know. I'm workin' for the T-Bar-T outfit, over Three Rivers way, an' the old Man, he says we're missin' entirely too many cows. He says that I should start out to have a good general look around. Well, I seen your camp from the hogback an' not havin' heard o' any health-seekers or such-like, I put yuh down for one o' them rustlers we want."

"What did you intend to do, if I had really been in my blankets?"

"Take yuh back to the Old Man an' let him look yuh over," shrugged the Kid easily.

He saw that in the Dude's waistband were his two Colts. If he could just get close enough, what would be an even break for most men would be the edge for him.

"How long yuh been up here? Where'd yuh come from? Anybody we know that'll speak up for yuh?"

He put the questions as if he were sticking up for the Dude, instead of standing under the Dude's unwavering

rifle-muzzle. He saw that his manner had effect, too.

"Off and on, I've been in this neighborhood for ten days or so," the Dude began to explain, as if he were the prisoner. "I'm moving camp tomorrow, toward Bent's Creek. I'm known for what I am, down in Gurney—in Bear Paws, too."

"Well, mebbe yuh're all right. Anyway, yuh don't look so much like a rustler, now that I see yuh close up. Well, they ain't no use in me lockin' horns with yuh, things bein' the way they are. I'll take your word that yuh're just a dude. Yuh can give me back my hardware, now."

For a moment he thought that the Dude was going to hand over his guns. Only by the most intense effort could he keep his expression a careless one. Then he cursed inwardly as the Dude shook his head.

"I can't take a chance with you, yet," said the Dude slowly. "I can't take a chance."

"Say!" exploded the Kid, very indignantly indeed. "Do yuh think I'm drawin' pay just to stick around here with yuh? I got work to do. I gotta be doin' it. Look here! If yuh're scared I'll drill yuh, or somethin', minute I get my guns back, then we'll work her thisaway: I'll go on back to my hawss an' yuh can put my guns down on that rock up the hill yonder. Then, if yuh want to, yuh can hunt a hole where yuh'll be safe when I ride down for 'em."

THE joker of the proposition lay in the fact that upon the Kid's saddle hung his Winchester. Before the Dude could make the indicated rock, the Kid would have his rifle and then—he was no rifle-shot, he conceded, but at fifty or sixty yards, firing from a rest—

"Your face—" the Dude's remark seemed highly irrelevant to the Kid—"is all right. But I've been watching your eyes. You're trying something shady. No, I'm not going to let you go, armed or unarmed, until a friend of mine comes. He ought to be here some time today. So make yourself at home."

"Who's this friend?" demanded the Kid suspiciously.

"Never mind. Maybe he wouldn't want his name published in your neigh-

borhood. He told me to be sort of careful. He was the one who warned me about the gang of hide-outs coming this way. If I had followed his advice, I'd have put a bullet into you a while ago, instead of just sticking you up."

"Why didn't you?" inquired the Kid, with real curiosity.

"Dunno," grinned the Dude. "Just couldn't bring myself to shoot a man in the back. You people in this country don't seem to think anything at all of killing a man before breakfast, but back East we look at it differently. I hope I never will have to kill a man!"

"Ain't yuh never killed one yet?" Some liar, this smooth-faced Dude!

"This morning's deal was the closest I've ever come to shooting at a man," the Dude told him, without a quiver to show that he was lying.

The Kid something of an actor, a liar, himself, gave the Dude full credit for his ability. He was good!

"Well, yuh gotta do it once in a while, down here," he grunted. Which was the first move in a plan that had just come to him. A little vague of edges, that idea, but he had hopes of making it work. "Yeh, yuh gotta do it, once in a while. So yuh gotta be ready. Much of a shot?" His tone, now, was friendly, rather than irritated.

"Not with a pistol. But with a rifle—well, I guess I'll seem to brag. But if there's anyone in the country, nobody barred, who can beat me, I've never heard of him. It's just a sort of gift, I guess. I picked up a rifle for the first time in my life, years ago, and made the dead shots look sick. It's just mechanical with me, if you understand what I mean. If the rifle's lined up right, I shoot just as I'd jab my finger into your chest. Just can't miss. See that pine knot there? Toss it up."

Stooping over the knot, the Kid debated for an instant if he might hurl it into the Dude's face ten feet away, then cross the space between to snatch one of his Colts. Then he decided to humor the Dude and wait for a better chance.

The knot sailed twenty feet high. The Dude held his rifle with hand upon the lock, at full arm's length, muzzle downward. When the knot was near the apex of its ascent, the Dude jerked up the rifle muzzle. Still holding it one-handed, not even steadying it against his hip, he

pulled the trigger. The knot jerked like a stricken bird and the splinters sailed. The Dude grinned boyishly.

"All I know is that I can do it," he said.

"Pure accident!" scoffed the Kid, but with an uneasy note.

"No. I can shoot the buttons off of your shirt without touching the flannel. Watch this."

HIMSELF he flung the knot, then turned his back upon it and the Kid, and from the muzzle of the rifle, now upon his shoulder, leaped flame. Again the knot jerked. The Kid gaped incredulously.

He had planned to talk the Dude into some sort of shooting demonstration which would give him a chance at his belt-guns. Even if the Dude had him covered, the Kid knew that his own uncanny speed would counterbalance that. Had he not drawn his gun, flung himself sideways and fired the shot that killed Skeeter Montijo, that night in Fair Oaks, after Skeeter had him covered?

But in the impression made upon him by the wizardly shooting just witnessed, his purpose was forgotten. He could only gape at the Dude. Then came a thought that was like a flash of light. He looked vaguely about him. There was a stump ten feet away. He went over to it and sat down heavily. Ordinarily, the Kid moved as instinctively as any animal; thinking was no regular habit of his. And now he had some hard thinking to do.

"That's right. Make yourself at home," the Dude nodded, misunderstanding the move. "I guess you're all right, but I just can't take a chance and let you go until Albers—"

He broke off sharply, frowning at his slip of the tongue.

"So yuh know Sam Albers, huh?" Here was something else that had to be fitted into the Kid's puzzle.

"Why, yes. I've known him ever since I came to Gurney from Bear Paws. He has been mighty friendly, mighty helpful," said the Dude.

"Why didn't yuh say so in the beginnin'?" the Kid asked. "I know Sam Albers right well."

But he hardly heard the Dude's answer. Sam Albers had said that Ben

Cassaday had been shot from behind by the Dude, shot three times. That Sardines, the Indian man-of-all-work of the store, had claimed that the Dude had missed his first three or four shots. That had sounded reasonable: Most dudes couldn't hit a barn door awning. But the Kid was ready to bet his stack of blues that this Dude had never missed a shot in all his life. As for missing three or four! Something funny here, somewhere.

"Yuh know anybody else around Gurney?" he began with artful casualness.

"Know any o' the Maxwell boys? Know Tom Carson?"

"Ben Cassaday?"

"Why, I've seen Cassaday," nodded the Dude. "Is he a—a friend of yours?"

"Not now," denied the Kid. "Why?"

"Well, I'm new in this country and I don't know enough to be taking sides. But Albers told me that this Cassaday is a tough customer; that he'll bear watching. I know that Albers and Cassaday had a row in the store the day I left Gurney to come up here. It looked like shooting for a minute. Something about money Cassaday claimed that Albers was holding out on him and his partner. That was ten—no, eleven—days ago."

"So Sam was short-changin' Cassaday?"

"No, no! That was what Cassaday said. But as Albers explained it to me, that afternoon, Cassaday and his partner had done some work for him. Cassaday was trying to claim more pay than had been originally agreed upon. Something like that."

"Uh-huh. I see. Albers is comin' up —shore—today?"

"He said that he'd be up this way toward the end of this week. Said that he'd stop off."

"When'd yuh see Sam last?" inquired the Kid carelessly.

"That day I left Gurney. He and Cassaday, with Albers' Indian, rode out of town somewhere. Albers came back that afternoon to fix me up with an outfit and he told me, then, about coming up here. About Cassaday, too. He thought that I might run into Cassaday up here; thought Cassaday might join this rough bunch he'd warned me of."

HE busied himself with the beginning of a meal, on the other side of the camp. The Kid hunched himself upon his stump, in the attitude of one who thinks deeply.

So Ben and Albers had quarreled. Ben had accused Albers of holding out on them. The Kid and Ben had often commented between themselves regarding the low price rustled cattle were bringing, with Sam Albers handling the sale. The Dude, unless he lied, which the Kid began to doubt, had last seen Ben Cassaday alive, riding out of Gurney with Sam Albers and Sardines. And that damned warwhoop would cut any throat you liked to specify for a dollar's worth of air-tights or a drink.

Leaving all this out of consideration, if Sam Albers really had been shooting square with him, why hadn't he warned the Kid that the Dude would be looking for visitors and had been instructed—by him—to cut down on them? Sam had said nothing of any particular acquaintance with the Dude; of an intended visit to his camp. Instead of warning him, he had led the Kid to believe that downing the Dude would be as easy as killing a sheep. What was Albers coming up here for today, anyhow?

Did he— Instinctively the Kid felt that he had hit the bull this time!

Suppose that Sam Albers, having short-changed his partners and downed Ben Cassaday, hoped to avoid the big settlement of several deals entirely by sending the Kid up to the Dude, who was expected to shoot him on sight? The more he turned it over in his mind, the likelier it seemed.

He wanted only to get away from the Dude, now; to slip over the ridge and wait for Sam Albers. But the Dude was bent on keeping him until Sam's arrival, and how to get away was by no means plain to the Kid. He moved on the stump to stare absently aside, up-hill. After an instant, he slid down until he sat upon the ground, with his back to the stump, and with it between him and the densely-thicketed ridge at which he had stared a moment before.

That ridge was perhaps fifty yards up-hill, its crest feathered by oak saplings. A man lying on the far slope of it was upon the edge of one of those well-like holes, bush-masked, past which

the Kid had come as he stalked the Dude's camp. Such a man, lying so and peering through the dense foliage of the thick-set little oaks, was practically invisible from the camp. Only the gray glint of a sombrero had betrayed to the Kid the watcher upon the ridge.

In all the Territory there was not another sombrero crown of that odd, sugar-loaf peak. It had been specially made up in Faith for fat Sam Albers. There was need, now, for action—sudden action. As if he had been Sam Albers, the Kid could read Sam's mind.

HE would slip back up-hill and ride down quite openly. As he dismounted, perhaps—or on some pretext or other, thereafter—his gun would go off quite unexpectedly and Sam would explain to the astonished Dude that accidents would happen; or that the Kid was a bad actor—something. The man who could concoct such a story as that he had told the Kid in Gurney would easily make a plausible tale.

The Kid faced suddenly up-hill again, but without exposing himself to a possible rifle bullet from the ridge. As long as the thicket was watched, Sam wouldn't move. The longer he stayed there, while the Kid was helpless here, a calf tied up for the butcher's coming, the longer the Kid would live.

The Dude set the coffee pot off the fire and grinned at the Kid. He seemed friendly enough, but the Winchester, that Winchester with which he could work sheer magic, was pointing in the Kid's general direction again. No hope of taking him off-guard, and there was not time to tell all the crazy story, even if the telling would make the Dude an ally.

"D' you know—" thus the Kid, very thoughtfully, with face still turned partly toward the ridge—"I been a-figgerin' the way yuh shoot. I just can't believe that yuh really expected to make a hit, a while ago. Them must've been just plain happen-chances."

"No. It's just my gift. I guess I was born to shoot a rifle."

"Mebbe so. But all the same, shootin' at things in the air is just a trick. Yuh figger where the thing's goin' to stop, just before it starts fallin'. Then yuh shoot. But straight shootin' is straight shootin'. It tells somethin'! Now, s'pose

yuh was standin' sideway to this stump. Right here where I'm a-settin' now. Well, yuh pick out somethin'—say that oak leaf yonder, in that little thicket on the ridge. One that's underside up—twisted by the wind, mebbe. Yuh see it? A' right!"

He could still see, could the Kid, the shadowy bulk of Sam Albers' sombrero. But the Dude would hardly notice that concentrating on an oak leaf, as he was. If only Sam Albers didn't decide to come down-hill to slaughter his hobbled sheep!

"Come over here by me," the Kid drawled evenly. "Now, s'posen yuh whirl when I say 'Go!' an' drive three bullets through that oak-leaf! If yuh can do it, I'll shore say yuh're shootin'!"

"That's A-B-C!" scoffed the Dude, moving over beside the Kid, who stared with guarded intentness at his face.

"Let's try it. Ready?"

"Shoot!" spat the Kid.

He strained his ears tensely for sounds other than the rolling trio of reports almost in his ear. He couldn't have sworn to it, of course, but it seemed to him that he heard a muffled rustling sound, as if a heavy body—that of a fat man shot through the face and of dying instantly, for instance—had rolled over the edge of a brush-masked hole and slid to the bottom. There was no other sound. Even a heavy mask of oak leaves is poor shield for a man's face, against three .45-90 bullets at fifty yards range.

"Pardner, yuh shore done some fine shootin'—for me!" the Kid commended.

HE grinned for the first time that day. A queer sport, the Kid; the whole Territory knew that. Now, as he grinned at the Dude, his wizened, old-young face, his faded, small blue eyes, were as happy-go-lucky, as infectiously good-natured, as any pleased small boy's. Unconsciously, the Dude—who had seen nothing but the gleam of that white underside of the oak leaf among the green—responded to the change in his prisoner.

"Why, that was easy!" he grinned, in his turn. "Say! You're all right! I've been studying your eyes. You're not trying anything shady, now. I've been thinking it isn't fair to hold you up, this way. Albers may not be able to come up here soon."

"No," agreed the Kid, gravely. "Mebbe he won't come for—for quite

some time."

"Well, here are your guns. Have something to eat with me; then suit yourself about the way you head out."

"Why, thanks," answered the Kid, with a cheery grin.

He accepted the heavy triggerless Colts and jammed them into their holsters. Out they came again, muzzles flipping up like darting snake-heads. While the Dude gaped, the Kid gave exemplification, like a sleight-of-hand performer, of the "double-roll," the "road-agents' spin." He twirled the Colts by their butts as a gymnast spins his Indian clubs. They went twinkling into the air, their arcs crossing; slapped home in the Kid's deft palms. They shot upward again, to return to him over-shoulder, dropping into his hands behind his back. Always, the Dude observed, one gun was muzzle-forward, ready to fire.

"Just a drink o' cawfee an' a hunk o' bread an' sowbelly to eat as I ride," grinned the Kid, re-holstering the heavy guns. "I gotta hightail it."

He gulped down a cup of scalding

black coffee and accepted a sandwich.

"Well, so long, Dude!" he yelled cheerfully over his shoulder, when he had reached the far bank of the Two Squaws. Then a thought came to him. He turned, oddly hesitant.

"Say, I—yuh said yuh was a health-seeker, yuh know? Well, I—hell! Your stack o' chips ain't none too tall, I reckon?" he stated rather than asked.

"Oh, I've money enough to keep me going for quite a while. After that's gone, I—oh, I'll make it out somehow," the Dude dismissed the matter.

"Better take this to keep the ol' chuckwagon a-rollin'," grunted the Kid. "Ah, hell! I don't need it. I'm goin' down to Gurney, now, to collect a inheritance that's a-comin' to me from my two dead pardners."

His hand flashed up and five twenty-dollar gold-pieces twinkled in the grass at the Dude's feet. Then the Kid whirled and vanished behind a thicket before the astonished Dude could open his mouth to reject the gift or render thanks.

A queer sport, the Kid.

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The Exotic Land

by KEN JASON

Fate and a woman contrive to place "Gyp" closer to the law than was good for him.

THE man drove the car furiously. It streaked along the road through the night, skidded around curves, and swayed in the loose gravel. It reached the foothills of the Pyrenæes.

Murder flew in its wake, trailing the driver, murder that had left a man dead at his desk in Paris, stabbed through the back. It urged the fugitive to speed, strained the engine of the little Fiat he had hired in a provincial town.

Several leagues behind him came the police, chasing the killer. They had trailed him from Paris, had arrived several hours after his departure, and had followed him in a powerful car. He felt

they were coming; he often had been a fugitive and he sensed the man hunt.

Above him a late February snow-storm raged in the mountains. He felt the cold air press down from above and muffled his coat closer to his throat. He donned his gloves as the numbing wind began in gusts to oppose his ascension. Up, up, slowly, agonizingly slow, it seemed to him, crawled the little car. Far up in the mountains on a strip of road that rounded a ledge he saw, looking below, the tiny lights of the police car, moving slowly through the night. They were just beginning the rise through the foothills.

Fear seized him, maddening panicky



fear. He was desperate because the Fiat would not respond to his mood. It was not built for hill-climbing, but he had had no choice. It was the only car he could procure in his rush. He knew they were gaining, slowly but surely, on him. Could he beat them to the border?

He had reached the snow now. It stung his face, blinded him, filmed over the windshield, and he groped along. The minutes became years of agony. Perspiration started on his brow. He went slower now, blindly, his lights like the antenna of a great bug, feeling the way. Higher in the mountains he came to a division of the road, a Y that sent one ribbon trailing to the southeast and the other to the southwest. This was the place. He halted, struck a match and, shielding it close to him, looked at a pocket map. Yes, this was the place.

He got out of the car and drew three suitcases from the back seat. Then, turning the vehicle around, he started the engine, threw it in gear, and jumped out. The automobile rolled down the road, gaining speed, and hurtled over the edge of a cliff. He did not stop to listen for the crash, but started, along the road that led to the southwest, at a dead run, lugging his suitcases as best he could. He ran until fatigue stopped him, then dropped into the briskiest walk he was able to summon.

He was a young man, not over thirty. His clothes were of a stylish and expensive cut and his shoes, scuffed and scarred now by the rocks of the road, were of a smart pattern. He wore a grey velour hat, pulled low over his eyes which, for all his youth, were not the eyes of youth. In the dim light of the dash as he sped over the roads in Southern France they might have appeared the eyes of an old man. But neither were they eyes of age. They were cold, blue, dead eyes, unnatural eyes, cruel and sensual. They were keen, shrewd eyes, windows to a mind and heart that knew no kindly emotions, no scruples. They were shifting eyes that could gleam evilly with murderous emotion or bulge in abject terror.

THEIR cruelty and lustfulness were heightened by the curve of the nostrils and the curl of the lips, and his ears, small, seemed to have been pressed into his head. There was a prominent

chin, but it was weak, purposeless. From a distance he appeared good looking, a rather debonair figure, but as he came closer and the subtle effect of his features took hold of you, there was an instinctive revulsion. You might have looked at him, fascinated, but the attraction was that of the basilisk.

He hurried through the snow, stumbling and staggering as ruts and rocks threw him off balance. He was tired, dog-tired, but panic pricked him and he went on. Then, coming to a curve where, on either side, the trees had been chopped away, he halted. This too, was the place. He walked to one side of the road and struck three matches, extinguishing each before he lighted the next. It worked.

From the trees walked a tall man, bumbled heavily with outergarments, but exposing his grizzled head to the storm with only a Basque cap to protect it.

"Señor Wisner?" he questioned.

"Si."

"Come with me. All is arranged."

The two men entered the forest. They had not gone far when the Basque stopped. Two horses were tethered to a tree. The suitcases were slung across one and the fugitive mounted it. The Basque swung astride the other and led the way down a game trail.

Gyp Wisner was smuggled across the border into Spain and temporary safety.

II

BUT it was not until he reached Barcelona and the sanctuary of a familiar dive near the waterfront of that hectic city that Gyp Wisner felt at ease. His panic had left him when he crossed the border, but he still was uneasy. He knew his pursuers would find the wrecked car on the road below the curve he had dropped it from, but he also knew that they, being national police, would not tarry long by it. They knew him and he knew them. They would sense his ruse quickly and it would not detain them long. But perhaps it would detain them long enough for him to catch a train at the little village lying on the southern fringe of the mountains and make his getaway before they notified the Spanish authorities. Evidently it did, for he made the

trip to Barcelona without incident, although he was on edge throughout the journey.

Gyp Wisner was no ordinary crook. And in this short biography of him it is impossible to catalogue his entire activities. Suffice it to say that he was international in them and that, being so, was a source of annoyance and perturbation to the police of four great countries and a number of lesser ones.

Among his crimes was murder, of course, for no man with the eyes and other features that Gyp possessed would be beyond it. Rather it was a natural penchant. Murder meant nothing to him. Fear did: he was a slave to fear.

Likewise he was an excellent burglar. His technique at safes was more than good and he knew locks thoroughly. As a robber he also shone and as a swindler he had made some impressive successes. He was an American and began his career in the States.

He gravitated to New York from the middle-west. When the police were about to catch up with him, he escaped to England and pursued his trades there. But London likewise caught on to Gyp and he fled to Germany where Berlin offered a fertile field. In danger of capture he left the capital and fled south, out of Germany and through the states of Central Europe and the Balkans. His travels eventually landed him more or less permanently in Paris where he began operations on a large scale. Also he had his closest call which sent him on his wild ride through Southern France and across the mountains into Spain.

He essayed a robbery that took him to the mansion of a wealthy French senator.

He had information that this gentleman had a large sum of money in a private safe at home. He was working on the safe when the senator, hearing a slight noise had come in to investigate. Gyp had heard him outside the door and concealed himself in the folds of heavy curtains hanging before a big French window. As the man passed Gyp sprang out and buried his dirk deep in the Frenchman's back, at the same time throttling any cry with a grip on the man's throat. He had an abhorrence of any noise and he preferred to dirk his victims. He knew well how to prevent

their screams while he was doing it.

Dragging the body to a desk, he sat it in a swivel chair and returned to his job. He was about to leave when the senator's wife, wondering at the long absence of her husband, and reinforced by servants, came to the room. Gyp, his dirk in his hand, had plunged into the group and through it, escaping.

But the character of his job and the general description given by the senator's wife identified him with the police and he had to leave Paris. His professional brethren had aided him, and he eluded capture. But the police were close behind him. He had paid dearly for the car in the little provincial town, leaving the train and hoping to throw his pursuers off the track, but they had kept close at his heels until he crossed the Spanish border. Of course they had notified the police along the way in France, but Gyp had earned his first name by his miraculous escapes.

HE had been smuggled into Spain by the Basque who was well acquainted with activities such as Gyp and his ilk pursued, and made a tidy sum each year in aiding their exodus from France.

In Barcelona he found refuge. He had been there before for the city harbors many such characters. It is in Barcelona that communism is rampant, that smuggling flourishes, that crime is nursed and developed. So Gyp headed there and was received by an old crony, a retired smuggler who ran a café and gambling house, and who kept him in a back room of the place. But he grew careless.

One evening, feeling restive and fretting at his enforced idleness, he ventured out to the cafés. He still possessed a sizable portion of the loot he had obtained in the Paris murder job and he drank a great deal. Following that he gambled a great deal and lost. Entering a more pretentious cabaret, after his losses, he was in ugly mood. He sat down at a table and ordered a drink, looking for any kind of adventure. Glancing about he saw, seated next to a handsome young Spaniard, a dancing girl of unusual beauty.

Now Gyp rarely had much to do with women, but when he did it was intensive. He was both thrilled and afraid in their presence. He did not under-

stand them nor was he capable of doing so. They awed him, fascinated him anaesthetized his otherwise shrewd mind and, if he saw one that particularly appealed to him, he could not but surrender to her charm. He resisted most of them, but the girl he saw stirred him. He wanted her. He arose and walked to where she and her companion were seated.

"May I dance?" he asked in his best Spanish.

The girl and man looked up. They both appraised him. The Spaniard glowered; the girl smiled. Obviously American, Gyp was attractive to her, if not physically, financially.

"Si, señor," she replied. "Muchisimo gusto."

Gyp bowed. He was handsome in a way and he knew how to act. He returned to his table and awaited the orchestra which soon began a Spanish schottische. Then he walked over to the girl's table. He was about to walk away with her when he caught the Spaniard's eye. It looked hatred at him. Gyp's mood changed from ugliness to vain-gloriousness, could not resist a play at bravado. He hesitated, returning the gaze. The girl waited, pleased at her paramour's jealousy of the American. The Spaniard dropped his eyes and Gyp danced.

He surrendered to her grace and attraction. The schottische stopped and the waltz began. The lights of the room, changing iridescently through all the colors, spangled the room. She was a lovely little thing, he thought. He would possess her. He would take her with him and leave Barcelona. He would—

His thoughts reached an aposiopesis when he saw the Spaniard. Gyp gazed over the girl's shoulder and saw him. Near him were other young men, all glaring menacingly. The American laughed. He would show them. They would do nothing at all. Swaggering, he accompanied the girl to the table, then asked if she would not go to his table with him. She assented. They started, when the Spaniard grabbed his arm.

"Señor! She is my woman!" cried the man.

Gyp did not answer immediately. He shot his cold, reptilian gaze into the

Spaniard.

"Indeed," he said deliberately. "Who says so?"

"I say so."

Gyp's answer to that was a shrug after which he pushed the man in the face and sent him back in the seat. The Spaniard was up in an instant.

He lunged at Gyp, but the American knew about such things. He sidestepped the charge and drove the Spaniard back with a hard-driven right fist. Immediately he was beset by the others. One jumped on his back. He shook him off. Another rushed him and was knocked down. The companion of the girl, now recovered, was up again, crouched knife in hand. The others held back.

Gyp reached in his coat where his dirk, sheathed, was strapped.

HE waited. The Spaniard grew tense and sprang. Gyp deftly eluded the streak of steel and struck. His dirk impaled the man's shoulder. The Spaniard shrieked in pain and Gyp struck with his left arm, knocking the man back and free of the dirk which cut as it withdrew.

There was pandemonium in the cabaret. The screams of the dancing girls and the excited shouts of the Spaniards brought a crowd from the street running to see what the fracas was all about. A group of seamen, thoroughly drunk, and excited by the fight, began one of their own, which soon spread to the other occupants of the place. Soon the café was filled with struggling, cursing men, while the women rushed for the door. Bottles crashed and chairs swung. The seamen were having the time of their lives. But at the door appeared the Spanish "Napoleons."

Gyp, having retired to a corner of the room, was watching the riot and enjoying it when he saw the officers. He looked around for the girl. He would escape with her. But she was gone. An instant later he saw her, talking to one of the police, and pointing to him. The slut!

She was double-crossing him.

Looking hurriedly about he saw a window just above him. He clambered to the sill and jumped out, as a bullet splintered the wood at his side. He landed in a narrow street and ran madly

until he came to his hiding place.

Safe again he took stock of his actions and wondered how he could have been such a fool. He had exposed himself and over a tawdry dance-hall woman. She would tell the police about him. She would describe him and he knew they had his description from the French national police. Why had he not been content to leave well enough alone? Now the Spaniards would have something for themselves to work on. He had stabbed a man. It was stupid.

His fear seized him. He would end in the chair or on the scaffold if he didn't watch out. Damn his soul! Had he no sense? It was all too dangerous, this fooling around. If he could get back to work, it would be better. If he could only do something. But he couldn't do anything now. Not now, with the Spanish and French both after him.

He thought of opium. He had used it before in similar circumstances. But he was afraid of the habit. Maybe if he could get good and drunk. No, he had to stay sober. But he couldn't sit idle and think. It was too terrible. He started.

The door burst open.

Gyp stifled a cry and saw that it was his protector the ancient Spaniard. The old man was crippled and he hobbled in in unnatural and grotesque hurry.

"*Por dios amigo!*" he cried. "They have traced you! They will be here soon! You must go!"

Gyp's color left him.

"But where! Where can I go?"

"I do not know, but you must leave. Hurry! If they find you here it means me also. If—Ah, I know. Leave your luggage to me. Come!"

Through back streets and alleys, through dank, stinking basements, the old man led Gyp. They reached the wharves and turned south. Following the waterfront to the extreme end of the docks, they stopped before a ship. Then they went aboard and the old man called for the captain. This worthy soon appeared, an evil looking ruffian with a scar across his face.

He was introduced to Gyp as Captain Romero.

Just before dawn Gyp, hidden securely in the engine room, sailed from Barcelona.

III

TWO years in the Mediterranean, two years in which Gyp became powerful. Starting in as a mere apprentice in the smuggling trade aboard the *Cabo Spartel* and under Romero, he had become a virtuoso at the game and the real factor behind the phenomenal profits the ship produced. For Gyp was ingenious.

When he sailed from Barcelona that night in which terror bestrode his shoulders he had no idea of entering the business. He was too occupied with his thoughts and fears, and continued to be for several days thereafter. Escape! Escape was all his mind could imagine. But the soft charm of the sea and the adventurous milieu of carrying contraband about the Mediterranean lured and won him.

It was different from anything he had ever done, an absolute change of pace and activity. Before he had been cooped in cities whose streets were haunted with spectres in uniform, and he felt cramped. Here on the sea; sailing one day, at port the next, fleeing, escaping, planning, shrewdly outwitting without much risk—it was all absorbingly interesting, and it was not so dangerous.

With Romero's knowledge of the shores of the Mediterranean, its inlets and coves and obscure ports, the *Cabo Spartel*, a phenomenally fast ship, could elude the boats of the law and could slip away to nowhere. Gyp's life had always been one of flight, but never such glorious, such exhilarating, such fascinating flight as this. And it paid.

Gyp saw to that. With his weasel-like acumen he had uncovered other things to run as contraband. There were guns. Guns were necessary to the progress of the Riff war, were essential to the activities of the Druses. Guns had to be had when revolutions were planned in Albania, when the republics of the Caucauses were torn by civil war. Tobacco was all that the *Cabo* had carried before; now a diversified cargo reposed in its hold.

Of course the tobacco cargoes were maintained. They were loaded in Macedonia; at some obscure Greek Island, or even in the harbor of Piraeus, and then

were taken west to a certain spot in the sea where they were transferred to the Spanish shipping fleets, whose little sloops and smacks would run them into Spain. Occasionally the fishermen were caught. They were usually fined and let go. The *Cabo*, which meant Gyp and, to a lesser degree now, Romero, reimbursed them for their fine, and they continued their work. Then there was dope.

Gyp's ingenuity had discovered this lucrative business. Narcotics always had been confined largely to the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. But—and it was a logical and simple conclusion for the shrewd Gyp—if there, why not in Spain, in Italy, in France? He got the tobacco in, why not the dope.

He found that hasheesh found its way into Egypt from the Far East and that Greece was shot through with dealers in narcotics. There was the supply. And he knew that the demand was in Spain, Italy, and France. He would not ship directly to Italy or France—he feared the consequences of coming in close contact to such vigilant governments—but he could and would get the stuff into Spain and then let matters take their course. He knew how easily the stuff would filter through. He used the fishing fleets for this trade too.

He made the necessary contacts in Egypt and Greece. Hasheesh and opium came from Egypt and he procured heroin and other drugs from Greece. Gyp was enthused. Romero was happy. The *Cabo* brought huge profits to both.

But, naturally, with the growth of the trade after its original smashing success, there grew also the resistance of the law. The *Cabo Spartel* became a marked ship and only the ingenuity of Romero saved it from capture. Where before there had been only the usual opposition of local authorities, there now was the puissant and determined forces of the national governments, specially appointed men, picked and tried in service. Furthermore they were urged on by the furore at Geneva against contraband of all sorts, particularly narcotics.

GYP felt the added pressure and so did Romero. Often there was no one to receive their stuff at the land-

ing place and often they were warned just in time to escape a cutter. With the League of Nations in the fray they had other ships than those of the nations directly interested to fear. The British base at Malta was a nest of power to be avoided and watched.

With this situation and the added dangers, Gyp's enthusiasm waned. Especially after two running fights in which he had seen two of the crew shot down near him. It was too close to be comfortable. His old hunted feeling returned and told on his nerves. His recent cheerfulness left him and his old neurosis again attacked him. The subconscious in him told him to get out. His conscious instinct told him he would be before long.

It was in this state of mind that he sailed into a cove on the coast of Tunisia near the Fratelli Rocks one night in late August. The *Cabo* was carrying rifles which were to be taken from there to the Riff armies by caravan. It was a particularly large shipment and the *Cabo* had just discharged an immense cargo of narcotics to the fishing fleets at great profit. It had been an eminently successful voyage.

Gyp was rowed ashore and walked to a little windowless shack, seemingly abandoned, which stood near the shore. The night was without moon and in the thick murk, barely illumined by the bright stars, the little building was barely discernible. But Gyp knew where it was. He had been there before. He walked to the door and knocked. The door slowly opened and he was admitted.

At a great rough table on which a sputtering candle gave a flickering light, two men were seated. The third occupant of the shack had opened the door for Gyp. One of the men was a Frenchman, one a Spaniard, and the other, who had admitted Gyp, obviously a North African Arab, by his garb and face. The Frenchman spoke, in English.

"Good evening, Mr. Wisner, we've been expecting you."

"A little late this trip, Desieux. They're after us, you know."

"So I hear, but you seem to elude them successfully."

"Have you the arms?"

"Of course. Have you the boats to unload them?"

"In the rock inlets, Mr. Wisner, we

have enough boats to unload three ships."

"Then we'd better get busy."

Gyp sent his boatman back to Romero to tell him that all was in order, Desieux showed where the boats were, and the crew of the *Cabo* went to work. Romero inspected the unloading of the ship, while the Spaniard was ashore to meet the boatloads of guns. The guns were stored in the innumerable grottoes beneath the crags along the shore, from where they would be taken the following night. Gyp, Desieux, and the Arab talked.

"How's the war going?" asked the American, lighting a cigarette.

"Well enough," answered Desieux, who produced a bottle of cognac and poured three glasses.

"Really any chance for the Riffs?" asked Gyp.

"Mr. Wisner, it is hardly credible that a small mountain tribe, unaided, can defy indefinitely the armies of France and Spain."

"Maybe not, but they've done pretty well at it so far. And how about the rest of the country? How about the Moors and the Algerians? I heard that old Abdel-what's-his-name was trying to swing their support."

"True enough, Mr. Wisner, but the French and Spanish have not been idle either. Money, as you Americans say, talks, and the heads of the tribes have been talking French and Spanish."

"Oh, I see," remarked Gyp, as something he could understand definitely came up, "but," he continued as his mind grasped the situation and became speculative, "if they do that with them why not with the Riffs?"

"You have a keen mind, Mr. Wisner. This is the last time you will ever sell me rifles for the Riffs."

"How's that?"

"I hear from my friends in France and Spain (and they never fail me) that the two governments will talk to Abdel-Azar as they talked to the rest, and our friend Hassanein here, who has just returned from the Riff lines, tells me that the chief will accept."

"Well, well, that's tough. It shoots our little game here to hell."

"So it does, Mr. Wisner, but perhaps we can profit by it."

"How?"

"WELL, my friend, the fact is that the deal is already closed and the agreement made. They will ship the specie from France. To it will be added the specie from Spain. It will be taken to Algeiras and then shipped across the straits to Tangier, where it is to be deposited in banks, perhaps some in other cities as well, which banks will, in turn, issue currency to cover the amount and pay the tribesmen. The chief, of course, will get the most and then obligingly allow himself to be captured and deported to some comfortable spot where he will live out his age.

"Now, Mr. Wisner, the French and Spanish are rather sensitive about all this. They will ship the specie quietly. There will be few guards because it would mean a loss of prestige if it were publicly known they could not suppress the Riffs. Hence they will make the shipment as inconspicuously as possible. Suppose I were to put you in touch with a friend of mine who is watching the business. Suppose you received the necessary information and that the *Cabo*, fully armed and equipped were lying outside the harbor of Algeiras when the specie ship sailed out. Few guards, all quiet. Then you and Romero know enough about escape. I'll meet you in Casablanca where we may have mutual interests to distribute among ourselves."

Gyp had been following him with interest. He decided to accept, but with reservations he made only to himself. Here, indeed, occurred to him a means of leaving the smuggling game, profiting by it, and living comfortably the rest of his life. He announced his willingness to steal the bribe.

"But Mr. Wisner, you know me very well, and I want you to be in Casablanca. If you are not there—well, I know you very well. Suppose the French knew Gyp Wisner was on the *Cabo*?"

Gyp assured Desieux that he would be in Casablanca, took the address of the person referred to, and left.

But the man was either mad or simple. Did he take him for a fool? Did he think that they would take all the risk and give him part of the gravy? Decidedly that was what they would not do. He had other plans. He told Romero to proceed to Port Said for opium.

They reached a point west of the city and dropped anchor in an open bay that

hid them from view up and down the coast. The crew went ashore and walked to the Port, leaving Romero and Gyp aboard.

"Captain," said Gyp when they were alone, "the profits have been unusually large this trip. Do you not think that we should get our share before the crew is given theirs. They are dolts and louts. I owe it to you for saving my life at Barcelona and you owe it to me for making your business. We have been firm friends and mutually beneficial. Suppose we divide first before we divide for all?"

"Your suggestion is excellent, Señor Wisner," said Romero and they went to the office of the ship between their cabins.

There was the ship's safe, a strong and modern affair that even Gyp would have been troubled in opening. Romero, who had the combination walked over to the safe and squatted before the dials.

Gyp watched, narrowly. His hand stole inside his coat. The captain was absorbed. Gyp set himself in his chair. He sprang.

A few minutes later Gyp, with bulging grips and his dirk now quite clean, slipped over the side. A little later and he was in the Port. An hour later and he was on the train for Alexandria.

The police investigated the deserted derelict a week later and found Romero's body. An Arab fisherman testified that he had heard a man scream the night the ship had cast anchor. Nothing was done. The crew was never found.

Gyp Wisner, while all this was going on, was in a first class cabin, bound for Marseilles.

IV

THERE was a fiesta in Tangier. The little city breathed a holiday atmosphere. The café spruced up and added a waiter or two to their staffs. From Algeciras came the Spanish boats bringing vacationists from Sevilla, Cordova, Madrid, Valencia, all intent on the celebration and anticipating the thrill that the small, but cosmopolitan town, an orphan of the nations, could give. The fiesta would last but

one night, ending sometime in the early morning, when the revelers would retire to the great Kursaals to finish the evening in hilarious abandon. It commemorated the discovery of America and made obeisance to the memory of Ferdinand and Isabella. Also it kept a custom dating from the ancient, Iberian peoples and maintained by the latter inhabitants of the peninsula. It fell on Columbus day.

The Spanish population, of course, were most interested. But the other inhabitants, French, Moorish, English or German, also were enthused. It meant an influx of visitors from Spain, perhaps a visitation of bored and munificent tourists, and a grand rise in the price of everything.

Only one thing served to mar the enthusiasm of the occasion. From the Spanish front came the body of beloved Captain Alejandro Romero, who had been killed in battle with the Riffs. The dashing *capitan*, favorite of women, admired of men, handsome, debonair, romantic, heroic, had been slain as he led his men in charge against the rebelling tribesmen. It caused a stab of melancholy to penetrate many Spanish hearts and French flags were hung at half mast in respect to the hero, whose name had been a byword to three armies. Everyone knew that the *capitan's* life had been a tragic one. Everyone knew that he had an older brother, of whom dark things were said, whose nefarious activities had caused the hero and his family much anguish. And everyone sympathized with him. Now he was dead, this gallant and tragic figure, and the people mourned him. They did his body honor upon its arrival. It was to be kept in Tangier over night and sent to Spain the day after the fiesta, where it would be buried with great honor.

On the little Spanish steamer that sailed at noon that day from Algeciras, crossing the straits, was a young man also handsome in a way, inclined to be debonair, but rather reserved in his attitude toward his fellow passengers. It was Gyp Wisner.

Gyp had bought a faked French passport in Alexandria and booked passage to Marseilles. Landing there he proceeded to Barcelona and went to the dive where he had been hidden two years before. His suitcases and other belongings were still there. Likewise he hunted up,

in Barcelona, certain of his friends who, he knew, could give him as much information as Desieux's man. For Gyp had quite as many channels for learning things as Desieux. He learned what he wanted to know, and then, with three suitcases, began his journey by rail across Spain to Algeciras. He was back again at his old tricks after two years at sea, back again in the old mould he had known before his flight on the *Cabo Spartel*. Again was he dressed nattily and expensively and again he had his old sense of misgiving, the fear of towns and the cramped feeling they gave him.

But he was through after this. No more for him. He was rich already and the loot at Tangier would make him wealthy for life. He would leave the town the morning after the job and go by automobile to Fez. There he would change cars and go to the Algerian border where he would pick up the railroad that would take him through Oran and to the City of Algiers. From there east. East, beyond Suez, any place. The Far East, perhaps India, perhaps South America. He had never been to South America. He would like the great capitals of the south, he thought, Rio, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, perhaps Havana. Oh anywhere. He would be wealthy. It made no difference where he was if he had wealth and he meant to have it in less than twenty-four hours, enough to last him a lifetime.

Now Gyp did not intend to steal the entire shipment of specie. In the first place that was impossible without the aid of other people and some conveyance that approximated the size of a truck. Since there were no trucks in Tangier and he did not care to bring in strangers (although he had a veritable army of swinish and villainous Moors to draw from) he had early decided to play a lone hand in the matter.

ALWAYS had he considered Desieux's idea idiotic. He planned along his own lines and decided to be content with part of the gold. With this in view he had brought with him two huge suitcases, empty, which he often had used before in his multifarious undertakings. Their exterior was innocent. They presented the usual leather to those that looked at them, albeit extremely heavy leather, and they were

each bound with three heavy straps. Their interior was composed of a series of steel ribs, so close together as to make almost a solid lining. And both were capable of holding considerably more than their weight in gold.

Gyp boarded the little steamer at Algeciras along with many Spaniards, all teeming with excitement and given way to the gaiety of which only they are capable.

As the ship drew close to the African side of the straits and rounded Monkey Hill, the southern Pillar of Hercules, Tangier hove into view like a chromatic sunburst. It lay against the hills above its open bay, decorated with flags and pennants and streaming with colored bunting. It was mid-afternoon and the oblique rays of the declining sun shone brilliantly on the costumed city, now an international port, but which had seen the Carthaginians and Moors invade Spain, had, in fact, been a base of operations for both these races, and had known the governments of the Vandals and Cæsars.

The ship cast anchor, small boats drew alongside and bare-footed Moors hopped over the rail like a drove of monkeys. They importuned chatteringly in the name of the hotels they represented, each, according to them, the best in Tangier. But Gyp was deaf to all save those of the Bristol, a modest affair he had become familiar with when on the *Cabo*, where he would be unnoticed and left quite alone.

At the landing he showed his faked passport which was still unreported, and was allowed to enter the international city. Preceded by his Moors he walked the short distance to the hotel, registered and was given his room. After he had bathed, shaved, and dressed, he walked downstairs and out into the little square in front of the Bristol.

It seethed with people. Spaniards, Frenchmen, Moors, dignified Riffians (these latter down for the fiesta, later to return to fight against the very men they now rubbed against) were moving slowly in the square, which, being wider than the streets entering it, served as a basin where the human streams effected a confluence and swirled in eddies. The sidewalk cafés were jammed. Waiters flitted in and out among the laughing throng serving whiskies and anchovies,

clams and wine, anything and everything the celebrants desired. Gyp sat down and ordered a drink.

He thought of what he had to do. Early in the morning, after the fiesta, and when the Kursaals would be crowded, seemed the most likely time. The revelers would then be in a more or less drunken state, the streets would be deserted, and the clerk at the hotel probably in a profound sleep, after the wine and cognac he undoubtedly would drink. Nothing in the way.

He had a plan of the Bank of British West Africa. From a Spanish acquaintance, a petty thief, he had bought the little chart. He was to enter the bank from the rear. A watchman, an old Moor, well over eighty, slept near the front door, and very likely nothing would awaken him that night, if he were there at all. If he happened to awaken during Gyp's working, that was up to Gyp. But there would be no noise.

The door to the vault was very old-fashioned, Gyp had been assured, and one with which he was quite familiar. It would not be difficult.

V

THE fiesta, held in an immense field on the southern outskirts of Tangier, waxed strong until midnight or shortly after, when the people began to trickle home. There had been dancing; there had been singing; there had been costume histrionics and pageantry, and there had been drinking. The cafés of the city had been packed to bursting, but, with the early morning hours, the merry folk were repairing to their beds, content with their part in doing homage to the sovereigns whose money had made possible the discovery of a hemisphere, and thoroughly the worse for wine and cognac.

Gyp remained at the scene of the fiesta until late, and then followed the crowd to the Kursall Francaise, where there was to be more gaiety. The dignitaries who had come for the occasion were gathering there. There was a French general and a Spanish general, and the diplomatic corps were well represented. There would be further revelry and Gyp was enjoying himself.

He took a table by himself and ordered champagne. A beautiful girl began to sing. It was indeed a song of old Spain.

It was a lament, a tragedy in melody. She sang as if the words wracked her soul, as if she were living the tragedy of the song. It might have been the wind in the towers of Granada, the sigh of the pines of Pyrenees, the moan of her race under the heel of the Moor. It was a song of death and black despair.

The room was silent as she sang, and Gyp sat as one hypnotized. He lived with her through the song, drinking the melancholy minors, breathing the elegiac melody. When she finished there was an instant of silence followed by a pounding rumble of thunder, and then a storm of applause. Gyp joined in it and sat down again.

Suddenly he felt angry. He was not sure at first just why he was angry. Then, looking at the girl again, he discovered he hated her beauty, her magnetism. He damned her. What a terrible song; what a horrible song. There was death in that song.

HE arose with a jerk, paid his bill, and left. He must be at his work; he must leave Tangier; he would take the first automobile to Fez when day broke. More than all he must leave that girl and the terrible song.

It was but a few minutes' walk to his hotel. He hurried through the deserted and darkened streets. No one was about. Thunder poured through the narrow streets, like water through a canyon. Lightning streaked down them like some white bird over a rapids. Gyp scurried along until he came to the hotel. Softly he entered and ascended the stairs. The clerk was asleep, as he had anticipated. He procured his tools and suitcases and started out again.

The bank was just up the street from the Bristol, but he did not stop in front of it. He continued until he came to another little square, then turned and walked south. A short distance in this direction and he turned again and walked back toward the hotel on another street. He had not gone far when he darted out of sight and up a narrow tortuous passage. He stopped. Above him was a window.

Using a large flat lever, with one beveled end, he pried the window open. He

lifted his suitcases and tools to the sill and drew himself up after them. He paused an instant, then silently slipped inside. Lightning danced through the place, revealing desks and cages. He threw his torch around. The ray found the protruding vault which stood at his left. Treading softly to it, he threw the ray of his torch on the front door. Beside it, leaning back against the wall in a chair, was the old Moorish watchman, asleep. Gyp reckoned the distance between him and the vault and decided that he could not hear.

He went to work.

Quickly and softly he attacked the mechanism on the vault. He broke here; he pried loose there; he forced and unscrewed. Finally he reached the wires he was seeking. He manipulated them and the great door swung open as a terrific crash of thunder shook the building.

He pushed the door wide and entered, throwing the light of the torch before him. A long, wooden box lay on the floor. The specie! Part of it would soon be his. And then to Algiers. And then luxury for life.

Investigating further he found an electric light and turned it on. Then he turned to the box. He reached for his tools when a placard tacked to the cover commanded his attention. It was written in Spanish. He read:

"Place this precious burden in your safest vault. It is a testimony to the glory of Spain."

Gyp made a mental note that they were quite right, but that he was going to take part in the testimony. He took his lever and inserted it between the cover and the side of the box. He was about to apply pressure to the tool when he heard a noise behind him.

He wheeled quickly. He saw the old Moor standing at the vault door, shaking as if with ague. In his trembling and wrinkled hand the old man held a revolver. It seemed too heavy for his feeble strength.

Gyp snarled and sprang. He wrenched the gun from the feeble hand. Another movement and he had buried his dirk in the wrinkled throat as he held his hand over the dried and sunken lips. The ancient convulsed and gasped. He tried to scream but the dirk had skewered his throat and the gushing blood strangled his cry. He made a gargling, horrible,

throaty noise and clasped his hand to his mangled throat. He staggered and fell, face up, next to the box. Gyp, holding the dripping dirk, watched his death twitchings, unmoved. The white beard was red now. The old man lay quite still in death.

Gyp turned to the box. He was about to apply pressure to the lever when a tremendous crash of thunder shook the earth. The light above him went out. Lightning played about the bank, darting into the corner and penetrating the depths of the vault. It illumined the death mask of the old Moor and Gyp started.

THE eerie streaks terrified him. He turned away from the old man and applied his strength to the lever. There was the rasping noise of nails being wrenched from wood and the cover gave. Gyp, glancing at the body of the watchman, saw it in the lightning streak and gave a frenzied shove. The cover gave, complained, and came off, so suddenly that Gyp fell forward and over the open box. There was a blinding flash of lightning and Gyp drew back, trembling.

He had seen, staring from within the box the face of the *Cabo's* captain!

He stood motionless for several minutes. He dared not move. Then, steeling himself he reached for his torch. He threw the ray in the box. It was the face of Romero! But younger and without the scar. Younger and without the evil on the features, a clean-cut Romero.

Gyp's head swam. The figure fascinated him. He leaned forward and over the box. He clutched the sides for support. He remained as paralyzed. His heart seemed near to bursting his chest. He threw the ray of the torch on the Moor. The old eyes stared vacantly at the ceiling of the vault. A fearful flash of lightning, followed by a great roar of thunder lit the vault as with daylight and the building trembled. The torch slipped from Gyp's hands.

He screamed. He rushed headlong to the door of the bank. He wrenched at the knob. His cries were in abject terror. He repeated them. The door flew open. He rushed out.

A rifle barrel pressed against his chest stopped him.

Behind it loomed the figure of a Spanish policeman.



Sabine

by REX EVANS

*He was a gambler by profession, this Sabine, and a daring one at that—
But there was nothing he loved better than a fight, especially a fight against
odds.*

I

IT WAS the spring of the year. In the summer Sabine worked. In the autumn he traveled. In the winter he slept. In the spring Sabine slowly awakened.

It may be wondered at, this schedule of living. People asked how Sabine could afford it, since he had no established fortune behind him on which he might draw at will. He never deigned to burn his hands with a rope or to ride herd or to wander behind a burro loaded down with a prospector's pack. If he did none of these things, how was it that

Sabine in the course of a short summer could lay up such supplies that he lived in luxury during the rest of the year? For in his season of travel he went whither he would, letting his fancy of the moment blow him away as freely as the wind blows a dead leaf.

When the winter came and the mountain nights began to grow crisper and longer, Sabine invariably turned up again at Big Horn, and rented again that big room with the big south windows and the great old four-posted bed, and dropped at a gesture, one might say, into a long period of inertia. During all of that time he ate of the fat and he drank of the cream, and ever he paid in cash. So it was also in the spring

of the year. He began to awaken; his clothes became gorgeous; a light appeared, burning in his eyes far back from the surface—and men began to take heed of him when he passed.

How could he afford to such a régime? Certainly he was not existing upon the stored up savings of a long life of previous labor. For Sabine had attained only to the blissful age of twenty-one. Yet for three years he had done nothing. He was eighteen when he dropped into Big Horn and amused the good folk with his soft, deep voice and his soft, dark eyes—and "Red" Larsen, attempting to make game of him, had been corrected with a gun and bullets of forty-five calibre.

So the worthy citizens of Big Horn swallowed the laughter which they had prepared at the expense of Sabine. They swallowed it and converted it into a choked silence. Thereafter, Sabine was undisturbed. For three years no man had lifted a hand against him. For three years they had pondered on the sudden death of that famous gun-fighter, "Red" Larsen, and as a result of their thoughtfulness, Sabine slept on in peace.

The source of his livelihood was discovered before he had been long in town. The sight of his fat wallet had inspired a gentleman newly out of the East and pardonably proud of the dexterity of his fingers. He sat down with Sabine for a three-day session at stud, and the things he did with those cards were beyond speech, beyond credence.

Yet at the end of that period he was horribly broke. And Sabine, at the end of the third day's session, showed him a simple little trick with a deck of cards and then gave him five hundred dollars to take him home again.

The wise man out of the East went back sadder and wiser.

That long contest opened the eyes of Big Horn to the fact that it had in its midst a gambler of the first water.

"He could make greenbacks blossom out of a Scotchman's pocketbook," said the English bartender in the hotel bar. "But look at the hands God gave him! Look at the head-start he was furnished with!"

Indeed, they were remarkably long, straight-fingered hands, with nails as neatly cared for, and skin of as tissue-

like a delicacy as any woman's. He did not even waste them upon the making of Bull Durham cigarettes. Instead, he carried "tailor-made" smokes in a long, flat, golden case.

That case was as much out of keeping with the rest of Sabine's attire as a five-carat diamond would be out of place on the shirt-front of an old-clothes dealer. But it was in perfect keeping with his hands, and sometimes when the heavy, sweet-scented smoke of his Egyptian tobacco arose, the man who sat on the opposite side of the gaming table would be hypnotized into forgetfulness of everything save those long, soft hands, and the burning cigarette, and the pale, smiling, handsome dull-eyed face. His gaudy cowboy outfit for the nonce disappeared.

THE last puff from one of those expensive cigarettes was now blown languidly forth, and Sabine snapped the butt high into the air and turned his head a little to watch its course. It was the blue, blue time of the evening of that spring day. In the west there was still a strong blur of color, but all the rest of the sky was deepest blue, and the mist in the pretentious square around which Big Horn was built was blue also, and the statue of Columbus in the center of the square was withdrawn to a greater distance by that same blue haze.

In the beginning, Big Horn was founded with great hopes. It was to be a rich metropolis. Its central life was to turn around this ample square. But alas for great hopes!—the metropolis failed to grow. There were not even enough houses completely to surround the square. They merely outlined its magnificent dimensions with sketchy strokes, here and there.

Having watched the falling of the yellow-burning cigarette butt against the thickening twilight, Sabine allowed his careless eye to roam over the houses of the square. They were not beautiful, and Sabine loved beauty. But he endured in Big Horn partly because it had something more than one narrow, dust-blown street to look out upon, and partly because it lay in a region of golden sunshine, eternal warm sunshine.

The sun was necessary to Sabine's happiness. Without it, he withered like a tropical plant. He had been known

to walk bareheaded through its noon blaze, and yet his skin remained pale.

Indeed, he was an exotic, a strange fellow, and he was so equipped by nature that at every pore he could drink up physical pleasure. Just as he enjoyed the white-hot noonday, so also he found enjoyment in the magic closing of the day, and the falling of evening like a fog, so that voices up and down the street sounded small and far away, and there was no rhyme or reason to anything but sleep in this gracious world.

He had lain there smoking with closed eyes; thin wisps of dust trailed through the air, from time to time. But even this was not unpleasant to him, for he could detect the strange, biting tang of the alkali in that dust, an odor that whipped up into his mind the terrible picture of the dead desert. Sabine had crossed such a desert on a dying horse, his own life fainting in a wounded body, and far away the pursuers dancing in small black dots on the horizon mirage.

Now the scent of the alkali brought that old torture burningly home to him, but on the other hand he had only to turn his head a little in order to hear the cool clinking of the glassware in the bar where men were drinking, and from which, again, another odor stirred, an odor of a new-wetted floor, and of many drinks in the making. To him, then, the square was not altogether ugly, as he stared at it after his cigarette had fallen into the dust beside the hotel veranda.

Yonder two children were playing ball and running with a mad abandon that made a faint sweat start on the brow of Sabine. His heart was in more perfect accord with yonder peak-hatted fellow who lounged beside the great statue of Columbus which a rich and drunken miner had donated in a careless moment. The man was standing, but his slouching attitude indicated that he was upon his feet with the minimum of effort. He was making a cigarette which he placed between his lips. Then he produced a match.

The smooth brow of Sabine gathered in the slightest frown. Something annoyed him in that sight. He did not know what. The man's hand moved in a wide arc as he struck the match against the base of the statue. Then he lighted

his cigarette. The evening was sufficiently dim to make the flare of the match quite visible even at that distance.

Sabine frowned more deeply. He was expectant of something else, but what? The fellow now walked away and Sabine followed him with intent eyes. He crossed the square. He came up the hotel steps. He walked down the veranda, a tall, slender-hipped, wide-shouldered man, with the dark skin and the smoky eyes which betray Indian blood.

HE looked like a Mexican. He might very well be from south of the Rio Grande. And yet there was a difference. He had an excessive and stiff-necked dignity, for one thing. Altogether, he impressed Sabine as being a novelty among cowpunchers in spite of the catholic conformity to custom of his outfit.

Sabine rolled back in his chair again. It was his special chair which no other man in Big Horn presumed to sit in, even when Sabine was not on the veranda. It was made with a long, low-reclining back, and there was an extension in front upon which he could rest his legs. Now he stretched his arms along the wide arms of the chair and felt the comfortable support pressing against him.

Closing his eyes, he wondered if he would be fool enough to answer the impulse which bade him to go to the center of the square and stand beside the statue of Columbus.

For he knew, now, why it was that the scratching of that match had excited in him a mysterious expectancy. Now he recalled that, at about that hour, but usually in the midst of some group of talkers in the square, this same tall, peak-hatted man had stood beside the statue and lighted a match by scratching against the pediment. But always, before, he had had quite a struggle to light the match against the glazed surface of the stone.

Vague questions formed in the mind of lazy Sabine. Why did the same man always go there at the same hour? Why did he light his match in the same way? Once, Sabine recalled now, it had required seven strokes to light the match!

How odd that he could recall such details! But often when the conscious mind is blank, the subconscious mind

will be working for us though we are unaware of the fact.

Sabine, with a deep, deep sigh, raised from the floor beside him his peak-crowned hat, pushed himself up to a sitting posture, deposited the hat upon his head, and rose to his feet with a faint moan of effort.

He stretched himself. There was an inch more than six feet of him, and he stretched it all. Who has watched a cat prepare for a mouse hunt by unlimbering each muscle in all its lithe body? Even so did Sabine extend his arms above his head and slowly writhe until there was not a fibre of him that had not been pulled and tested. Then he dropped his arms, gave one shrug which snapped everything into place, and looked about him as though he were seeing the other two men on the veranda for the first time.

They had observed his complicated method of getting up with a silent interest. Yet they did not venture a smile even when his back was turned. Some men are never ridiculous, just as some animals never are. A dog's antics may throw a spectator into fits of laughter, but who laughs at a cat? Even when it plays there is a touch of grim earnestness about its movements and it seems to be merely practising with its sharp claws and its needle teeth, waiting for real work to commence.

Men smile, too, at a clumsy bear, for all his might. But who will smile at the lounging grace, the ineffable malice of a panther hardly a tenth of the bear's size?

As for Sabine, he tripped going down the steps from the veranda, but there was something in the light-footed deftness of his recovery that again kept the two men who looked on from smiling. He sauntered across the square. Not until he was twenty steps away did the two turn to one another with a silent, grave glance of consultation. And yet neither of them had ever seen Sabine before!

They watched him turn and come to a pause at the base of the lordly statue of the Genoese. Then one of them cursed softly.

"Yes," said the other, as though a perfectly understandable comment had been made, "he looks like he might be about nine parts man!"

II

AS FOR him who was nine parts man, from beside the granite base of the statue he had turned and was surveying the façade of the building. He was really not far away, but the dull light gave an effect of distance. The two on the veranda, for instance, were retired to indistinct blurs under the shadow of the roof. The two lights in the barroom windows made all the rest of the hotel ghostly dim. All the face of the hotel was masked in shutters except for two rooms. One of those was in the corner, his own familiar room. The other was on the far corner.

He decided that he must do the thing for which he had come. He took out a cigarette and selected a match. The match he raked against the slick surface of the granite. It did not light, but he did not repeat the motion. Instead, he stared, fascinated, at the window of the room in the far corner of the building, for a lamp had suddenly appeared at it.

The lamp was raised straight up, and then it was carried across the window in a stroke which completed the figure of a cross. It then disappeared, only dimly illuminating the square of the window from the interior of the room.

Sabine walked back to the hotel.

He was a vastly different Sabine from him who had idled on the veranda of the hotel, however. The forgotten cigarette was crumbled between his first and middle fingers. He walked with a longer and a lighter stride. When he reached the steps of the veranda, he went up them with one bound, landing without a jar on the floor above.

In the doorway he paused. Throwing back his head, he looked over the square, flashed a glance at the two silent smokers on one side, and then turned into the interior of the building. He ran to the floor above, hurried down the hall, and tapped at the door of that corner room from which the light had showed.

He heard the murmur of a man and a woman speaking together, and then the door was opened by a woman in a white nursing costume. In the uncertain light and by the heavy shadow which fell across her face, he could see nothing of

her features, but when she spoke and asked him what he wanted in a harsh voice, it was as though the speaking enabled him to see her more clearly.

It was a broad, heavy-jowled face with pinched-up eyes and a low forehead, as forbidding a countenance as he had ever seen. And her little, pig-like eyes were glittering at him as she asked her question for the second time.

"Who are you? And what are you staring at now?"

He could think of no answer. Why, indeed, he had come up to this room he did not know, except that he had followed a blind impulse. And he was completely upset by meeting a woman. They were rare in that hotel. Indeed, men are the travelers in the West. The women remain at home.

Falling back upon that mysterious gesture which had brought the lamp into the window, he stepped back and made a long motion as though scraping a match against the wall behind him. The effect upon the woman was pronounced. She started forward a half-step, peering earnestly into his face, and nodding. Then she said, so loudly that it was obviously for effect upon the listener inside the room:

"You've got the wrong place. This is the room of Mr. Carpaez."

She withdrew and closed the door, while Sabine went slowly down the hall, halting every few steps. It was all very queer. There could be no doubt, now, that the man who lighted his cigarette at the base of the Columbus statue had, perhaps by the number of strokes of the match against the statue-base, conveyed a signal to the people in this room of the hotel, and that the signal had been answered by the movement of the lamp in the window.

Downstairs he found the proprietor of the hotel, Jud Haskins, a typical cow-puncher, except that he had lost a leg and, without that necessary member, had been forced to find an occupation on foot instead of in the saddle. Labor and ten years of patience brought him this reward. From his little office he directed the operations of Big Horn's only hotel.

The sight of Sabine at the door brought him out of his chair and hobbling on his wooden leg across the floor.

"What's up, Sabine?" he asked.

"Anything wrong? Have they been burning your bacon again?"

FOR, according to the experience of the past three years, it was a full three weeks earlier than Sabine's usual time of complete awakening, and yet here he was with his black eyes on fire, like mid-summer when he was in one of his moods of desiring "action."

"Nothing wrong, partner," said Sabine. "But—I'm thinking of stirring about a little. It's in the air, ain't it?"

"Why," said Haskins, "I dunno but you're right. Only, you usually take it easy a little longer than this, don't you? You most generally wait till the hot days before you think of showing your nose outside, much. Ain't that the fact?"

"Hot weather's got nothing to do with me," answered Sabine. "But a gent that's full of hell-fire and dollars all summer gets to remembering that he's past thirty and nothing saved in the winter. I've seen 'em that wouldn't bet one to ten on their own weight between Christmas and St. Patrick's Day, that would give you odds on the color of your own hair on the Fourth of July. That's why I lie around and take it easy, Jud. I don't want to waste my energy!"

He smiled at the hotel proprietor and the latter smiled brightly back at him. They had long ago decided that each other was worthy of great respect. Sabine, who usually talked not at all of his own affairs, had waxed free of tongue with Haskins, and what Haskins heard he locked up in the secret vaults of his memory.

Sometimes he had a terrible, cold feeling that Sabine was purposely testing him by making him the confidant of many facts about his past, waiting for the time when Haskins might repeat a single syllable of what had been told. For if once a single story were launched abroad, it would be quickly traced home to Haskins. And though his wooden leg did not at all interfere with his admirable gun-play, yet he had no desire to meet Sabine when the latter was on the war-path.

To add to his reticence, he had learned that a full half of the yarns Sabine told were the rankest inventions. One could never tell when to believe the gambler. For instance, he might be speaking

gospel truth now, when he declared that he liked hot weather simply because it loosened the strings of the pocketbooks of others. Or again, it might be that it was the first explanation that came handy to the tongue of the formidable youth.

"The fat-heads and the suckers crawl out of the shade when the sun goes north," went on Sabine. "And Sabine is waiting to ring the bell and call them into the pasture where the greenest grass is growing." He laughed joyously. He seemed quite incapable of feeling shame or remorse because of his profession.

"Let me tell you something," said the proprietor.

"Go as far as you like," answered Sabine. "I'll listen all day to any man. I learned how to pull a gun by sitting in the sun an hour watching the motions of a cat's foot when she was playing with a mouse. Ever watch a cat's foot, Haskins?"

"Don't suppose I've ever studied it."

"You've missed something. I'd rather sit and watch a cat's footwork than dance with the swellest girl that ever had freckles."

"If it comes down to that, it doesn't mean much," suggested Haskins. "You ain't much of a time-waster when it comes to girls."

Sabine threw back his head and laughed. He went through all the motions of the heartiest laughter, but the only sound was a deep, soft chuckle.

"Girls?" he said. "I like 'em all. The only reason that I don't start on one trail and stick to it is because I find the sign of so many other trails crossing it."

His black eyes gleamed and shone upon Haskins.

"And now what's brought you here?" asked the latter.

"To pass the time of day with you," said the gambler.

"Don't lie to me, son," said Haskins. "When you make a move that ain't called for and plumb necessary, cats will stop eating canned salmon when the tin is off! Loosen up, Sabine, and tell me what you want!"

Again Sabine laughed, positively rolling about, so profound seemed his enjoyment in the insight of his host. But he grew sober again in a trice.

"Went down the hall," he said, "and saw a woman at the door of the room in the far corner. Who's in that room, Haskins?"

The proprietor cursed softly in astonishment.

"You are a queer one," he declared. "You mean to say that you don't know anything about Carpaez?"

"Not a word."

"Why, the whole town has been talking about nothing else for two weeks."

"Maybe, but I've been asleep."

"Sit down, then, son, and I'll tell you a yarn that'll make your mouth water."

III

IT was about five year back that the don showed up," said Haskins. "He come with his son out of nowhere—meaning that he'd never been seen before in these parts. He was a shade over six feet tall, I guess. And he was built like a lion. He had a gray mustache that come out to curling points on each side, and he had a black beard that come to a point too. His eyebrows come up to a speck over each eye, so's he had the look of one of these pictures of the devil. He had the manners of a grand-duke. Not one of them flash-in-the-pan four-flushers that kowtow to the boss and give the hired man hell; no, sir, he talked to the blacksmith like he was a princee in disguise.

"Don Jose Carpaez—that's his name. He had a boy along with him, a kid at the tail end of his teens, full of pepper and vinegar. The lads around Big Horn, because he talked fancy English with a foreign twang to it, thought they'd ride him a bite. But they found out he had two hard fists and knew how to use 'em. His idea of a little daily morning exercise was beating up a couple of husky cowpunchers. And the old man would lick his chops when he seen the kid come prancing in for breakfast with an eye turning purple and black.

"My son," says he to the kid, Juan, 'all brave men fight, but only brave fools get black eyes.'

"Well, that all come about five years ago, when old Carpaez come through Big Horn looking for a place to settle down. He had a wad of money with

him, and he had the bad luck to fall into the hands of Guy Johnson. Little old Johnson got hold of him, talked him dizzy, spun him around, and woke him up owning the worst stretch of rocks and sand that ever went by the name of range land. Well, sir, it would of busted your heart to see the old boy cheated like that, and him never guessing it. He builds a little house, buys some cattle, and settles down as pleased as can be.

"That was all five years ago, and you ain't seen him in the time you been here because after the first two years he had so darned little cash to spend that he never came to town. All he done was to mortgage his soul to send his son away to college. Juan Carpaez is somewhere in the East stepping around with the best of them, but the old man is near starving on his ranch. And every vacation time, when Juan comes home, old Jose has been splurging to make the kid think that everything was going along well.

"In the meantime Guy Johnson had mortgages wrapped around the old don up to the neck. He was just on the edge of giving the strings a pull and squeezing Carpaez out, when there comes along a crash of another kind altogether.

"How come you ain't heard of it, I dunno. But you sure sleep sound while you're sleeping, Sabine! It was three weeks back. Jack Hargess and his brother, Bill were riding down the Montgomery Road right past the Carpaez place and they heard a crackling of guns blowing down the wind. So they up with their hosses and went hell-bent for the house. They hit it and tore inside and they found that four gents had just busted down the door to old Carpaez's bedroom.

"The old bulldog had tackled them hand to hand. He'd been blazing away with his revolver and doing not much more than make noise for quite a spell. But when it come to hand-to-hand work, he was right at home. He tore into them four skunks and messed 'em all up. Then the Hargess boys tangled with the merry-go-round. At the first yip they let out, the four turned and ran for it.

"Two of 'em got plumb away, but two had been so sliced up by Carpaez's knife that they couldn't make no respectable time and the Hargess boys just nacher-

ally salted them away with lead so's they'd keep from that day till they landed in hell-fire. One was Josh Hampton—you remember him that was sent up for robbing little Millbury?"

"Don't recollect it," said Sabine.

The other sighed.

"YOU got no talent for gossip," he declared. "Anyway, Josh was a bad one. He was spoiled right to the center. The one that dropped with Josh was a dark-skinned gent with a streak of soot in his eyes. You know what I mean, Sabine? Nigger blood, I guess, mixed up with the white. There was nothing on him to show where he came from—no name—no nothing.

"When the Hargess boys turned around to Don Jose, they found the cheery old devil sitting on the floor with his hack against the wall, smoking a cigarette and leaking blood like his skin was turned into a sieve. He thanked them hearty for what they done and then they tied him up. Before they finished he was fainting and it looked so serious that they sent a rush order for Doc Chalmers to come out from town.

"Doc come out, give him a look, and said that everything would be hunkydory if he had a little rest and quiet and good food, and the Hargess boys decided that he'd have them things if they had to cook for him themselves. But the next day along comes Guy Johnson asking for money that was overdue, with the law to back him up and foreclosure in his brain—the yaller hound!

"The Hargess boys told him plumb liberal what they thought about him, a gent that would talk of throwing a sick man out of his own house. Then they rigged up a buckboard and they took old Carpaez into town and fixed him up in my second-best room—you having the first. They wired to Juan, away off in his college, and they let him know what had happened, and he wired back that he was coming on the jump.

"But he ain't showed up yet. And it seems like the old man is grieving a good deal about the length of time that it takes Juan to come. Anyway, he ain't getting well the way he ought to. Hanging on and taking about as many steps backward as he takes forwards. And that's the whole story, Sabine. The woman you met at the door? That's the

nurse, Mary Chapel. You see, the Hargess boys are doing this job up brown. They're paying all the bills. And they sent clean to Salt Springs for this nurse.

"They said that the old Spaniard is the gamest old sport that ever used a knife and that he's going to live on the fat of the land if they can help him to it. Since he got to getting worse, lately, they've rented the next room to his and one of them stays there regular. That's the sort of white men the Hargess boys are. And I guess it won't do 'em no harm in these parts. If one of 'em wanted to run for sheriff tomorrow, I figure it would be unanimous, the way the boys would elect him. And now, Sabine, what's interested you in this deal?"

Sabine smiled.

"What interests me?" he answered. "I'll tell you, son, I'm going to save up this yarn and tell it again to my Sunday school class. It'll do 'em all good."

So he turned away and sauntered through the door while the proprietor, grinning and shaking his head, looked after him.

Into the barroom went Sabine. His coming caused a slight stir, for he was not one to advance unnoticed in any society, even when stern, strong-hearted whiskey was a rival in holding the public eye. But what interested Sabine was that the stir his coming had started was so very slight and ended so soon. For, as a rule, his advent into the barroom in the spring meant a fat addition of business to the hotel and the bartender.

Not that he was a particularly hard drinker himself, but because he treated generously left and right. So he took it for granted that the first drink he had bought in the matter of two or three months would bring a clustering group around him. But there was no such movement, and Sabine was angered to the soul.

He was, to tell the truth, rather a vain fellow. He loved admiration. He literally bloomed under it. But the anger of Sabine disappeared when he saw that the reason he was neglected was on account of the presence of that tall, smoky-eyed fellow in the peak-crowned hat who had so often made the signal from the base of the statue of Columbus.

He had taken the tactically commanding position in the exact center of the bar. And he held forth in a slow and

rather pompous style, speaking English after the fashion of one who thinks in a foreign language and then translates the exact words, but never into smooth and easy idiom.

"They were four or five centimeters long, sirs. That is, an inch and a half, say. Great, stupid heads, great soft bodies—phaugh!"

HE cast up his long, eloquent hands, raised his eyes, and shuddered in his aversion.

"But who could stop to look at one of the creatures? No, no! The ground had become alive! The dead earth had turned into the hopping, crawling things. Wherever you went, the ground poured after you. You could not escape, wherever you stood, there they were already, not by thousand or millions or billions—no, but they covered the ground as grass covers it."

"What the devil sends them?' we ask. We look up. The air is astir with hawks and with eagles. They sweep down. They eat till they are full. They rise again and fly. They eat again and again, but what they eat is nothing. It is not even a morsel crumbled from the loaf."

"Yonder a horse goes thirsty to the watering trough and, instead of drinking starts throwing his head up and down. All horses are fools. This one is only more foolish than others. I go to see why it will not drink. And there—the watering trough has no water! It is solid with the crawling locusts. *Dios! Dios! Madre! Madre!* The water is alive!

"Boots with polished surface are what one must wear. Otherwise they crawl over you—instantly you are covered. And the horrible little smell—"

He made another gesture.

"And where," said Sabine, "did all this happen?"

The tall man came out of his trance of disgust at the recollection and cast a glance of sharp rebuke at the interrupter and the interruption. The others, also, glowered upon Sabine.

"It's the Argentine he's telling about," said one eager listener. "He's talking about the locusts; they eat every doggone thing, Sabine! They'd even eat up cactus!"

This was communicated in hardly more than a whisper, but Sabine hardly heard.

He was staring fixedly at the man from Argentina, while his mind went from one picture to another—this handsome, smoke-eyed lazy fellow at the bar, and the pig-faced woman in the room above. What was there between them?

IV

PERHAPS there was no connecting link outside of his imaginings, yet he had fairly ample proof that the man communicated with the woman, and that he dared not make those communications by word of mouth but kept at a distance and delivered his message by the means of signs. The secrecy of that method implied guilt.

He was sharply recalled to himself by the purring and angered voice of the man of Argentina saying:

“You see little in my words; you see much in my face. What is it that you see, sir?”

Sabine's lips parted as he smiled. They exposed two even rows of teeth of the most perfect regularity, the most dazzling whiteness. Not a spark of mirth appeared in his black eyes. But in his fingertips, and in the bones of his arms, there arose a mighty volition, tingling and aching and urging him to fight.

In another instant he would have launched an insult, but in the interval he caught sight of the pale, agonized face of the bartender. He remembered that the poor devil had opened the place on shares with the hotel owner, and that all his capital was invested in the furnishings. Suppose a gun-fight wrecked the place?

“Go on with your yarn, partner,” said Sabine kindly. “I ain't going to bother you none.”

And he turned and left the barroom.

He was not displeased with himself. It rather tickled his vanity to see that he could make such a ready concession to another man, a stranger, without shaming himself in the eyes of the men of Big Horn. That murmur which arose as he left the bar was a murmur of relief, and before the man from the Argentine was five minutes older he would understand that in the person of Sabine he had narrowly missed a grim danger.

But by the time he had finished his

supper in the noisy dining-room big Sabine had well-nigh forgotten the entire episode of the man, the lighted match, the woman. For it was not his affair. He lingered a little over the story of old Carpaez, but this also became of diminishing interest. When he went up to his room he was ready to sleep. Summer, after all, had not yet come.

Before sleeping, he sat for a time in front of the window and stared out over the straggling square of Big Horn's lights, and above these at the black mountains, molded softly against a blue-black sky, and higher still to the bright mottling of stars. Such moments as these brought immense peace and content to the strange soul of Sabine.

There were times when he felt that his talents were wasted in the West. There were times when he envisioned Sabine in the midst of the gamblers of Manhattan, with the stakes climbing high and the hours getting small. One such night might make his fortune. But he knew that he could never snuff out of his nostrils the smell of sun burning the desert. Neither could he ever get from his mind the cold shining of the stars at night. The mountain desert had made him and he could never escape.

That was small punishment to Sabine. It only meant that he had to shake off his dreams of cities and millions, now and again. He did it tonight without effort and had risen from the window to turn to his bed when he stopped with his hand upon the covers to turn them back.

He stood up straight, frowning. One part of his brain had been working all this time in protest at his indolence. One part of his soul was in revolt; and now that revolt began to work into his conscious brain. Something was wrong. Something was decidedly wrong.

Then he saw the connecting link which tied the man of the Argentine and the woman of the brutal face to the story of Don Jose Carpaez. For had he not been told that one of the assailants of Carpaez was a dark-skinned man, a stranger who had never before been seen in those parts? Yes, a dark-skinned man with smoky eyes.

Such a description might have served for the man he had seen in the barroom. And had there not been two who fled in safety from the Hargess boys?

Once more the sleepy spring was banished from the mind of Sabine. If the man from the Argentine had attacked old Carpaez once, might he not attempt to attack again, and this time through the medium of the nurse?

HOW that woman could be a bedside nurse, how any patient could recover under the surveillance of those glittering little evil eyes, were mysteries to Sabine. It became vitally necessary that he look in upon her at her work. He wanted to see her as she leaned above the sufferer. He must see her in that capacity, and then he would be able to draw his own conclusions.

He leaned from the window. The roof of the veranda began not three feet below. It was utterly simple to double up his legs, pass his long body through the window and then work down the shelving roof until he came to the far corner. There he flattened against the wall and looked about him on the street.

Horsemen were coming and going regularly. Voices called here and there. By starlight and by lamplight combined, he could make out forms, almost faces. It seemed incredible that they should not see him as clearly. But he remembered that he was completely withdrawn from the light and that he stood against the drab wall unrelieved. Only a noise or a shaft of light would call attention to him.

Relieved in that respect, he turned toward the window. What he saw was partially veiled or wholly cut off by the blowing back and forth of the thin curtain, but he made out a bed and upon it the profile of a white-headed, white-mustached, black-bearded man of fifty-five. His features were now greatly emaciated, so that the cheek-bones thrust out prominently, the eyes seemed puffed, and the hands which lay crossed upon his breast were almost colorless.

Certainly there was cause for the anxiety of those two good men, the Hargess brothers, who had placed him here under the doctor's care. If ever Sabine had seen a man at death's door, this was one.

Bill Hargess was even now reading a newspaper at one side of the room, but presently, covering a great yawn, he dropped the paper and rose. Sabine heard him directing Mary Chapel to

call him if the patient showed signs of sinking. Then he turned to an adjoining door and disappeared. Sabine looked after him with oddly mingled emotions.

Bill Hargess and his brother represented the force which was most hostile to the gambler in Big Horn. More than once they had suggested that it would be well to persuade a character as notorious as Sabine to seek other quarters. And though they had not yet been able to persuade the sheriff, the time might very well come when the two of them could succeed.

Hitherto Sabine had hated them wholeheartedly, with the feeling that they were blunt-headed fellows incapable of understanding an artist. Now he revised his opinion. There was something to them. This unsuspected bigness of heart in them opened his eyes. He began to respect them more. Indeed, like all of those who prey upon society, he despised those who did not fight against him.

No sooner was Bill Hargess gone than the woman approached the bed, leaned over, and raised the hand of the sick man. When she released it, it fell back heavily, limply, upon his breast. And this fall barely induced him to open his heavy eyes and stare up at her. She attempted to smile. It was a mirthless grimace which kept Sabine shivering even after she had turned her back and started for the door.

That glimpse of her evil face determined him upon radical action of some sort. He only waited to strive to plan a reasonable course. In the meantime he had watched with interest the maneuvers of a great black cat which was curled up on the feet of the Don. As the woman left the room, it rose, arching its back with hair on end, but a signal from Mary Chapel, as she closed the door, had caused it to sink back into its former position.

Its head was not now lowered in sleep, however. After looking about for some time, it turned its great yellow eyes full upon the window at which Sabine stood, while its tail began to curl from side to side. It gave the uncanny effect of lying upon guard during the absence of its mistress from the room. And it seemed to have instantly detected the presence of an enemy. If Sabine had been filled with dislike by the appearance of Mary Chapel, he was now inspired to a perfect horror of loathing.

NOT once did the great cat, fully half again as large as any Sabine had ever before seen, stir from its place. Its big round head remained raised high and the eyes were staring steadily. When Sabine looked into them for an instant, he felt almost hypnotized. The yellow was not fixed and steady. It was a swirling light, and after gazing at those eyes for a moment the beast seemed to increase in size, seemed to draw nearer.

Sabine forced his head to one side and found himself panting as he looked away into the pure and open air of the night. When he looked back again, Mary Chapel was returning with a steaming pitcher in one hand and a tall glass in the other. She poured the glass full of chocolate. The heavy, sweet aroma blew to Sabine outside the window.

Leaning by the bed, she raised old Carpaez a little and presented the glass to his lips. The steaming liquid burned his skin apparently. At least he winced away with a muffled exclamation and Mary Chapel, allowing him to sink back onto the pillow again, stood over him with a scowl of perfect malignancy. The blood of Sabine ran cold again, but the horror for the sake of Carpaez was turned to fear for his own safety.

The black cat had crossed the bed to its mistress and rubbed against her with arched back until she looked down to it. Then it leaped to the floor, went straight to the window beyond which Sabine stood, and, leaping onto the sill, whined in Sabine's face!

For a moment, nearly yielding to a vast wave of commingled disgust and horror and fear, Sabine was on the point of jerking out his revolver and dashing the butt against the head of the creature. Instead, he shrank back, and, hearing the steps of the woman approaching rapidly, he glided around the corner of the building just as Mary Chapel thrust her head out of the window.

"What's up here?" grumbled the nurse. "What d'ye see, Betty dear? What d'ye see?"

A faint "meow" from the cat answered this appeal, and the cold sweat started on Sabine's forehead. It was as if the woman and her strange pet could actually exchange thoughts in their speech.

After a moment he heard her steps re-

treat, and again Sabine returned to his post of vantage. Mary Chapel was now on the far side of the room. But the black cat, from a point of vantage on a chair nearby, kept a steady pair of gleaming eyes fixed upon the window. The instant Sabine appeared, it stood up, arched its back, and lashed its sides with its tail.

Nearer at hand, on a little stand just beside the window, stood the glass of chocolate where the wind could blow across it and cool it. Above it rose a slender glass vase which the kindness of the Hargess boys kept filled with green stuff.

A gust of wind brushed heavily against the foliage, tilted the vase a little, and when the pressure was released the vase settled back with a faint and musical chatter against the top of the stand.

But it was the glass of chocolate upon which Sabine fixed his eyes with the most interest. The pale and set features of Mary Chapel as she had offered that drink to the invalid were again present to his mind, and again that sensation of coldness and of unspeakable loathing, which had passed over him so many times in the past few moments, swept up his body. Of course there might be nothing in his singular fears.

Yet he reached through the window, despite the fact that the black cat, at sight of his hand, actually spat and raised an angry paw. Mary Chapel, leaning over to pick the newspaper from the place where it had fallen on the floor, muttered: "What, Betty? What, girl?"

But before she had straightened and turned to look, Sabine had tipped the vase so that it fell in and struck the glass of chocolate. Both fell crashing to the floor.

Sabine, fleeing instantly to the corner of the house, heard the angry outcry of the nurse. A little later there was the sound of glass being swept up. He was about to return to his place when he heard the voice of the woman crying loudly:

"Betty, you fool, stop licking up that stuff! Where is the wise devil in you now?"

APPARENTLY the cat had been tasting the chocolate as it lay in shallow pools upon the floor. But that harsh warning from the woman confirmed the

fears which had been forming in the mind of Sabine. He stole down the roof once more, and directly beneath the window, stooping low. But as he passed it his shoulder was caught and strongly held.

He turned with a start and above him was the convulsed face of Mary Chapel, gone white with fear and devilish with passion. At sight of Sabine she released her grip with a gasp.

"You!" she said. "You!" and she turned and glanced quickly into the interior of the room, as though dreading that they might be spied upon.

She turned back to him as he rose.

"It was you then, that knocked over the vase?" she asked.

"It was the wind. Not me."

"No?" All the while her eyes were working quickly back and forth and up and down as though she were trying to look around a corner and see the truth about him. "Who are you?" she said eagerly, at last.

She wound her nervous fingers into his shirt and held him.

"Will you talk? Who are you in this game, Sabine? Why ain't I been told about you?"

Sabine laid a finger on his lips.

"D'you want the whole town to see us talking together like this?" he asked.

She started back but returned almost at once.

"Tell me one thing," she said. "Is it the little fellow, the little fellow with the yellow hair and the blue eyes, that's sent you here?"

"That's him," said Sabine.

She shrank back and shook her man-sized fist in his face.

"Damn you!" she breathed. "Damn you for making a fool out of me!"

She jerked the window down and then the shade behind it.

Sabine, realizing that he had fallen into a simple trap, was still determined that his share in this unknown drama was not finished. He hurried down the roof to his own window, dragged himself through it, and then hurried down the hall until he came to the Carpaez' door. He tried the knob. It was fast. He knocked heavily.

"Who's there?" gasped a husky voice from the room.

He waited, grinding his teeth.

"Here," he heard the woman saying.

"It's cooler now. Drink this. This'll hearten you!"

Against the door, on the inside, there was a quick, light scratching sound as though the great black cat were striving to get out at him.

It was the crowning horror.

"Don't drink!" shouted Sabine.

"Don't drink, Carpaez!"

At the same time he drew back the width of the door, crouched, and then hurled himself forward, bunching his body behind his right shoulder. That cushion of muscle struck the door near the lock. Behind it all his powerful body was driving. The impact tore the steel lock through its surrounding wood. It flung the door wide and sent it crashing back against the wall. Sabine plunged to the center of the room.

What he saw was Carpaez, lifted in bed on the arm of Mary Chapel, with a fresh glass of the chocolate at his lips. At sight of him she recoiled, trembling with fury. Big Hargess came to the door of his room, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, and to him she pointed out Sabine.

"Are you going to allow that, Mr. Hargess?" she whined. "Are you going to let a drunken gambler like Sabine break in on me and—"

Her voice broke. It was rage that made her mute, but it sounded very like fear. Hargess was wild with anger at once. He stalked up to Sabine.

"I've heard about your damned assurance before," said the rancher. "But this is the first sample of it that I've seen. And I'll throw you out of the room unless you go now, Sabine. I'll throw you out and I'll have you rolled in tar later on by the boys! Now get out!"

Sabine drew a great breath. Hargess was a big man, a great-shouldered, thick-chested giant of a man, and a fight with him would be a pleasure to be remembered for many a long year. There would be no gun-work. Hargess was notably one who made his way by the dint of heavy fists liberally bestowed. All the long, striking muscles up and down the arms of Sabine writhed into bunches and slipped away again like running water over ridges of rock.

BUT yonder was the pale-faced old man, peering about him with faint

eyes and saying in a feeble and yet dignified voice:

"My friends—my dear friends—you take too much trouble on my behalf—"

The fighting lust dissolved from the heart of big Sabine. He pointed to the sick man.

"Hargess," he said, "look yonder at Carpaez."

"I've seen him, and what the devil of it?" said the other, hotter and hotter as it was apparent that the gambler was backing down. "I'm going to have an explanation in full for this outrage. Sabine. Why did—"

"Damn you!" exploded Sabine. "You can have all the explanation you want later on. But I'll tell you what I've come here to see: that is, that Carpaez doesn't drink that chocolate!"

Hargess blinked at him.

"You've gone crazy, Sabine. Or are you joking?"

"Joking? I tell you, Hargess, if he drinks that he'll be dead before morning!"

There was a gasping breath from Hargess. He turned to Mary Chapel and found her drawn back against the wall with the black cat pressed against her feet and spitting viciously at the two men who seemed to be threatening the mistress.

"I dunno what's in his head, Mary," said the rancher. "What's he driving at?"

"He's crazy," said Mary Chapel. "You've called him that yourself, and you're right."

"Crazy or not," said Sabine, "it don't cost much to have somebody find out what's in that chocolate. I want that pitcher!"

But as he stepped forward to take it, Mary Chapel caught the pitcher from the table and cast it through the window. It broke with a crash on a stone in the street.

"If there's going to be suspicions," she cried, "I'll not stand for it!"

"Stand for what, Mary?" asked the rancher. "There's sure no harm in what he just asked to have done. If that chocolate was all right—"

"All right?" screamed Mary Chapel. "And what do you think might be wrong with it? But am I one to have folks spying at what I do with my own hands?"

"Look at the cat!" exclaimed Sabine. "That cat licked up some of the chocolate that fell on the floor. You see where it lay before Miss Chapel wiped it up? The cat licked some of that up. Now watch it!"

The black cat threw itself suddenly rigid and then fell in convulsions upon the floor. Mary Chapel with a wail, dropped on her knees and tried to take the poor creature in her arms. But her hand was ripped open by the claws of the beast, which had to be wrapped in a towel and carried out in this fashion, the nurse keeping up a running fire of imprecations upon Sabine and of appeals to a merciful heaven to spare the life of her cat.

Her footfalls died away as she fled downstairs to get hot water for her sick pet. Hargess, bewildered and horrified, would have kept her in the room, but Sabine held him back.

"It's no use holding her up," said Sabine. "Let her save her cat if she can. Our main job is to see if we can save Carpaez."

"Save him? From what? What the devil is it all about, Sabine? My head's spinning."

"What's sickened the black cat, Hargess?"

"Poison?" cried the rancher. "You mean to say that she-devil has been—"

"I don't say anything," said Sabine. "But it looks tolerable to me as though the old boy was being slowly poisoned. This evening they got hurry-up orders and they planned to finish him up quick. That chocolate was the stuff that was to turn the trick. They had him weakened down to a point where they could kill him at one wallop and nobody would think much of it. It would look nacheral enough. There'd be no post mortem."

Hargess dropped upon one knee by the bed, the better to peer into the face of the sick man.

The brow of Carpaez was wrinkled and clouded with a frown. But the stimulus of the violent scene which had passed in the room had brought his mind out of the clud which enwrapped it. One hand touched the arm of Hargess on one side of his bed. The other fell upon the hand of Sabine on the opposite side. And the skin, to the gambler's sensitive touch, was icy cold and thick and harsh.

"My dear friend Hargess," said the invalid. "you have already done too much for me. My own son has forgotten me in this time of need—but you have done too much. You shall not imperil yourself for me as you have just been doing. I saw you struggling—with someone coming to attack me—" He laid his hand across his forehead. "My mind goes a blank there," he said faintly. "I can remember no more. Except that there was danger, and that you were here, Hargess. Therefore I knew that I must be safe."

BIG HARGESS reached across the bed and closed the hand of the sick man upon that of the gambler.

"You feel the hand of that man?" he asked.

"Yes," nodded Carpaez.

"It's the hand of another friend," said Hargess. "It's the hand of a man that's just saved your life. And, unless I read the sign plumb wrong, it's the hand of a gent that you'll see a lot more of before you're through with him."

"My brain is spinning," whispered Carpaez. "I shall know how to thank him in the morning. But now—"

His hands relaxed. His eyes closed. He had fainted.

VI

THE morning, if it did not bring to Don Jose Carpaez the strength to know and to thank the man who had saved his life, brought to his door a big youth in his early twenties with the brown face and the strong, steady eyes and the elastic step of an athlete who has trained in the open. Aside from that, his appearance was by no means prepossessing.

His clothes seemed to have been, at one time, good in make and material and fashionable in cut; but time and hard usage combined had ruined them. Great grease stains blotched the coat and trousers. His collarless shirt was turned in at the throat, and, though the throat itself was clean enough to suggest recent washing, the shirt was black with grease and grime.

The once swagger hat was battered to a shapeless pulp which flopped awkward-

ly upon his head. The toe of one shoe was gouged open, very much as though the bark of wire had caught in it and slashed it wide; the heel had been completely ripped away from the other.

This was the man, nevertheless, who knocked loudly upon the door of Carpaez' room the next morning. That door was opened by Sabine. Down the hall Sabine heard a mumbling of angry voices. He guessed that the tattered stranger had worked considerable havoc with the outposts before he was able to break through the lines and reach to this point.

"Who are you?" said Sabine.

"It's more to the point to say, 'Who are you?' said the other, panting. "Let me through the door!"

He thrust out a big, square, lower jaw.

Thereupon Sabine discovered that they were of a like bigness. Sweeping the form of the other, he discovered likewise the athletic mold of the newcomer. And Sabine smiled upon him, that smile which showed his white teeth and which left his black eyes unlighted.

"Son," said Sabine, "didn't your mamma never teach you not to talk so fast? Before you start to bust in here, tell me why you're coming."

The latter glanced over his shoulder. Footsteps were hurrying toward him. Angry voices were growing louder.

"Here," said he, "is a good reason."

Without turning his head, he smote Sabine squarely upon the point of the jaw.

Though taken brutally and most unfairly by surprise, Sabine was in the act of jerking his head back when the blow landed. Otherwise, he might have been completely stunned. Even as it was, the blow landed with sufficient force to knock him flat upon his back. The big stranger leaped into the room.

Had he stopped wide of Sabine, all would have been well. But he stepped too close, and that was a great mistake. There are certain of the tribe of cats which fight with more deadly effect when lying upon their backs than when on all fours. While Sabine, lying prone, might not be as effective as when he stood erect, he was still not out of the battle. The man of the ragged clothes had stepped almost literally upon an intermeshing of barbed wire. The first step tangled him. The second brought him

crashing to the floor.

As he fell, with an oath of surprise and anger, he tried for a strangle hold, whipping his left forearm under Sabine's right shoulder, and then clamping his left hand upon the throat of the other. But the surface of Sabine's skin seemed to be oiled. The hand slipped from his throat at the first shrug of his shoulder. Before the stranger could draw breath, the surprising fellow had writhed into a new position, half propped upon his left elbow while he smote up with his right fist, a sharp and cruel blow.

It did not stun the big stranger, but it set him back upon the floor. Before he could move again the battle was taken out of the hands of Sabine. Half a dozen men, headed by the hotel proprietor, dived through the door, spilled at random over the newcomer, and flattened him under a pile of bodies.

Sabine rose and pitched them right and left until he came to the form of the man of the ragged clothes, now with most of the wind pressed out of him. Sabine lifted him to his feet and dragged him into the hall, followed by the others. There, too numb and breathless to fight back, the youth leaned against the wall, panting heavily, and stared at Sabine. And Sabine stared back.

UPON the side of his jaw a sore place was aching. He was aware that a lump was forming. He knew, still further, that, had that blow landed a fraction of an inch nearer the point of his chin, he would have collapsed upon the floor and not recovered for some time. Therefore he viewed the tall young man with growing respect.

"What in hell," said Sabine slowly, "is the meaning of all this?"

"He busted up to the desk," said the owner of the hotel, "and said he wanted to see Jose Carpaez. I told him that he couldn't do it, because Carpaez was sick and because you were in charge and wouldn't let anybody but the doctor come near. He wanted to know who the devil you were, and before I could tell him, he bolted for the stairs. I hollered to Jordan and Kilpatrick, here, to stop him. They tackled him together, but he turned into gunpowder, blew up, and kept on going!"

A growl from Jordan and another

from Kilpatrick verified this portion of the tale.

"They stopped him long enough for some of the rest of us to catch up. We nailed him again on the stairs. There was another blowing up, and he got clean up here. For a fighting fool I ain't seen his like in some years!"

Sabine moistened his lips and regarded the stranger with a beneficent eye.

"We were just warming up to our work," he said. "You sure spoiled a nice party by busting in between us that way. Now, son, tell us what's your rush to see old Carpaez?"

"Why should I explain?" said the other haughtily. But his dignity was impaired by his lack of wind and presently he gasped, "I am Juan Carpaez—let me in to him!"

Here Haskins interpolated an incredulous exclamation and, stepping close, he jerked the other around until the light from the window at the end of the hall struck full upon his face. Then he stepped back, shaking his head.

"I dunno," said Haskins. "It might be. I ain't seen him in three years, and he's sure growed a lot. What sign have you got that you're young Carpaez dressed up like a hobo in a play?"

"Here, Haskins," said the other. "Perhaps you remember?"

Drawing up his coat sleeve, he displayed on the forearm a great curved scar, several inches in length.

"By the Lord," said Haskins, "I remember it now. That was where the crazy greaser sliced you four years back. Carpaez, I'm sure sorry that I've treated you this way, but it was the clothes that fooled me. I'd always seen you dressed up slick—and I ain't seen you at all for three years!"

"It's nothing at all," said the latter. He shook hands heartily with Haskins. "I ought to thank you for taking such good care of my father that everybody can't break in on him. Now I suppose I may see him?"

He turned triumphantly upon Sabine only to find that that worthy was in the act of lighting a cigarette. He completed that act, blew a wedge of sweet-scented smoke toward the ceiling, and then snapped the burned match to a distance.

"You may not," said Sabine com-

placently. "I got no orders from the doctor to let you in. Your dad's sick, kid. You hear? He's been busting his heart for three weeks because you ain't showed up. Now that you've come—well, I'll wait for doctor's orders before—"

"I'll see you damned before I see you keep me out of that room," said Juan Carpaez.

His bright blue eyes burned and snapped at Sabine, but the gambler merely dropped one hand upon his hip, just above the butt of his revolver, and he continued smoking.

"There's been about enough noise, I reckon," he said. "I've heard you damn me, son. And I won't have to write that down in a book to remember it. But you and me can have our arguments later on. Right now, you and the rest of the bunch are going to clear out of this hall. Noise may kill the old man as sure as bullets."

THAT last sentence brought a quick change in the manner of Carpaez. All the violence disappeared. Without a word of protest, he allowed Sabine to go back into the room alone and close the door. Young Juan Carpaez remained in the hall with Haskins, entreating him to say what had happened and what the condition of his father was now. The others had now gone downstairs. Haskins took Juan up to the end of the hall and there confided the whole strange story.

"It's a fairy book yarn, Carpaez," he said. "You never heard of Sabine. You went away to school before he landed in these parts and began to make history every summer. Anyway, Sabine seen some sort of a signal flashed by a gent named Nuñez Mendoza to the hotel and saw the answer flashed from the window of your father's room. It looked queer to Sabine, so he started investigating, and the long and short of it was that he seen Mary Chapel, the nurse that was taking care of your father, bring in some chocolate that Sabine managed to spill off the table, because he figured there was something wrong with it.

"Then he tore around to the room, busted the door in—it's only got a latch right now—and stopped the nurse from giving your father a drink of the stuff

that was left in the pitcher. A rumpus started. In the middle of it, the cat got convulsions and died. Carpaez, the chocolate was poisoned! Mary Chapel was arrested. The doc came and gave your father a blood test and found that he was soaked full of arsenic. That was why he hadn't got well of his wounds!

"Then they started to look for Nuñez Mendoza, but Nuñez had slipped out. He came back in the middle of the night, sliced through the wall of the jail and let Mary Chapel out, and both of them are clean gone this morning. Right now your father has about an even break to get well or not get well. What they figure is that Mendoza bribed Mary Chapel to use the poison slow and sure, so's nobody would ever suspect that it had anything to do with your father. But he got tired of waiting. Last night he decided to finish things up quick, and she mixed a knockout dose. Just by luck Sabine happened to catch the flash of that signal."

"That's the short of why Sabine won't let folks bust in on your father. He's taken this case into his own hands. And Sabine has a pretty good pair of hands, as you'll be apt to learn later on!"

"He should have knocked me on the head with the butt of his gun," said the youngster miserably. "The quickest way to get rid of me would have been the best way! What a fool I've been!"

"The main thing," said Haskins solemnly, "is why you ain't showed up all this time?"

"Because I've had to fight my way every mile that I came west and south," said Juan Carpaez. "But that's a long yarn."

VII

AS A matter of fact, it was so long a tale that it did not come forth for a whole week. At the end of that time, Juan and Sabine sat in the sunshine that streamed through the windows of the bedroom and saw the doctor raise a finger at them. They followed his gesture into the hall.

"He's through the thiek of it," he told them. "He's sleeping soundly. From now on that constitution of his

will bring him back to his old self rapidly. Stay away from him; stay out here and don't go in until you hear a sound from him."

It was while they walked up and down the corridor that young Carpaez told the story. As soon as the telegram from Bill Hargess came to him, he had hastily left college and, with a wallet filled with cash, taken a night train for New York, there to get an overland to the West.

When he awakened in the morning, he found that his money had been stolen in the hotel. He could not delay even to complain, however. He decided to beat his way across the country on the trains. Other men had done it before him and he believed that he could give as good an account of himself as they had done. But he had not traveled a day on the rods before he discovered that he was being dogged across the continent by two villainous looking fellows.

One misfortune followed another. In one terrible experience he was nearly knocked off the rods by a stone tied to the end of a rope and allowed to trail under the car by some enemy lodged on the top of it. He escaped from that peril only to be arrested on a charge of vagrancy at the next town he reached. There he was lodged in jail for five days before he managed to break out and resume his journey.

Finally he had reached Big Horn, sadly worn and battered, to be sure, and raging with a desire to, as soon as possible, retrace his steps, find the two who hand hounded him on the way West, and pay them in full.

Sabine listened to the narrative with a growing interest. He had found much to like in the other during the week of intimate association while they watched over old Carpaez. Now, as he learned the truth about that slow journey home, and as he looked into the brown face and the keen blue eyes of the other, he felt, for the first time in his life, that he had found a man whom he would be glad to have as his partner.

Hitherto he had played a lone hand. But, very gradually, he began to see that there might be a value in close companionship.

"It sort of looks," he said thoughtfully, "as though there was a gang working to get rid of both you and your

father. Look here, Juan; did you ever fall foul of a gent named Mendoza from the Argentine?"

"From the Argentine? I don't remember. We left there five years ago and came here. There may have been a Mendoza there who was an enemy, but I don't think so. My father had only two enemies in Argentina."

"Two?" said Sabine, intensely interested.

Carpaez looked earnestly at his friend. "I have told my father," he said, "that I would never repeat the story. But surely we have no secrets from you. When he is well, he will be the first to tell you with his own words. I'm only anticipating him by a few days.

"It goes back, Sabine, to the time when my father was a rich man in Argentina. Very, very rich. His land grant came from Spain in the days when they gave land according to the cattle that one brought into the country. The first Carpaez to come to Argentina brought great shipments of cattle, so he got great square leagues of land. His *estancia* became big and rich. Those who followed him increased the camp. It seemed as though every Cordoba was bound to prosper in our new country—"

"Cordoba?" echoed Sabine.

The other frowned, but then continued.

"YOU may as well know all the truth. Cordoba is our name and not Carpaez. When my father left Argentina he took the new name. The Cordobas who lived like princes in Argentina—he could not bear to have them beggars in other places by the same name. So he took that of Carpaez. The Cordobas, then, grew rich in Argentina. They had numberless cattle. They owned blooded horses, a great house in Buenos Aires, railroad stock—in fact, there was nothing into which their hands did not dip. As the fortune increased, it became necessary that a closer financial genius be used to manage it. My father, you see, was no financier. When he was still a young man and came into the estate, he took in two young secretaries. The idea was simple and beautiful. One was to act as a check upon the other. Each had bookkeepers who kept the accounts of the estate.

"If one took a false step it would be

discovered in the accounting rendered by the other. The majordomos of the *estancia*, the managers of the various properties, made their reports to the two secretaries, Ricardo Romero and Guillermo Solis. And Solis and Romero made their reports and recommendations separately to my father.

"It seemed perfect and my father, who hates business, sat back and forgot about his properties. So it went on smoothly, wonderfully smoothly for year after year while Romero and Solis became middle-aged men of family, still in the same positions, drawing down larger and larger salaries, growing rich.

"One would have said that they were growing rich because they had made such wise selections for the investment of money. But the investments they had made here and there for my father were not so good. Just how peculiar they were, he did not notice for many years. You see, they could cover the fact that they had employed vast quantities of the money by the way they presented their accounts. My father hardly glanced at these. All he knew was that he could draw out as much cash as he pleased whenever he pleased. That was enough for him.

"Also, he knew that more land had been added to the estate. That was also enough for him. Only an accident made him wish to come to the assistance of a friend who had suffered tremendous financial losses. It was Carbal. Perhaps you remember the rebellion of Carbal? No? Well, it was not such a great thing. But Carbal rebelled. Some of his family had been treated badly, and Carbal rose. His poor little rebellion was overthrown at once and he was forced to flee from the country and became a penniless man abroad. But my father knew him well. He determined to buy in the estate of Carbal when the government sold it, and then he would work the property and send the entire income to poor Carbal—a very generous idea, eh?

"But when he attempted to get the money, he discovered that he had not enough, and that it would be hard to get enough. He looked about and found that here and there upon his estate mortgages had been plastered. In fact, he had from time to time signed the documents which his secretaries placed before him. He had thought nothing about them.

"Now, alarmed, he began a close investigation, and he discovered that he had been plucked to the extent of millions of dollars by his secretaries. He looked up their resources. He found that both of them were very rich men. They had grown by magic while managing his estates.

"He went over their books. But the books of the one agreed perfectly with the books of the other. Of course it is plain to see what they had done. They had simply put their heads together and decided that what was simply a good living if they remained honest and apart would become a gold mine if they worked in co-ordination. So they had worked together to plunder the estate of Cordoba.

"Ricardo Romero was the leader. He is a man of iron, a big, broad, smiling man of iron. He is full of laughter and cold-blooded wiles. He is fond of birds and little children. He is always playing games—that is Romero. That is that devil! Romero was the man who planned everything and showed Solis what must be done if they were to get rich.

"The honesty of Romero appeared only in the equality of the division of the spoil which he made with Solis. Each of them received exactly one-half.

"As for Solis himself, he is quite a different sort. He is a thin-faced, fish-eyed hypocrite. He is devout. He prays much. He has built churches. He is that sort of thief, you see, Sabine? He talks little; he appears to think much. That is Señor Guillermo Solis. But he is as black a devil as Romero!

"When my father began to press on and discover the truth about them, and saw how they had pulled the wool over his eyes and how they had crucified their benefactor, he became enraged.

"YOU don't know my father when he is enraged, Sabine. He is fifty-five, or nearly that, now. And his hair is white with his troubles. But his strength is still tremendous when he is angered. He is a fighter. He flies for the throat like a bulldog. Yes, he is like a lion, that father of mine.

"I remember that terrible passion that he fell into when the blow fell and he made the discovery, though my mother and I did not know it at the time. We could hear him stamping up and down

his room. Once he threw a chair the length of the room and it was found smashed to splinters. Sometimes we heard him groan.

"He came out with hollow eyes and rushed to find Solis and Romero, to denounce them and throw them into prison. But at the door of his house he was stopped. He was arrested by an officer of the law on the charge of treason.

"That night the news came of the charges. The devilish Solis and the fiend Romero had informed the government of the intentions of my father to give money to support Carbal, and in so doing afford succor to an enemy of the state. The newspapers made a furor over it. It was said that my father had merely been waiting until the revolt of poor Carbal showed some headway. Then he intended to throw all of his vast resources upon the side of the rebels.

"There was a wave of popular anger, supported by the malicious lies published by two papers financed by Romero and Solis, and the trial of my father ended in his sentence to confiscation of his estate and a nominal term of three months in prison. It was held that the loss of his property would be punishment enough.

"So he was sent to prison. My mother died of grief and shame, and the estate was sold to the highest bidder — or, rather, bidders — who happened to be Solis and Romero, buying in the property with the money they had gained through speculation in its management. Sabine, do you talk Spanish?"

"Yes."

"Then you know that only in Spanish are the words found in which to describe such demons. My father left Argentina at the end of his term of imprisonment and went to Spain, where he sold the old estates of the Cordoba family and, with the money and a new name, came to the United States. Here he expected, even at his age, to make a new beginning out of an old ruin. But all fortune has been against him. Now he lies barely past the point of death in a room and on a bed which the charity of strangers has furnished for him."

Juan dropped his face in his hands. Sabine, to whom such violent betrayal of emotion was distasteful, made his eyes a blank, incapable of seeing through the screen of cigarette smoke. There was a

Latin flexibility and impetuosity of temper in young Cordoba with which he could never be in sympathy. But under the surface he knew there was a solid manliness which he respected with all his heart.

"Juan," he said after a moment, when Cordoba again looked up, "where do you think we'll be a month from today?"

The other shook his head.

"Somewhere out to sea," said Sabine.

He threw his cigarette out the window and shrugged his shoulders.

"Without a hoss," he said, "I dunno how I'll make out, but you and me and the Don have sure got to start trailing for Argentina."

"Never!" exclaimed Juan. "My family has been disgraced there! Never!"

"Hell!" said Sabine. "Never is quite a spell. If a gent beat me out of a man-sized wad of money like that—or even if it was five cents' worth of pipe tobacco—I'd go back and foller his trail till I wore my feet off. But that ain't the real point of what I'm saying. The real point, partner, is that there's something stirred up down in Argentina that'd be good for you to see."

"You do not know us, Sabine," said the Spaniard. "We shall never return to be shamed before our countrymen. Besides, they have cast us off, and therefore we cast off them!"

"Rot!" said Sabine. "That sounds pretty, but it don't mean nothing, partner. A country may throw off a man, but a man can't never forget his country. Ain't that right? You've dreamed about Argentina a pile of times, eh?"

Juan sighed.

"WHAT I'm driving at is this," went on Sabine. "You and your father pull up stakes and leave the Argentine and try to forget about it and settle down plumb peaceable. Nobody bothers you for five years. At the end of that time, you and your dad are looked up, and pronto a lot of bad luck begins to come your way. They try to knife your father first and then they try to poison him. At the same time they work at the other end of the line and try to kill you while you're on your way south. Don't you make something out of that, Cordoba?"

The latter frowned and then shook his head.

"It means that we have enemies, yes," he said. "But what else, Sabine?"

"And where have you any enemies except in Argentina?" asked Sabine, almost in disgust. "The gents around these parts swear by your father. But you notice that Mendoza comes from the Argentine and that he seems to have run the work to kill your father. No doubt he had his hand in sending the two on your trail, too.

"That checks up with this result: Solis and Romero, them two skunks down in the Argentine, have got afraid of you again, so they've sent out spies to locate you and finish the two of you. They nearly done it, the first crack out of the box. But you can rest easy that they'll try again. Why? Because there's something happened down in the Argentine that would make it uncomfortable for them if you got wind of it!"

"What!" exclaimed Cordoba.

"And that's why," said Sabine, "we're going to be on the ocean in a month from today. Your father will be well by that time—or well enough to travel, anyway. We'll head south to see the look on the faces of Romero, Solis and Company when they take a slant at the three of us breezing out onto that *estancia*, or whatever you call it."

"Travel to the Argentine? Without a penny?" groaned Juan.

"Bah!" said Sabine. "I've played chances at ten to one. Don't you think this is worth a play?"

VIII

IT WAS still a day or so less than a month from that moment when Sabine stepped into the room of a hotel in New Orleans and shied his hat across to a chair. He then brought out his usual cigarette, lighted it, and fanned a cloud of smoke from before him.

"It is as I feared," said Don Jose Cordoba. "There has been no good fortune. The money has not been picked up."

The Don had, as Sabine prophesied, almost recovered. He was still a little pale, perhaps, but his face had filled out; his eye was clear; his step was firm and active.

"The money has been picked up," said Sabine. "There's no doubt about that.

But it's been picked up out of my pocket, Don Jose, and there'll be quite a spell in between before it's put back. That's the way they work!"

Don Jose made a graceful gesture of surrender.

"It is money lost in my service," he said. "It is a debt which I shall see repaid to the last penny, señor."

Sabine regarded him with calm disapproval and answered not a word to this remark.

"There's a hoss-boat," he said, "that's leavin' this afternoon for Buenos Ayres. It's a tramp freighter, the *General Slawson*, command of Captain Joseph Humphries, and it's carrying a load of hoss-flesh down for Argentina. Partly they're high-blooded devils and partly they're mustangs. The yarn goes that somebody down in Argentina wants to toughen up the breed in one direction, down yonder, and give it more speed in the other direction—hosses for work and hosses to race, you see?"

He paused. The father and the son had interchanged glances during this singular speech. But they made no comment. If Sabine had gone mad and begun to rave, they would have listened with unalterable control of their facial muscles.

"The point," explained Sabine, "is that we can get aboard that boat and run down to Buenos Ayres on her. We have not the coin to buy passage; there ain't any cabin passengers anyways. But there's a need of some men to handle hosses. Don Jose, could you wrangle hosses for a couple of weeks going south?"

"I?" said the other in his deep, gentle voice. "I shall be glad to attempt it, señor."

So it was settled.

That morning they had arrived in the city of many colors to wait for a boat which was to touch port in a few days and then start for Buenos Ayres. But the pocket of Sabine, containing all the available wealth of the party, had been picked as they walked the street that day and their total resources were now nothing. So Sabine sent his two friends to their hotel room and sallied forth alone to look over the resources of the town.

He was successful, indeed, in locating a gambler of his acquaintance, but the

fellow was hopelessly broke, and Sabine passed on until he located a battered old tramp freighter at the docks, just taking aboard the last of its cargo of horses for Argentina. There he glimpsed and heard the ravings of a huge man with an apoplectic face, and learned that it was the captain, Joseph Humphries, and that his irritation came from the desertion of several of his intended crew at the last moment.

So the three of them, lugging their suitcases with them, came down to the dock together, three big men, all of exactly one height. From the front, the dignity of Don Jose's white mustaches and flowing white hair gave him an added importance. It seemed to Sabine, now that the Spaniard's health was returning, that he had never seen a man of such natural gentility. As they came onto the dock he thought with a qualm of the contrast between the red-faced, roaring captain and the reserved gentleman of Argentina.

"Don Jose," he said, "I forgot one thing. I should have told you that the reason the captain's men left him was because he beat one of 'em almost to death."

Don Jose turned his fearless blue eye upon Sabine and smiled.

"He will not strike me more than once, I think," he said.

But Sabine shook his head.

"Here's the point," he explained. "On dry land nobody could do it and keep a whole hide. But out at sea they tell me it's different. The captain is a king. He can do what he wants. He can string you up by the neck if he feels like doing it. Afterwards he'd have to account for it when he struck port. The trouble is that, when he gets to port, he's always got two-thirds of his crew ready to swear their lives away for him!"

DON JOSE sighed. Then he resolutely shook his head.

"There is a black side to everything," he said. "We shall do very well aboard that boat, if we can secure the work."

Securing the work proved to be ridiculously simple. There were not even questions about their ability to handle horses.

"A man is a man, and a hand is a hand," observed Captain Humphries as they signed the book of the ship in his cabin. "Take 'em forward and show

'em quarters. Then take 'em aft and show 'em the work."

The boatswain obeyed. He conducted them first to the cramped and dirty quarters of the forecabin, where they put their luggage on the bunks which were assigned to them. Sabine cast a troubled glance at Don Jose, but the latter smiled and dropped his hand on the shoulder of Sabine.

"There is one thing for which we can be grateful," he said. "That is that Mendoza has not reached the boat. We shall sail free from him and therefore we shall leave our bad luck behind us. Señor, I am happy enough to sing!"

And sing he did, when they had changed their clothes for overalls and started back into the hold of the ship.

They found the horses packed closely around the outer portion of the deck, with their heads pointed inward. There was not room for them to lie down, and they were packed cunningly so that when the ship rolled they would wedge together and not fall. The circumference of the ship was divided here and there by stout partitions, between each of which there was a number of horses. The animals were tethered to the fence which ran immediately before them.

Distributed in this manner, the feeding and watering meant an immense labor by hand. For this labor the captain had signed a crew of ruffians of the first water. Sabine, familiar since his childhood with rough men, felt that he had never seen such a choice aggregation. Each one represented a different country: France, England, Russia, Africa, Germany, India, Japan—black, white, yellow and brown; the color made no difference. Strength of hand and thickness of skin were the main essentials.

There was no delay in beginning the work. Instantly they started in with the first feeding, while a riot of noise, stamping, neighing, and snorting, broke out up and down the decks.

It was a shipment very largely of tough Western mustangs with enough dashes of good blood to give them looks, as a rule, but with the durable muscle of their wild ancestors and the temper of devils, confined as they were in this strange and terrible stable with a thousand unknown smells striking their nostrils.

In the whole line, Sabine noticed only

one quiet horse. He pointed out to a Mexican carrying hay beside him a tall, gray stallion with a beautifully formed head, fastened in a single stall. The stallion curiously watched the motions of the men passing near him, but he neither neighed nor stamped nor pawed. He was a keen contrast with a raging black stallion in a similar stall at the far end of that corridor. Sabine pointed out the contrast to the Mexican.

The latter merely grinned.

"Two devils," he said. "That's the mustang *El Pantera*." He turned and pointed to the gray. "And that is a great outlaw. That is *Asesinato*!"

Even the stout nerves of Sabine thrilled. "The Panther" and "Murder" were strange names for horses. They explained themselves. *El Pantera* was lashing himself into a fury because other horses were being fed before him. *Asesinato*, the beautiful gray, merely watched with pricked ears.

Even as Sabine watched, he saw that the pricked ears were a hypocritical sham, however. A man carrying hay passed too near the lifted head. Instantly the ears went flat back. The head darted out, snake-like, and the teeth snapped on a fold of shirt. *Asesinato* jerked his head down; the sleeve was ripped from the shirt but the shrieking sailor managed to cast himself upon the deck and escape further damage.

Before he had raised himself to his feet, *Asesinato* had pricked his ears cheerfully once more. Sabine set his teeth. He had never seen such malevolence in a horse. There was exactly the beautiful head which made children want to step up and pat the velvet muzzle. But if a child ever attempted that it would be a death—that was all!

El Pantera, at the far end of the corridor, writhing and prancing, with his eyes bloodshot and his ears flattened, was far less terrible than this silent demon. For the gray there was only one fitting name, and that was the one which the Mexicans had found for him—Murder!

STRENGTH fascinates the strong, and Sabine looked with a hungry interest at *Asesinato*. It seemed to him that he could remember tales of such a beast going the rounds of the fairs and the round-up shows as an outlaw, an outlaw which no man had ever ridden for five

solid minutes, an outlaw which strove always to kill the man whom he had thrown.

He was roused from his trance by the booming voice of the boatswain in his ear:

"What the hell is this? A beauty show or a ship? Start moving!"

Sabine favored the big bo's'n with one of his mirthless smiles. Had they been on shore a speech half as violent would have gained the ship's officer a sound thrashing, but Sabine was by no means minded to spoil the passage before it began. He obeyed the order without a word.

The ship began to move while they were still at work. The time-honored custom of permitting all hands to loiter on deck while the ship drifts out from the dock was not honored on board the *General Slawson* with Joseph Humphries in command. When they finally were allowed to go on deck, the *General Slawson* was sliding far down the river. Sabine turned to Don Jose, who leaned on the rail at his side, and found that the latter, though sweating profusely, was neither completely exhausted nor out of temper with the work which he had had to do.

"The first step home," said the man of Argentina, "is always a happy step. But look yonder, my dear friend!"

He pointed to a gasoline launch which was skimming down the river and which now sheered sharply in toward the side of the *General Slawson*. Standing up in the the boat he saw no less a person than Nuñez Mendoza, his hat off, his black hair blowing in the wind, waving gracefully toward stout Joseph Humphries as the latter stood on the deck.

In another moment Mendoza had reached the side, and there was a hasty parley between him and the captain, a waving of money, a lowering of the rope ladder. Then, while Mendoza climbed up the ladder, his trunk was hoisted aboard with a rope.

"Mendoza!?" had, of one accord, broken from the lips of Sabine and Juan Cordoba.

Don Jose looked fixedly at the well-tailored fellow as he stood talking with the captain.

"And that is Mendoza?" he said at last. "Well, it is bad enough to have the devil with one on dry land, but what

will it be to be cooped up with him on the same boat at sea?"

IX

IT SEEMED unquestionable that the malignant purpose of Mendoza had brought him to the ship to plague them on their journey to the Argentine, but for the next three days little was seen of him. Only now and again he appeared on the deck with the captain, with whom he seemed to have become a boon companion. The two could be seen swaggering back and forth at interims, but most of the time they spent in the cabin, gambling and, so the cabin boy reported, drinking.

Juan Cordoba suggested that no real malice had actuated Mendoza in taking passage upon that boat, but merely a real desire to get back to his own country. That suggestion, however, could not live in the face of Sabine's report of the facts: on the passenger-boat Mendoza could have started three days later than the horse-boat and yet landed at Buenos Ayres three days sooner.

The *General Slawson* ploughed slowly through the tropic waters, wallowing along with a thick blanket of smoke pressing down over her bow as the trades fanned her, or the smoke blew to the side as the speed of the boat equaled the fainter strength of the wind. Every day it became hotter. The air seemed heavy and was hard to breathe even on deck. Below it was stifling.

In that atmosphere the horses became down-headed, and stood with flagging ears, the sweat coursing down their sides. Through all that sickening weather as they crossed the equator, the work of the crew did not abate.

The old sailors, stripped to the waist and usually with bare feet, stood the trial better than the rest. Sabine was well enough. A pale spot sometimes showed in the hollow of his cheek, and blisters covered the palms of his hands. But he had within him an exhaustless well of nerve energy ready at his command. Juan Cordoba did nearly as well, but with Don Jose it was different.

The long sickness had too newly left him. He was by no means back to the normal, and he began to sink rapidly. It

was in vain that Juan and Sabine attempted to help him and actually did almost his entire share of the work. Merely to stay below during the great heat and breathe the damp, hot air was too much for the older man.

Half fainting, he bore it all without a word of complaint, while the boatswain sought him out with curses and forced him on to greater efforts. Always he would murmur to Sabine, when he saw the gleaming eyes of the youth:

"It will soon be over, Sabine. Do nothing for my sake, dear friend. One blow, and we are all ruined."

Presently the object of Mendoza was plain to them. He had corrupted the captain to his purpose and the captain had simply instructed the boatswain to see that Don Jose did his full share of the work. He knew that sooner or later the elder Cordoba would sink under the effort, and then the first sign of brutality on the part of the boatswain would bring an attack from Juan or, still more probably, Sabine.

The moment a blow was struck the situation changed and the captain, if he wished, might even declare that a state of mutiny existed, throw them all in irons, and then—but the possibilities were limitless. It only required that the boatswain should center his attention upon Don Jose.

It became a problem of endurance. The answer to the problem could only be of one nature. On the seventh day out, Don Jose reeled as he walked, and Sabine attempted to expostulate with the boatswain. The latter laughed in his face.

"Sick, is he?" he said. "A damned bluff, I'd call it! I've seen 'em try it before. No, he don't go to the doctor; he stays here!"

Jose stayed. It was only a matter of hours, now, before he dropped to the deck. The boatswain plied him with curses and threats, not really aimed at him but in the hope of leading Juan or Sabine to an outbreak. Only the pleading of the old man kept them in hand.

The outbreak came, against all expectancy, in a crisis of another sort.

It was the one cheery time of day. The sun was hardly up. The heat had not yet begun to burn. The whole crew was cool and comfortable at the work of washing down the decks. In the

midst of that work there was a call from below in the form of a shrill whinny, and then a cry from the boatswain.

"All hands below!"

THEY rushed down to the first deck below, and in the corridor they found a scene of wild confusion. A babel of ear-splitting neighs and stampings filled the air. In the center of the corridor, *El Pantera* and *Asesinato*, reared on their hind legs like two humans, were beating with forehoofs and tearing with their teeth.

They whirled, separated, and rushed together again. Sabine saw blood streaming down the crest and shoulder of the Murder horse, while the big black seemed as yet unharmed.

Some of the men started forward with ropes, but the boatswain called them back. He turned with a demoniac face toward Don Jose.

"Go put them horses back in their places," he commanded. "On the jump!"

Don Jose drew a deep breath, hesitated, and then started forward without a word. But Sabine stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

"Look here, Bo's'n," he said, "my partner here can't handle a rope. Let me at them two and I'll have 'em tied in a minute!"

He had started forward, but the boatswain shouted to him to keep back. He had issued his orders. They were not to be changed. With a string of curses he forced Don Jose to continue.

Down the passage Jose went, steadily enough, though reeling a little when the deck shelved unexpectedly as the ship heeled in the wind and waves. In his hand he carried the lariat which means so much in the grip of the expert and which means nothing at all to the amateur. The boatswain stepped forward and blocked the passage of any of the others who might offer to assist the older man.

The battle of the two stallions was progressing about evenly when Don Jose, coming near, threw the noose, not for the feet of one of the horses, so that he might have thrown it, but ignorantly toward the head, hoping to choke one down. Even so, the noose fell wide of its mark and merely whipped across the back of *Asesinato*.

The Murder horse whirled to face the new attack, slashed out with heels that caught the black in the chest and crushed it back, and then darted at Don Jose with ears flattened and snaky head thrust forward.

The Spaniard plunged to one side, and *Asesinato*, slipping on a wet place on the deck, floundered to the boards. He was up again with the uncanny agility of a cat, a marvelous thing to view in a horse, and wheeled toward Don Jose again.

The final kick had taken all the spirit of battle out of *El Pantera*. He stood back in a far corner with the blood streaming from his breast, watching the new combat with fierce but frightened eyes.

It was at that moment that Sabine leaped forward. He smashed through the press of sailors before him. The boatswain whirled toward him with set face and burly fist poised.

"Keep back, you swine!" he commanded. "I'll crack your skull for you if you try to get past! Orders are orders. Keep back or I'll have you hanged for mutiny!"

Sabine tearing himself clear of the others, leaped in with a driving fist that cracked the big boatswain cleanly on the jaw. His head snapped back and he went down. Sabine raced on down the passage as the Murder horse, regaining his footing after his first mis-spent charge, was wheeling to beat down Don Jose.

Still the latter, though only armed with a rope of whose management he knew nothing, stood his ground. He was reeling with weakness. His knees buckled under his weight. Yet he showed no symptoms of being about to fly. Sabine went past him like a catamount, snatching the rope from his feeble hands and darting on at the great gray horse.

He had no time to make the noose. All he could do was to thrash the rope across the face of the charging demon and then leap back and flatten himself against the wall as the flying danger went past.

Asesinato wheeled again. Now, having missed his charge twice, he had a red eye of fury. There is nothing more terrible than a maddened horse and Sabine, in that crowded space, knew that the chances were working five to one against him.

In the foreground he saw Don Jose, gallantly and foolishly, throw up his

arms with a shout of dismay and rush forward, as if those naked hands could be of any help to Sabine in his battle with the murderous stallion. In the distance, among the shouting, surging mass of sailors, some of whom had picked the boatswain from the floor, he saw Juan Cordoba whip out a flashing revolver to kill the horse, and saw the weapon torn from his hand by the others.

HE SAW and heard these things in one of those photographic flashes of the mind. Then he threw his rope. He did not aim at the head. Instead, he threw for the flying feet of the gray. As he threw he could only pray for luck. His own skill, indeed, was hardly greater than that of Don Jose. In his childhood he had used a rope as a game, and since childhood he had scorned such a laborious means of making a livelihood. Now he had to look back to the skill which had been his ten years before.

Luck favored him. He saw the noose flick out on the deck. He jerked back frantically and saw it twitch up around diagonal foreleg and hind leg, just as he had hoped. At the same time he cast himself to the side, face down upon the floor.

The white teeth of *Asesinato* met at his shoulder. Had he trusted only to his plunging hoofs, he would have broken the back of Sabine, but, instead, he chose to sink his teeth into the fallen man. The result was that he caught only the shirt, ripped it cleanly from Sabine's body, and allowed the latter to spin to his feet and fling his whole weight against the end of the rope before *Asesinato* himself could whirl.

The legs of the stallion were knocked out from under him; he fell with stunning force upon his side. The next instant he was hopelessly enmeshed in the rope.

X

VERY loud and very pleasant was the ringing cheer of the sailors as Sabine completed his victory, an involuntary outburst. But what meant more to him was the hand of Don Jose on his shoulder and the silence of the Spaniard.

When they turned toward the others, they saw that the boatswain was just returning to his senses, staggering like a drunkard. Captain Humphries was coming through the crew, and behind him the sneering face of Mendoza.

If the boatswain were staggering as though drunk, the captain was drunk in fact. His usually red face was now fairly purple. One glimpse of the boatswain and of the blood which was trickling down the back of the latter's head where it had struck the deck, and Captain Humphries roared with fury.

"The man that strikes my officer strikes me!" he thundered. "Get Sabine. Tie him and throw him in the hole. And the other? Where's the other? Where's the young snake? Where's Juan? Here he is—take him, too, and throw him in for good measure! Damn them, I'll teach them discipline!"

Behind the captain, halting midway on the flight of steps from above, appeared the cripple, Peter, Captain Humphries' small son. Upon his face Sabine, as his glance roved about, seeking some escape, now looked. He saw that the youngster was white with excitement, perhaps with fear.

The glimpse of poor little Peter was enough to warn him that Humphries would stick at nothing if he were resisted now. The story was short and ugly. After the death of his wife, Humphries had taken his only child on board his boat with him. On the very first cruise Peter had stumbled in the way and had been kicked out of it by his father. The result was a smashed bone in his leg which the doctors could not properly mend, and poor Peter was crippled forever.

Now he clung to the stairs with his withered arms and looked in terror down upon the crowd of men where his brutal father was thundering.

If this happened to Peter for no crime at all, what would happen to Sabine for what the captain called open mutiny?

The very perfection of the captain's rage saved the skin of Sabine for the time being. Humphries wanted some grim and soul-satisfying torture and he could not think of a sufficient one on the spur of the moment. Therefore he ordered his men to take Sabine to the hole, and Juan Cordoba with him "on general principles."

Each was taken by the arm and shoved roughly away down the passage, past the heads of the frightened, restless horses until, passing down to the bottom of the ship, a trap-door was raised and a dark, foul-smelling pit in which they could hear the water awash was exposed to them and they were ordered down into it.

The healthy bronze of Juan Cordoba paled several shades, but Sabine merely shrugged his shoulders and addressed his last word to the Mexican who made one of the party.

"Pedro," he said, "some of the boys are going to want to take it out of *Ase-sinato's* hide for breaking out of his stall. If you keep them away from him, you get that gun of mine that you've admired. Understand?"

Pedro nodded and grinned wickedly.

"I know," he said. "You want to save him till you can get at him yourself, eh?"

Sabine regarded the other quietly for a moment. There was no use, he saw, in attempting an explanation. Therefore he simply agreed with a nod and then led the way down into the black pit below them.

At the bottom of the steps his legs dipped into water to the ankles.

In the meantime Captain Humphries, left with a red-hot temper and no means of lessening its heat at hand, began to regret that he had sent his two men away. Yet he must wait and devise a punishment which would be remembered and trembled at as long as he sailed the sea. On smaller pretexts than this he had indulged his love of cruelty. Now he had found a treasure trove.

ONE man had struck a ship's officer, another had drawn a revolver; and he could find sailors who would swear, at his bidding, that the revolver was drawn to be aimed at the fallen boatswain. He could go farther. He could declare that it was the beginning of a mutiny, and that the attack was planned to be carried on to the rest of the ship's officers.

Sabine and Juan Cordoba were absolutely at his mercy. The captain was a specialist in pain. To him this prospect was as entrancing as the discovery of a pot of gold to a miser. But in the meantime, must he rage in quiet? He rolled

his eye to find an object on which to vent the first flush of his rage. The object which he selected was Don Jose Cordoba, who now came unsteadily down the passage in front of the men who were leading the gray and *El Pantera* back to their original places.

"Come here!" shouted Humphries. He turned to the boatswain. "Bring him here!"

The boatswain darted one gratified glance at his master and then strode down the deck, caught Don Jose by the arm, and jerked him forward until he confronted the captain.

"Now," roared Humphries with a string of oaths, "we'll find out how far a damned work-away can run a ship where I'm captain! To begin with, what in hell d'you mean by starting a mutiny?"

Don Jose was very weak, but now he managed to draw himself to his full height and he smiled straight into the eyes of Humphries and said not a word.

"Answer me!" thundered Humphries.

Don Jose shrugged his shoulders.

"Then take it, damn you!" bellowed the captain, striking the man from Argentina full in the face.

Down he fell, a loose and heavy form, knocked completely senseless. The captain started forward as though he would jerk Cordoba to his feet for the pleasure of knocking him down again.

He was checked by a loud and wailing shriek from behind and turned to see little Peter clinging to the rail with one withered hand while the other was thrown up before his eyes to shut out the memory of what he had seen.

Captain Humphries cursed beneath his breath. Then, in a stride, he was through the crowd, barely in time to catch Peter in his arms as the little fellow pitched down in a faint. Throwing the light burden of the child over his arm and shouting for the doctor, Captain Humphries raced up to the open air of the deck above. There he placed Peter on the boards and, dropping to his knees, opened the shirt of the boy and began fanning him with his hat, at the same time calling for the doctor.

The latter came, sweating, in haste.

"He's dead!" panted Joseph Humphries. "Doc, I've killed him! Lord God, I've damned myself — I've killed him!"

The doctor was a little man. He was hardly half the bulk of Captain Humphries, but he was the one man who spoke his mind to the big fellow. He was the one man in the world whom the captain feared.

"You haven't killed him—this time," said the doctor, after a summary examination. "But another little trick like this one and you'll have to wrap him in canvas and put a weight at his feet and drop him overboard. You hear me? One more—"

The captain held up his hand and turned a convulsed face toward the doctor.

"Don't say it, Doc," he muttered. "It wasn't Peter that I hit. I—I—I didn't even know that he was near me!"

"Pick him up," commanded the doctor curtly, "and take him into your cabin. I'll work over him there and see what can be done."

And in the captain's cabin he worked until little Peter opened his eyes, which seemed deathly big and black in the midst of his pale, pinched face. One glimpse of his father, at the side of the room, brought another shriek from his lips and he pressed both hands across his eyes.

"He killed him," gasped Peter. "He—he killed him, Doctor!"

NOT one of the crew of the captain's ship would have believed their eyes had they seen it, but Captain Humphries dropped upon his knees and lifted the hands of Peter from his eyes.

"Pete!" he protested. "That hound ain't killed. He tried mutiny; he tried murder, Pete, but I didn't kill him. I—I only knocked him down!"

The eyes of Peter remained tight shut and now he shuddered.

"Doctor!" he whispered.

"Well?" queried the doctor.

"Please—send dad away!"

The doctor turned savagely on the captain.

"Get out!" he said.

Like a beaten dog the captain rose. He hesitated in the middle of the cabin.

"Doc," he said, "I'll fix up the man and send him up here. D'you think that would help Pete?"

"Do you want him to?" the doctor asked the boy, and received an affirmative nod.

Captain Humphries fairly fled from the cabin and astonished the sailors among whom he burst a moment later on the deck below.

Don Jose was in the act of picking himself up from the deck, where he had been permitted to lie, no one daring to aid the captain's victim. Now he was lifted in the stout arms of Humphries himself.

"Get some water!" thundered the captain. "Get some plaster for his cut lip. Hurry, damn you! Are you made of wood, you?"

The sailors scattered as though by magic. Only Nuñez Mendoza remained near. His face had grown black at this turn of events.

"Remember this, Humphries," he said, as soon as he was sure that no other person would overhear him, "if you change your mind about finishing Cordoba, I can still change my mind about the money!"

That speech brought only a glare and another roar from the captain.

"Damn you and your money! Get out of my sight!"

And Mendoza, like a man stunned, went.

XI

IT WAS in the after cabin that the captain and the doctor conferred later on. From the captain's own cabin there came a murmur of voices, the deep, smooth voice of a man and the edgy, uneven voice of little Peter.

"Hark to 'em," said big Humphries. "Hark to 'em, and Pete chattering like a magpie, God bless him! What does he see about the Spaniard to make him talk?"

"He sees the mark of your fist on his face," said the doctor.

Humphries writhed his ponderous bulk around as though to strike the doctor. One blow of that massive hand would have crumbled the spare frame of the doctor, but the blow did not fall.

"Maybe that's it," he admitted, sadly and humbly. "Maybe, that's what's loosened his tongue, but—listen!"

A burst of shrill laughter sounded in the forward cabin.

"Listen to that, Doc! Listen to that!"

I ain't heard him laugh like that for a couple of years. Not since—"

He stopped and winced. Plainly he inferred that the blow he had struck the child had stopped all of Pete's laughter. Now he went to the door, dropped to his knees, and peered shamelessly through the keyhole. He returned after a moment to the doctor.

His face was full of pain as he spoke.

"He's sitting on the Spaniard's knee," he said. "He's got Pete's head against his shoulder. He's telling him a yarn about something or other. Anyway, Pete's eyes are closed and he's smiling."

He paused, then began to walk up and down the cabin, his heavy boots clumping to and fro, to and fro, while the doctor looked out the window with eyes which were dull with the distance of the ocean's horizon.

"He must be a pretty good man!" exclaimed the captain. He stopped before the doctor as though the discovery had shaken him to his feet. "He talks to Pete like he was fond of him. Yet he knows that Pete's my son, and he knows that my fist knocked him down. Doc, how's that possible?"

The doctor made no reply. He busied himself in the filling of his pipe. When he came to the lighting of it, the sudden sound of new laughter from the forward cabin, fresh, thrilling laughter, made him drop the match from his fingers.

The captain resumed his walking and he resumed his mumbling talk at the same time.

"I had the other two turned loose out of the hole," he said.

He shot a scowling glance across the cabin at the doctor, as though defying the little man to smile at him for having changed his mind. When he observed that the doctor was not inclined toward mirth, he sighed with relief.

"I turned 'em out. They're both queer," said Humphries. "What d'ye think the fighter is doing?"

"Sabine?" queried the doctor.

"Who else? Yes, him. He's back working on the gray horse. First he bandaged the black. After that he got to working on the Murder horse, *Asesinato*."

The doctor sat bolt upright and began to puff away at his pipe with the most furious speed.

"I had the Mexican watch 'em," explained the captain. "Seems that he offered the Mexican his revolver if he'd keep the boys away from *Asesinato* while Sabine was in the hole. Now—"

The doctor spoke through a thick cloud of smoke.

"Why did they send two man-killers like the black and the gray?" he asked.

"A little sharp American business," said the captain. "The Argentine firm asked for tough mustang blood. This is what they get."

The doctor smoked silently again.

"He says now," continued the captain, "that there's nothing wrong with *Asesinato*—never was anything wrong with him. Says there's nothing wrong with any horse, but it's all with the men who've handled 'em. Sounds like fool talk, eh? Might as well say that men are good or bad just according to the way you treat 'em—"

"Well?" broke in the doctor. "Well? Why not say that?"

The captain glowered at him and then, changing his expression, ground his fist across his forehead.

"I've never been able to figure just how you work things out, Doc," he growled.

BUT he seemed strangely subdued and strangely worried. Every now and then, when the sharp burst of Pete's laughter came from the next cabin, he would stop in his pacing as though struck.

"After all," said the doctor, "it seems to me that you have really nothing against Sabine and the others."

The captain shrugged his shoulders. He had never been able to conceal the shady sides of his character from the terrible little doctor.

"He's made of money," confessed Humphries. "He flashed a roll of bills thick enough to choke a mule, heavy enough to knock down a horse. It made me dizzy to look at it."

"What could I do? What could I do, Doc?"

The doctor clung to his rôle of silence. He had seen it work before; now he noticed that the big captain writhed before it.

"All I had to do," he said, "was to see that none of the three of 'em got ashore in the Argentine. Understand?"

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There wasn't much to that, was there?"

"Perhaps a little accident to the three of them on the way back, eh?" suggested the doctor smoothly.

The captain started and glared at the other.

"No more of that!" he said, breathing hard.

The doctor smiled quietly.

"I've got a suggestion," he said at last.

"Well?" said the captain.

"I mean, I have a suggestion if you really want to right yourself. You've played a dirty hand in this game."

Humphries shook his head like a badgered bull, but he endured the punishment of the doctor's stinging tongue.

"I can show you the way out," said the doctor, "and it's a way that you'll like."

"Start talking, then."

"Mendoza is a pretty strong fellow, don't you think?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"A handy man in a fight of any kind, I should say?"

"I don't follow you, Doc."

"This cabin, I should say, has nothing in it that can be easily damaged?"

"Doc, what are you driving at?"

"Just at this—Mendoza has done Sabine and the other two wrongs. Mendoza has told you that the three are all yeggs. From what you've seen of the one they call Don Jose, you think they're all white men. You want to give Sabine a chance to get back. Well, Captain, my idea is that you take 'em both to this cabin, turn 'em loose in here, and lock the door from the outside. They'll make an adjustment of some kind then, I think."

XII

ALL that had happened on that ship, this day, had been inexplicable to Sabine.

Now, in the middle of the afternoon, he sat cross-legged on the deck in the little passageway in front of the gray man-killer, *Asesinato*. In fact, the Murder horse could have reached the head of the man with his teeth at any time. But *Asesinato* was occupied in quite another fashion.

He had at first thought that the wheat heads which were held by Sabine must be a delusion and a snare, some new and cunning way of tormenting him. Eventually he had snatched at a little wisp of the carefully selected heads which Sabine held and had found that they were really not poison.

After that, he fell to studying the tall stranger. He had never been a headlong horse. An Indian had raised *Asesinato*, and long lessons of Indian patience and Indian cruelty had been taught the horse. Instead of being maddened by what he learned, *Asesinato's* mind had been developed. He had learned to study the men near him. He had learned to tempt them toward his beautiful head by means of pricking ears. Now he set about studying Sabine.

Inside of an hour, he decided that this man who was so strong, so fearlessly willing to fight him, was also kind, gentle of hand and spirit. In short, *Asesinato* made up his mind that this fellow, although in appearance a man, was in reality of a far nobler species. In another hour it came to pass that Sabine sat under the fence in easy reach of *Asesinato* and fed the mankiller out of the palm of his hand.

Sympathy, which speaks in a hundred languages without words, was now eloquent enough to speak from Sabine to the wild horse. Or, in reality, to a horse not wild at all, but simply over-domesticated. Men, when they train horses, count upon implanting an instinctive fear in the beasts. Instead, now and again, they only succeeded in implanting instinctive hatred. This was the case with beautiful *Asesinato*. He had well earned his name.

It was at this pleasant work that the message from the captain came to Sabine. It was delivered by the boatswain, his bruised face more murderous in expression than ever. Sabine was wanted above, and Sabine, rising from his place, patted the nose of the gray in farewell and followed. On the forward part of the deck he passed Don Jose, walking back and forth with little Pete hobbling at his side. Jose Cordoba waved toward him, but there was no time to exchange a word. He could only guess, from the liberty of Jose, that all was not as bad as might be, and that his own liberty was something more than a temporary thing. Juan, he knew, had been assigned to the

fire-room to pass coal. Perhaps he was about to be given a similarly onerous position.

Presently the boatswain knocked at the door of a cabin. The voice of the captain himself called loudly to enter, and Sabine opened the door and stepped into the presence of the captain and no other than Nunez Mendoza. The boatswain closed the door and left them together.

Mendoza had started a little at the sight of Sabine, but he settled back in his chair and waited. The captain explained at once.

"It looked to me," he declared, "that you two ought to be able to get together and talk things over friendly. I don't want any stabbings in the back on a ship I command. So I've brought you together. I'm going to go over you and make sure that you have no weapons of any kind on you. Then I'm going to walk out and let you talk."

Mendoza sprang from his chair with an exclamation, but the roaring oath of Humphries convinced him that he could not alter his position. Of his own volition he gave up a revolver and a heavy-handled knife of grim dimensions. Then the captain walked out and left them together.

THEIR maneuvers were not unlike those of two panthers, forced into one cage. Keeping as far from one another as the dimensions of the cabin permitted, they found chairs and sank into them gingerly, keeping on the edges of their seats, ready to spring into action at a moment's notice. In the meantime they kept up a polite parley.

"Seems to me," began Sabine, "that there ain't going to be any cause for trouble between us, Mendoza."

"Of course not, señor," said Mendoza. He spread out the palms of his hands in a gesture of sublime affability. "From the first we have thought well of each other!"

"That's right," he answered. "All we need, if we're to get on together, is for you to tell me just why you were sent up to murder Jose and Juan Cordoba."

"So?" said Mendoza, lifting his brows in polite wonder. "The name is not Carpaez?"

Sabine grinned again, lifted himself out of his chair with an easy motion, and

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stepped to the center of the room. There he sat upon the edge of the little round table, which was fixed to the floor.

"Are we going to get together, Mendoza?" he asked.

The Argentinian had likewise left his chair. He leaned against the cabin wall.

"I cannot tell what you mean, señor!" he murmured.

"This," said Sabine. "I want the whole news. I want to know why you came, and who hired you!"

"Hired me!" cried Mendoza.

"You hound!" snarled Sabine, all his surface good-humor suddenly leaving him. "If you won't talk, I'll choke it out of you."

He flung himself headlong across the cabin.

To meet that rush, however, he noticed that the man from the Argentine did not so much as stoop to dodge or to prepare to cast his own weight against that of Sabine. Instead, he stood bolt erect, with his right hand held a little behind him and a strange, cruel smile upon his lips.

Then that right hand jerked up with a flash of bright steel dripping from it. Sabine, with a shout of dismay and rage, saw that he was running on certain death. He had barely time, at the last moment, to check his impetus a little and lunge to the side.

The knife slithered down his arm as Mendoza stabbed hastily. Then, as he leaped in, Sabine flung himself back across the little round table in the center of the room. He was safe for an instant, at least.

"Call for the captain," smiled Mendoza, "before I stick you like a pig and then kick the blood out of you faster while you wallow on the floor."

Sabine, stepping back as he circled the table, laid his hand on the back of a chair.

"No, no," smiled Mendoza. "The chairs are fastened to the floor, my friend."

"Right for you," answered Sabine. "They're fastened to the floor, but the floor is old, and—"

As he spoke, he threw his whole strength against the chair. There was a squeaking and ripping as the rusted bolts tore through the wood. The heavy chair came loose in Sabine's hands. At the first sight of that maneuver, Mendoza had sprung forward with his knife

extended, rapier-wise. He was only in time to receive the mass of the chair crashing against his body. His knife flew to the side. He toppled back and landed half stunned against the wall.

Fear of death was the stimulus that brought him struggling to his feet, but it was only to feel the fingers of Sabine writhe into his hair, jam his head back against the wall, and then the point of his own knife tickled the hollow of his throat.

"Do you talk?" panted Sabine.

"Señor," said Mendoza, "I have never intended anything else from the first."

Sabine stepped back.

"Mendoza," he said, "you've got nerve enough to be an honest man! Why in hell don't you change your part one of these days?"

"Because I have been tempted," said Mendoza, panting a little but still maintaining his white-lipped smile. "I have been tempted by the example of the famous gambler, Señor Sabine!"

Sabine could only reply by shrugging his shoulders.

XIII

THEY sat in a semi-circle, Sabine, Don Jose, and Juan, sooty from the fire-room. And they faced Mendoza and waited for his story.

It was typical of Mendoza that now that he was cornered he showed neither shame nor perturbation. He continued smoking, as calm as ever, and his thoughtful eye showed either that he was arranging his story or else selecting the proper words for an artistic opening to the tale which was to unriddle the mysteries behind that attempted murder in Big Horn.

"When a man grows old," began Mendoza, at length, "he is very apt to grow foolish, also. I have seen the strongest of men in their youth grow stronger still in middle age and then slowly crumble as they become old. For my part, I shall die in the prime of my middle life."

"Or, perhaps, even sooner," said Don Jose with the most courteous of bows.

"You are right, señor. Perhaps even sooner." He raised his eyes and waved some smoke toward the ceiling as though sending a greeting toward the infinite.

"To come into my story, age was the

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36x5.50-18	3.35		
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undoing of no less a man than Guillermo Solis."

There was a light exclamation from both of the Cordobas.

"You," said the Argentinian to Don Jose, "can perhaps best appreciate how truly great a man he was."

"Yes," said Don Jose, "I can appreciate how—great he was!"

"Seeing that he began at nothing?"

"Exactly, and is now rich."

"And respected."

"True," said Don Jose, his voice hardening a little, "respected also! Well, well. Go on, señor."

"As a matter of fact," he continued, "many people have given too great a portion of the credit to Ricardo Romero. But you, señores, will agree with me that Solis is the artful and profound spirit who saw into the future."

"Exactly," said Don Jose. "Continue."

"I am verging toward the point, my friends. I began by saying that Don Guillermo had begun to grow old. But I gave you no hint as to how very old he suddenly became. Señores, that great man suddenly stepped out of the world and became attached to a religious order!"

Don Jose started, then settled back. "Nothing in the world, I had thought, could surprise me. But this, I confess, does. Continue, my friend."

"When he entered the holy order, conscience entered him, you see."

"Ah!"

"I mean exactly that. He became, of a sudden, one filled with remorse for past sins. He thought of many things. He said that the building of churches alone could not possibly atone for what he had done to one man above all others; that when he rapped at the gate of heaven, the very mention of one name would bar him from entrance. You follow me, señores?"

"Even to heaven," said Don Jose. "Continue my friend!"

Mendoza smiled again.

"Very well. But, though Guillermo Solis, now Padre Guillermo, was willing to confess his sins to himself, he was not willing to publish them to the world unless there existed a sufficient reason for such publication—unless, in fact, you or your son were still alive.

"He determined then that he would

select a man at once clever enough to follow a world and silent enough to keep his goal from the world, and send him out to find the Cordobas. I, señores, was the man whom he so honored with his choice. He sent for me. He unburdened himself of a strange story, which all of you know already. He told me that the supposed traitor, Jose Cordoba, was in truth a virtuous man. Having completed the tale, he let me infer that, if I in turn repeated the story, my days in this world would not be long.

"I accepted the munificent terms on which the work was tendered to me. I went home. I packed my necessities. I purchased a ticket for Spain, where it was reasonably certain that you were living, and I was about to leave when I received a message which brought me into the presence of that other great man, Ricardo Romero. Though Solis may once have been the greater of the two, the more inspired, there is no real comparison between their strengths now.

"I saw Romero, I say, and he told me, in short, that he knew every word that had passed between me and the good Solis. How he learned, the devil alone can tell!

"**B**UT, having confided so much to me, he went on to tell me that, if I persisted in attempting to discharge my mission, my days were numbered. If, on the other hand, I should change into his service, all would be well. He began to speak of money. When Ricardo Romero begins to speak of money—well, it is almost a proverb: 'Even the angels fly low from heaven to listen to his terms!'

"And I, señores, am not an angel.

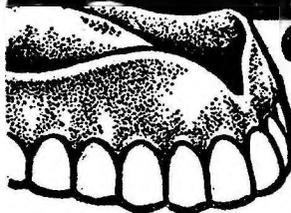
"To be brief, I accepted his terms. I sailed not for Spain but for the United States. Ricardo Romero, wiser than his partner, had tracked every move you made.

"'An enemy whose grudge has not been paid is a sword of Damocles hanging above my head!' said the great Romero.

"I went, therefore, directly to your place. I took with me, on the trip, a certain comrade of mine, an excellent man with weapons.

"He died on that luckless night when he and I and two others attacked you, Señor Cordoba, and when the two Hargess brothers came by in the nick of time to save your life.

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"Then I changed my plans. I attacked with a small bribe the nurse who had charge of you, señor. I planned with her everything that followed. You must agree, everything was going well until God chose to destroy my clever work."

He sighed, and then, turning toward Sabine, there flashed into his eyes, for a fraction of a second, a glance of the most unspeakable rage and hatred.

"There," he said, "is the instrument which He chose for His work. And here, señores, sit I, beaten by Providence and bad fortune! I am about to land on a shore where the malignity of the terrible Ricardo Romero will now meet me. You, señores, are about to land on a shore where the immense fortune of Solis is ready to be placed in your hands. Have I spoken enough? Am I believed?"

"And where do we go," said Sabine, "to make sure of all this from Solis?"

"We?" echoed Mendoza, picking out the one word for his comment.

"Exactly. You stay with us, Mendoza."

"I am a dead man, then."

"Very likely. But there is a chance."

"Kismet," he said at last. "Only fools rebel against fate and manifest destiny. I shall go. I shall be your guide."

"Where?"

"To the great Solis house, which is now about to become your home."

The four horsemen had ridden long and steadily in the dark of the cloud shadows, but when the moon suddenly broke through the clouds it showed, first of all, upon the silver mane of the gray stallion which Sabine bestrode—no other than *Asesinato*. Mendoza and the two Cordobas had kept with difficulty beside him, pressing their horses steadily with their spurs. Now, moving up from one of the rare elevations in that vast plain, they could look far off and see the moonlight making a haze about a noble cluster of trees and, loftier than these, glimmering upon the roofs of large buildings.

Don Jose held up his arms and wept.

Sabine gazed upon him in wonder but not in scorn. He knew the fine old man too well to despise his emotion. Upon his other side, Juan clasped his hand.

"It is the old home," he said. "Now our home and yours, dear Sabine, until death parts us."