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Short Stories

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SHORT STORIES for APRIL 10th

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Just jot down your name and address on the coupon below, mail it to me—and I'll send you, absolutely free, a copy of my new book, **"Everlasting Health and Strength."** It reveals the secrets that changed me from a 97-pound, flat-chested weakling into a husky fellow who won the title of **"The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"** against all comers! And it shows how I can build you into an **"Atlas Champion"** the same easy way.

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J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
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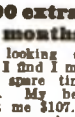

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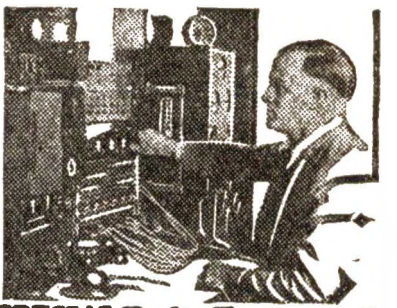

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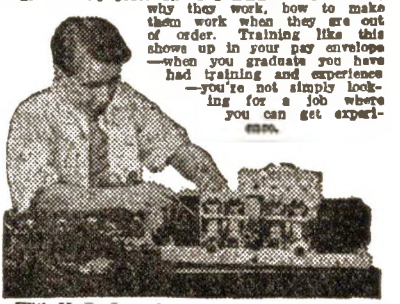
My Course is not all theory. I'll show you how to use my special Radio equipment for conducting experiments and building circuits which illustrate important principles used in such well-known sets as Westinghouse, General Electric, Philco, R. C. A., Victor, Majestic, and others. You work out with your own hands many of the things you read in our lesson books. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home easy, interesting, fascinating, intensely practical. You learn how sets work, why they work, how to make them work when they are out of order. Training like this shows up in your pay envelope—when you graduate you have had training and experience—you're not simply looking for a job where you can get experience.



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$6000.00 in Cash Prizes

I'M GOING TO GIVE $3,500.00 CASH to some deserving man or woman; $1,000.00 to another; $500.00 to a third; $200.00 to a fourth—25 Big Cash Prizes in all, totaling $6,000.00, and 200 additional Grand Prizes worth Hundreds of Dollars. Every month I am distributing many, many other rewards worth hundreds and thousands of dollars. Sounds too good to be true?

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$3,500.00 ALL CASH — to spend as you like. Your worries gone—Your dreams come true. All the joy and happiness you have been longing for—over night. Probably you would start in business—buy a home—pay a mortgage—or invest this money for greater opportunities—$3,500.00 Cash would give you a flying start toward the better things in life!

HUNDREDS HAVE WON

Throughout the past year we have given away hundreds and thousands of dollars in Big Cash Prizes — in all parts of the United States. It's Your Opportunity to Win — NOW!

Mrs. Elizabeth Gritzke, New York, won over $1,500.00. She writes: ". . . the squarest firm I ever dealt with."

Joe Walsh, a miner in Pennsylvania, won $4,700.00 in Cash Prizes.

Be Prompt! $100.00 Cash Certificate At Once!

To make it worth your while to be prompt in sending your name—if you will see that your letter or postal card is postmarked not more than three days after you read this notice, I will send you a $100.00 Cash Promptness Certificate AT ONCE, entitling you to an extra $100.00 in Cash, should you be the fortunate winner of the First Grand Prize.

TOM WOOD, *Manager*

H-O Building Dept. A-400-D, Cincinnati, Ohio

so: We have a big manufacturing plant. We are one of the country's large distributors of famous Beauty and Household Products, and this stupendous Cash Distribution is a part of our nation-wide advertising campaign. Every dollar spent in this gigantic Cash Distribution will help make our products known in every community. This is our way of advertising.

YOU NEED ONLY SEND YOUR NAME

No house-to-house canvassing. It's not a "Good Luck" chance. No puzzles to solve. No names or stories to write. No experience is required. **Anybody may win.** Salesgirl, housewife or school teacher — mechanic, clerk or farm boy—everybody over 16 years of age has an opportunity. YOU have a real chance to win $3,500.00 or any of 225 Big Grand Prizes.

Send no money, there's only one thing to do now

Just write your name and address on the coupon below and mail it in an envelope or paste it on a one-cent postal card. Many big fortunes have started with only a coupon, a name, and a postage stamp or postal. Send YOUR name today — YOUR fortune may depend just upon this coupon!

THIS COUPON *may bring you a* FORTUNE

TOM WOOD, Manager,
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Yes, tell me quickly, without any obligation or expense on my part, how I can win $3,500.00 and enjoy happy, carefree days again.

My name is.....

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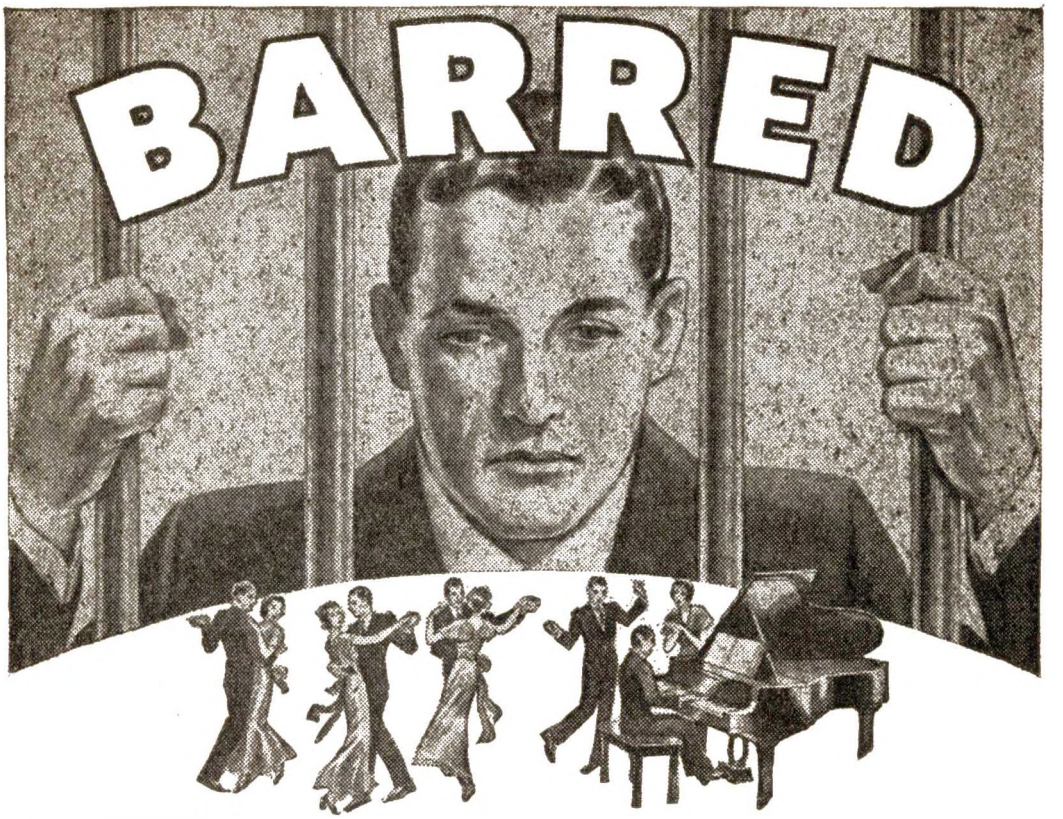

—because he couldn't entertain

ARE you too, ruled out, barred from parties and popularity? You are probably just as attractive, interesting, clever as anyone else. Yet others always capture all the good times while you alone are left out in the cold.

Why? Find out why and the bars that shut you out will fade away and disappear. Most people who miss popularity are themselves to blame. Friends would invite you out if only you had something to add to the general gaiety. For that is why we have parties . . . to entertain each other.

And yet, so many think ability to entertain is a special talent. If you mention music (the greatest single factor in popularity) they say, "I can never learn to play. I'll need a private teacher. It will cost so much, and take so long. No, not for me."

They remain barred outsiders because they don't realize that no one need be a musical genius to learn to play . . . that thousands have acquired a musical education without teachers, tremendous expense, tedious practicing and boring scales.

Forget Theories — Do What 600,000 Others Have Done

Already, six hundred thousand men and women have chosen this new method of learning music, many just as discouraged as you now. And every single one of them chose this method of learning to play their favorite instrument.

Most started towards popularity by coming across such an advertisement as this. At first they may have doubted that a way had been found to make learning to play easy and inexpensive instead of boring and costly.

But all proved to their own satisfaction that they could learn to play at home, without a teacher, in half the usual time, and *at a cost of only a few cents a day!*

Make up your mind to read this offer through. Take advantage of the opportunity it brings you, yet place yourself under no obligation . . . the offer that convinced over six hundred thousand that the U. S. School of Music Method was the ideal way to learn to play.

Pick Your Instrument

Piano	'Cello
Organ	Mandolin
Ukulele	Harp
Cornet	Saxophone
Trombone	Flute
Piccolo	Clarinet
Guitar	Violin

Hawaiian Steel Guitar
Sight Singing
Voice and Speech Culture
Drums and Traps
Automatic Finger Control
Banjo (Plectrum, 5-String or Tenor)
Piano Accordion
Italian and German Accordion
Harmony and Composition
Junior's Piano Course

Send for Free Booklet And Demonstration Lesson

The U. S. School of Music will send you a complete, explanatory booklet and a Free Demonstration Lesson. All you promise is to read through both book and lesson—thoroughly. Nothing more, because once you see this booklet, you will be convinced that you, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument. You won't have to be urged. You will urge us to hurry your first lessons to you.

That's a fair offer, isn't it? You have to be satisfied before you begin.

If you want popularity, if you would like to be able to entertain and surprise your friends, to make real music—jazz or classical—roll from your finger tips the minute you sit down to play—ACT NOW! Mail this coupon today! No obligation. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 863 Brunswick Building, New York City.

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Please send me your free book, "How You Can Master Music in Your Own Home," with inspiring message by Dr. Frank Crane. Free Demonstration Lesson and particulars of your easy payment plan. I am interested in the following course:

Have You
..... Instrument? .....

Name .....

Address .....

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

Plan Used by Famous Physician of Great Eastern University in Curing Students . . . Now Given to Rupture Victims Everywhere

Part of New Method . . . Amazing Suction Cell Retainer . . . Makes Cruel, Gouging Trusses Unnecessary

Rupture Reduced In 30 Days . . . OR NO COST!

HERE is great news for rupture victims. A two-fold rupture system has been developed, tested by thousands of people. It is based on the remarkable record made by Dr. Jay W. Seaver at a great eastern university, and a special new kind of way to support rupture. You do not have to wear leg straps, torturous springs or cruel hard pads. Instead, Suction-Cell Retainer provides deep-tissue support for your rupture. A special offer is now being made to truss victims. That offer says that unless your rupture is actually and decidedly reduced in size within 30 days after wearing Suction-Cell Retainer, it does not cost you one penny. Read below the details of results accomplished by Dr. Seaver and then mail coupon immediately for free proof offer.

SCIENCE is every day making new accomplishments. Dr. Seaver's records have shown that he actually cured rupture among the students of the university in more than 7 out of 10 cases. Some of them were baseball players, some gymnasium performers and others athletes engaged in strenuous exercise. He not only freed them from having to wear trusses but allowed them to go ahead in their exercise. Now, thanks to another man widely experienced in rupture relief, the essentials of the Dr. Seaver methods are available to everyone, with the radically different Suction-Cell idea for retaining rupture.

Suction-Cell Retainer has nothing to do with medicines nor pastes, and can be used without cumbersome straps or elastics; weighs but a few ounces and is not noticeable through the clothing. Rupture sufferers and people wearing it say they scarcely know they have it on.

But most important of all, when used according to instructions, it guards against the dangerous "coming down." What the wearing of Suction-Cell Retainer really means is best indicated by the extraordinary offer now made to send it to ruptured people for free proof use—with the understanding that unless it actually reduces the size of the rupture, during trial, there is not one cent of cost.

Every man or woman who is ruptured owes it to himself to find out immediately full details concerning this modern advancement in rupture relief. Authorities say that many victims face the grave dangers of strangulation, because their ruptures are never properly held. In many cases appliances worn actually cause this danger to be increased. Everyone who mails the coupon below is now being sent an interesting booklet on rupture; facts are given about the danger and cause of strangulation, the importance of proper replacement of rupture and other vitally interesting information.

You will also receive letters showing what the new methods have accomplished for people of every age in every walk of life—some of whom had been ruptured for more than a score of years. You will receive information about the methods as used by Dr. Seaver at the great Yale University and you can determine for yourself what they will mean to you.

Do not delay an instant. Mail the coupon now so that you will be entitled to the decidedly valuable FREE PROOF OFFER before it is withdrawn.

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Mail FREE Proof Coupon Immediately

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New Science Institute,
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Send me at once free details of the Dr. Seaver method, Suction-Cell Retainer, and the Free Proof Offer which allows me to use Suction-Cell Retainer, with the understanding that it must reduce my rupture within 30 days or it costs me nothing.

Name.....

Address.....

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

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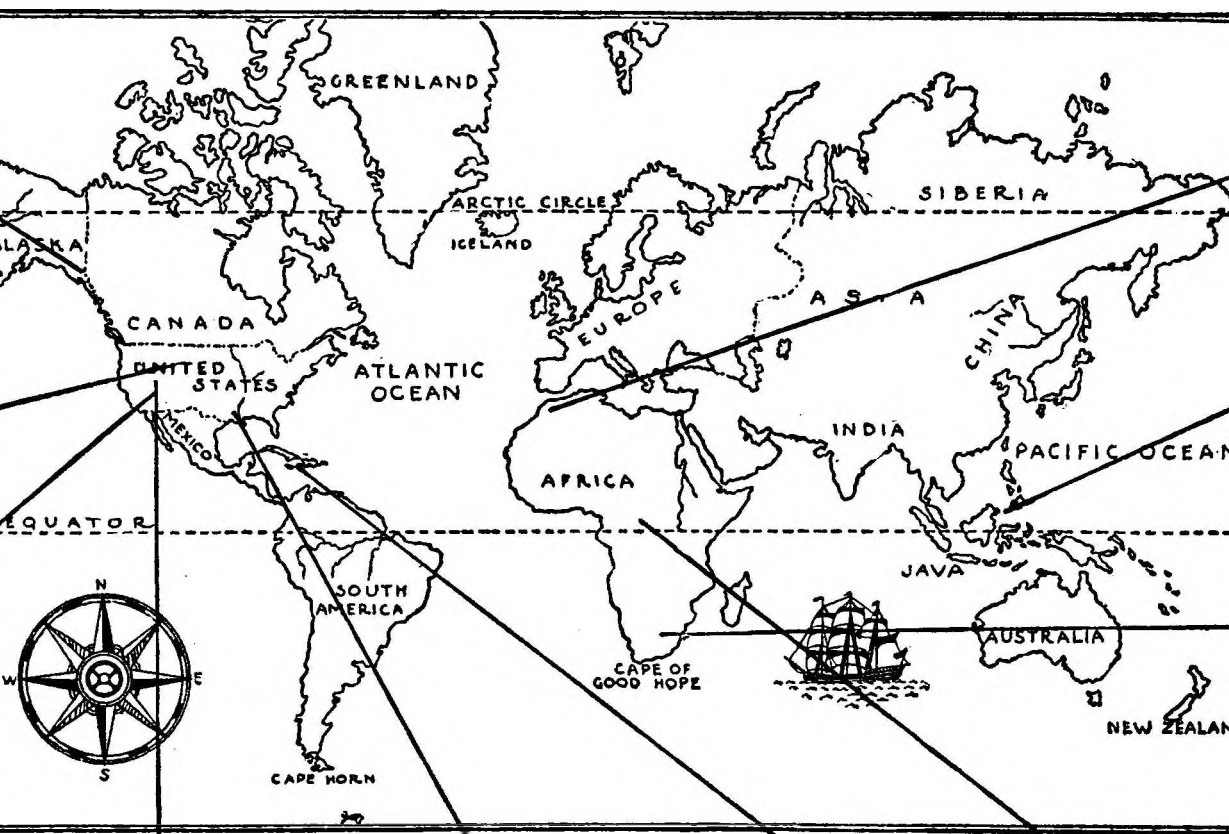

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The Lost Island

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The Claws of The Le

THE GREATEST AND BEST

Short

TWICE A MONTH

CONTENTS

ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

Stories

HARRY E. MAULE, *EDITOR*

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U. S. Patent Office

MAR. 25th, 1933

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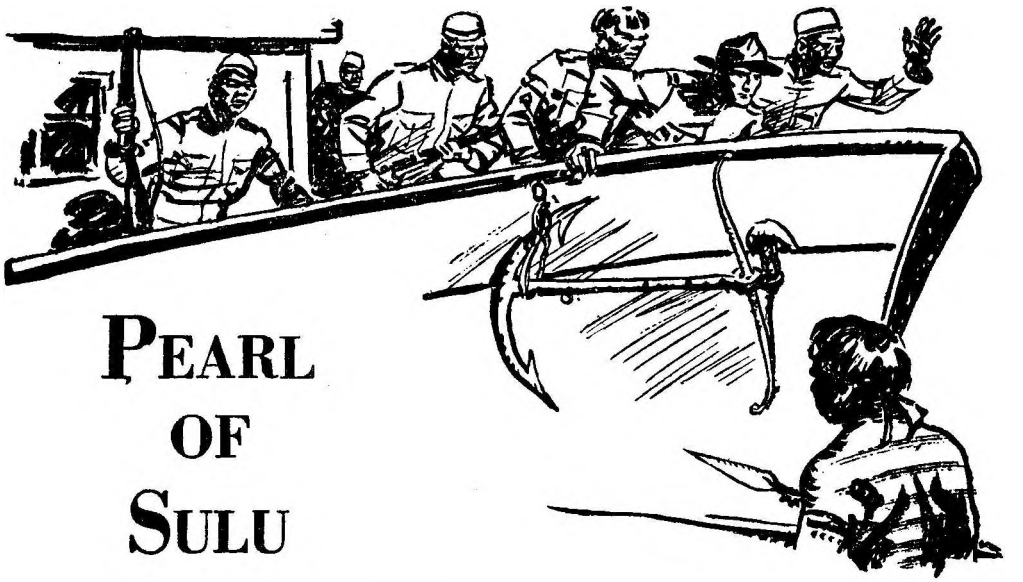
Vol. CXLII, No. 6 Whole No. 654



PEARL OF SULU

A Complete Novel

By CHARLES L. CLIFFORD

Author of "The Tin Horn Killer," "The Fate of a Man," etc.

I

CAPTAIN NEWBERRY grew actively furious as he at last made out the approaching launch through his glasses. For the past month he had been a mighty hard man to get along with; for, when a captain of Scouts, stuck in the most out of the way station in the whole Philippines finally gets that leave he has been dreaming of, and then that leave is snatched from him because of the dumbness of his lieutenant, well——

The captain had worked himself up into a fine fury when Cowan disembarked from the launch and came up to report. Newberry awaited him on his verandah. He started the ball rolling with a string of his own picturesque oaths, blasting as they were original. Cowan just stared down at him with a resigned look on his handsome, weatherbeaten face.

Run out of oaths, Newberry raged:

"You've had your three months leave in the States while I was sweating blood over these damned little Macabebes. All alone here with this gang on Siasi of all places. Damned blob in the Sulu Sea. And not a white man short of Jolo. And I can't go there because I'm alone with the company. You know my leave's due when you come back, and here you hale back here a month overdue. Just enough for me to miss the handicap golf at Baguio. I'd have won it sure as hell! And I got the most insulting letters from Dixon and Costello and Moylan and the rest of them from up there where it's cool. We all planned our leave together. And you—you—you—*shavetail!*"

Cowan had to laugh. He loved the old man; and he knew that most of this was just a characteristic blowing off of steam.

"The nineteenth hole is still there. That's as far as you ever got at Baguio, you told me yourself," Cowan said grinning.

"Listen," Newberry said waving Cowan to a cane rocker beside him, "you come across now with a yarn. A damned good one, mind you. Tell me just what she

The Sea Gypsies of the Pacific guard well their sacred dead.

looked like, how that rye tasted—all the details, or by the lord Harry I send in those charges for one month's absence without leave—so help me! Sixto!"

The Filipino boy came running with the Scotch and soda as he was expected to do at that tone of voice. The two officers filled their glasses. Newberry drank deeply of his, then growled:

"Well I can get off in the morning. You might have tried to spoil my leave, but you missed. They had rain up there in the mountains and the tournament was postponed. So if the story's a good one I might——"

"You won't even tee off," Cowan said sipping his drink.

"Cowan," the older man looked shrewdly at his lieutenant, "it's not like you to report late. Something damned strange I'll warrant to make you miss a transport. Come clean now!"

COWAN was staring out over the blue of the Sulu Sea. His heart was heavy. The captain saw that there was something here that would take more than his usual levity to arouse. It wasn't like this man to let a fellow officer down. He laid a hand on the lieutenant's sleeve. "If you'd rather not—you know I was kidding about charges. If they cleared you at the other end it's all right with me. I know what it is to see a white woman with color in her cheeks for the first time in four years. Frisco's a great town. When I was younger I passed my leaves there. I know."

Cowan faced his captain. "There's no use in dodging it. You're right, Captain. It was a woman. And all this past month I've been cursing myself for a damned fool——"

"And still loving her at that, eh?" the captain said.

The younger man's face reddened at the words. "That's the shameful part of it." he admitted. "She was so beautiful I—I——"

"You let her play you for a sucker. We've all done it, boy. Every soldier who ever went on leave with a pocketful of

money. Maybe if you get it out of your system——" he suggested artfully. He had been lonely without this man whom he'd grown to think of almost as a son. And he was hungry for news of life.

"All right," Cowan said. "But you'll give me the horse laugh. It was like this:

"I had been drinking rye—it's grand in that cold town. I saw her in the St. Francis Hotel. I couldn't take my eyes off her. She—she was sort of tall; and she had that color in her face you——"

"I can just see her," the captain said. "They hang around that Peacock Alley."

"No!" Cowan said sharply. "Not that kind. She looked——"

"Oh, all right. Go on."

"There was a man always with her. She didn't wear any ring—that is not a wedding ring; but she did have a pearl on her right hand. I'll admit I was jealous as hell, just watching her with that man."

"Sure—jealous of a woman you didn't even know."

"Yes. And then one day a newspaper reporter called my room. It was the day before I was to take the transport back to Manila. Leave up. I felt like hell. This newspaper man wanted a story. You know they always give the transports a write up when they leave or come in from Manila. Some one had told him about me—that Bud Bajo business."

"Well it's something at that to have all the troops in Manila turned out to decorate a Scout shavetail," Newberry said. "And I wrote the citation myself. Neat I thought it."

"Damned exaggerated," Cowan said. "Anyway I got tight and I suppose I did brag a bit. And it was in the papers the next day with my picture. This girl saw it; and she came up to me in the hotel lounge and asked about where I was stationed and all. I said here at Siasi and then she asked about Taluk."

NEWBERRY raised his heavy brows in surprise. "Our Taluk?"

"Yes. I told her it was just a small island six miles from here and that nobody knew much about it. We'd only been stationed here a couple of months before I went on leave so I really couldn't tell her much."

"But how in the world——?"

"You ever hear of a Scout captain named French?" Cowan asked significantly.

Newberry started. "French? I knew him slightly. He was in command here for a good many years. Got on marvelously with the Bajaos—the sea gypsies. He was killed fighting with them against the Joloano Moros some ten years ago. There was a lot of talk and mystery about it at the time. I was in Los Banos then; but I never got the straight of it."

"This girl claimed to be his daughter. Said her mother died over here when she was young. The old man sent her to live with an aunt in some town in New Hampshire. The aunt was death on him because he'd run off with her sister and tried to prejudice the child against him. He wrote her letters she said. Pathetic letters telling her that he would come back when he retired and make a regular princess of her. And he sent her what he could spare of his pay and many valuable pearls. In the last letter, just before he was reported killed, he sent her a wonderful ring set with a black pearl. He seemed to have had a premonition of death and asked her to have his body buried with that of her mother in this New Hampshire town."

"She show you the pearl?"

Cowan grinned wryly.

"I said there was one on her finger. But you can buy things like that in the five and ten cent store. Don't laugh. I know I was a sap. I've seen a few movies myself. I should have known then that I was being taken for a sucker; a romantic boob. But I'd had a few. Some of that drug store rye. And she—well——"

"I'm not laughing," Newberry said. "And French had a daughter. I remember her and the mother in Jolo. Why do you——?"

"Wait," Cowan said, his jaw hard. "Sure she had the dope. She'd have to have had some facts to start the scheme on. Anyway, she told me that her aunt had died just lately. Before, being just a child, she had been able to do little about the old man's request. But when the aunt died she left a bit of money; and the pearls the old man had sent she had sold for quite a sum. So through an attorney she had tried to get information from the War Department. Asked to have her father's body disinterred as she had heard that men killed in France had been brought back. Papers full of it. But Washington hedged. The thing got in the papers. And one day this man I'd seen her with, Sladen was his name, looked her up. He said he'd been a pal of her father's over here. They'd been together up Samar way and French had helped him out of a jam with the Pulajane's. Owed him a debt, he said, and wanted to help the daughter in repayment. He said he knew the country down here. He persuaded her to make a trip to Manila, because the Washington authorities had put her off with a vague reply that the decision rested with the Commanding General of the Philippine Department as to whether it would be good policy to disturb French's grave. It seems that he was supposed to have been buried on Taluk itself."

"Phew! You know what that would mean? If it was so?"

"Not much to me," Cowan said. "I've just seen the place going by in the launch."

"You and everybody else," Newberry said in a low voice. "These Bajaos used to be a great people. The Moros from Jolo hate them because they are not true believers. Not Moslems like themselves. They're a pagan race and live on the sea in boats. You see them about here; but you must have noticed they never stay ashore for more than a few hours. Just to pick up a few necessities."

"They're savage looking, all right," Cowan said. "I've never seen anybody who knew much about them."

"This one station here at Siasi is the only one among their islands. And before we came to take over I got confidential orders from Manila to respect their customs and traditions. The reason for our being here is to keep the Moros from Jolo off. They want to get at that island. To dig Taluk from end to end. There have been bloody battles between them; but the Luwaan, or Bajaos are too few now and unarmed. You see it is a custom of these people to bury their dead on that island. It's actually just one huge place of ceremony and cemetery. No one is allowed to land there. What goes on I don't know and never heard of any one who does. But I do know that there is a special burial ground for the chiefs and that they are buried with great ceremony and with all their wealth intact. That means, if you believe the tales of the pearls they own, a tremendous treasure is lying there for somebody."

COWAN sat up, almost spilling his drink in his excitement.

"Good lord! Then maybe—all along I've just thought these impostors were taking me for my pitiful roll. But now ——"

Newberry said sharply, "Tell me what happened and we'll try to figure it."

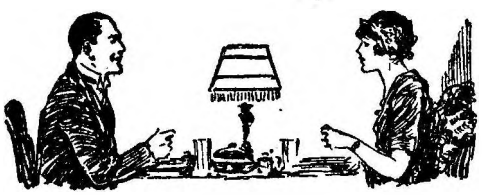
"I fell for her story," Cowan said. "She wanted me to help out on this end. Said it was almost certain the Manila authorities would give her and this Sladen permission at their own expense to disinter French on promise not to disturb other graves or the natives. I met Sladen. He came by and saw us talking. He seemed sore as hell at the girl for telling me the story. Just an act, I figure now."

Newberry had been thinking. "The idea is, she came to you not wanting him to know," he said. "Figuring you would give her the straight dope and maybe help out over here with troops, being stationed nearby. Showing possibly that she wasn't quite sure of this Sladen?"

"Well it seemed like that. But——"

"Sladen bumps into you. Tells you it's all clear sailing. Maybe shows a bit of jealousy, eh? Doesn't want you around especially?"

"Something like that," Cowan admitted



feeling uncomfortable. "Or I thought so then. But he played up to me. We all went up to his suite to have a drink and talk the idea over. I got a little tight I guess. Looking at that beautiful girl. Of course I fell for her story. And I could see myself helping her out over here."

NEWBERRY grinned.

"You fell in love with her my boy. You didn't give a damn about this quest of hers except that it would bring her out here. And you resented this butter-in Sladen. Am I right?"

"Maybe. But that's all over. They took me, plenty. Fed me on this fairy story and on doped rye, way I figure it. Anyway I got to bragging again. I promised them the whole islands; said I'd back them up with the whole company. I'm afraid I completely forgot you were in command."

"Well, I won't be tomorrow."

"They seemed to be egging me on. The girl looked more wonderful to me every drink this Sladen handed me. Then—well, I guess I got too bold. I practically told her I'd fallen for her."

"She'd known that for hours," Newberry said. "You don't have to tell women that."

"But I think I did. Actually. I remember, hazily, seeing Sladen glaring at me. Maybe he believed my line about being able to do this job for her with one hand. Because by then I'd had her father's body dug up with all honors and myself standing by with the company at Present and possibly with her hanging on my arm. Anyway, not much of my scheme included Sladen and tight as I was I sensed that he resented it. Matter of fact I dimly recollect hoping that he would start something. I had a most thorough desire to take a sock at his jaw.

"I think I frightened the girl. Or at least she pretended to be frightened. You'll see that of course it was all put on. She swept out of the room, annoyed. I remember that Sladen tried to keep me from following her—from insisting on telling her that I loved her. He quieted me when she had gone. Intimated that I hadn't a chance with her. That she was more or less playing me for a come-on to do this dirty work out here. Then I think he carried me to my own room. When I came to it was noon of the next day. There was a bottle and glasses lying by the bed on the floor. My head felt like a football; and the transport had sailed. My friends of course had checked out. And my pockets were inside out. Took me for all I had. I reported to the corps area A. G. and he gave me a growl and sent me over on the next boat. How's that for a sucker game?"

COWAN expected to hear his captain roar with laughter; but Newberry looked very serious.

"Can't figure why they'd cook up such an elaborate plot just to take me for a couple of hundred bucks. Hell, I'd have given the girl anything I had for just one tear out of those eyes."

"That is odd," Newberry said. "Has it occurred to you that they might have told you the truth?"

Cowan stared at Newberry. "No," he said. "If I ever saw a crook that Sladen's one. But after what you just told me about that loot in pearls that's buried on Taluk——"

"Yes," Newberry said. "If they got the general in Manila to back them up—with troops. Yes, if they could finance

a boat and get ashore there under government protection they might pull a racket that would make the Chicago beer ring look silly, if the Moro tales one hears about some of those buried pearls mean anything."

"Why would they take that money out of my pocket? Wouldn't they be fools to let themselves in for such a petty thing if they were actually coming out here?"

Newberry poured himself a fresh drink. "I guess you're right. Chances are this Sladen's been out here. Heard rumors. Got this woman of his to fake the part of French's daughter. Chances are they work up and down the coast at big hotels pulling that yarn on men with big money. Probably play it like the old Spanish prisoner racket. Have the woman put it up to some playful old boy that she needs money to finance an expedition for her father's body. The cruel government won't help her. Maybe promises to take the old boy along, make love to him under the Southern Cross——"

Cowan arose. "I'm tired, Skipper. Like to clean up at my quarters. Don't rub it in, for Pete's sake!"

Newberry laughed. "I won't tell on you. And when I saw the launch I had Sixto tell your muchacho you were due. See you at lunch."

As Cowan strode down the walk of the bungalow the captain called to him. He pointed towards a smaller house some hundred yards away—to Cowan's quarters. "Funny thing, come to think of it, Cowan."

Cowan scowled, "I thought you were going to forget it!"

The captain laughed. "No; your house. It was the first one here; only one until last year when they put this one up. You know who built it? Who always lived in it?"

"No," Cowan said over his shoulder.

"Yo're girl friend's father—crazy old French."

The captain roared with laughter, and Cowan growled, "To hell with old French!"

WHILE changing Cowan inspected his quarters with a new interest. So crazy old French had lived here! What a coincidence. There was plenty of evidence of eccentricity about it Cowan thought as he gazed about the place. The partition walls were of the conventional plaited bamboo; but the outer walls were of thick, hardwood planking unusual for such a building. But most remarkable of all, instead of the usual footing of spit bamboo, the bedroom floor was constructed of wide, beautifully polished ebony planks. Nothing finer in the governor's palace at Malacanan.

Cowan thought, as he rubbed his sandals over the gleaming floor, a great life those old-time Scout captains lived. Little kings in far places with their hundred and ten adoring retainers; hardbitten native soldiers who would die to the last man for them. They took what they wanted in these lonely places. They built to suit their own peculiar ideas.

II

THE next morning at dawn Captain Newberry steamed away to Jolo in the launch and Cowan was left in command of the company.

In a few days he was back again into the old routine as though his four months' absence had never been. He enjoyed watching his savage little soldiers drilling, swimming, running at dummies with their gleaming bayonets. Then one day a launch docked, a white soldier from Jolo came up the road and handed him a written message. "Lieutenant's to come back with me."

Cowan frowned and read the message. It directed him in terse words to report at once to the commanding officer, Jolo, Sulu. To return with the bearer.

"I've no other officer here. What's it about?" Cowan said.

The soldier made that classic gesture with his head and shoulders that only the ranks can execute. What went on between

officers, as the officer concerned must know, was too much for him.

"I oney knows I'm to run the Lieutenant back."

That evening Cowan, a little scared, reported to the colonel who commanded the Sulu district. He was thinking that, after all, there might be a court martial in this thing yet. Newberry's letting him off might have been questioned by higher authority at headquarters.

But when the colonel shook hands, smiled, and pointed to a chair in his quarters, Cowan breathed a little freer.

"Got a job for you, young man. Sorry your captain's away—but it's your turkey out there at Siasi. Always believe in letting the man on the job handle the job, eh?"

"Yes, sir," Cowan murmured, wondering.

Outside of the colonel's quarters the post band was playing softly. Some intricate, classical composition that even the most sophisticated orchestra might have thought twice before attempting. But with soldierly spirit, some hiatus, and many flat notes, they struggled bravely on. Cowan almost laughed. The whole thing was so typical. Now, after all this mysterious prologue, he would probably be told his company was to target rifles against the visit of an inspector.

BUT the next words of the colonel brought him up stiff in his seat.

"An unfortunate incident has occurred on Taluk Island. A man named Sladen chartered a boat and tried to disinter an officer's body that was buried there. Went about it tactlessly, it seems. Should have come here first, gone about it officially. But he says he didn't want to bother anyone. Thought all he had to do was hand out a few presents to the chief and sail away. Well, the fat's in the fire."

Cowan was staring at the colonel with starting eyes. The colonel's face had become grim.

"These people, these Bajaos, drove them off," he said sternly. "Killed two of his native laborers. Fired on his boat. That's the first shot that's been fired in Sulu since I took command. The orders are clear about arms. All the archipelago has been combed for rifles. The datoes have given their pledges. And the Mohammedan Moros have kept theirs to the letter. This pagan tribe is bad medicine. Always been a source of trouble down here so I'm told. The Moslems hate them: they're an element of discord in an otherwise progressing country. As I see it it's time to clean them out. They've defied an order from the Department. And besides, this fellow Sladen had a civil government order the Department got for him in Manila, just in case."

The colonel stopped speaking abruptly. He glared at the young Scout officer as though he were the offending chief of the outlaw Bajaos. Cowan, dazed by what he had just heard, sat dumb, staring back at his commanding officer.

The colonel cleared his throat harshly.

"Another thing," he said. "Captain French was with me up north—during the Insurrection. A finer, or braver officer never breathed. And by the Lord Harry I'm going to see that his remains get the proper respect due a gallant officer who died in action. Cowan, you're to take your company, escort Mr. Sladen back to Taluk, and if you have to kill every man, woman and child in the place, bring Captain French's remains back here with honor!"

"Yes, sir," Cowan said.

"Sladen's got a comfortable motor pearler. She'll proceed to Siasi; and you can put a guard aboard her. Your own launch with two from here should take your company over with plenty of room. And I'll attach a machine-gun platoon. Clear?"

"Yes, sir."

THE colonel arose. His official air dropped from him like magic.

"You're dining with us before you leave. The launches are ready at the dock. I

hear that rascal Juan rattling the cocktails now. Come along into the *sala* and meet the ladies; a treat for you after Siasi."

Cowan's dazed mind was slowly clearing. He started to speak. He meant to cry out:

"Those people are crooks! They robbed me, framed me, in Frisco."

But the colonel was already through the door of his library. He turned his head, smiling at Cowan and gesturing him on. The habit of unquestioning obedience was strong in the young officer. And his mind was still muddled. He could hear the voices of women—laughing lightly, talking. The music still played, played very badly; and there was the homely clink of glasses. Hardly the time or place to burst forth in melodramatic denunciation. A little later would do as well—when he had the colonel alone.

Cowan walked into the *sala*. He was aware of white dresses and starched, crisp white mess jackets. He bowed over the hand of the colonel's lady, shook hands with the several officers, all of whom he knew.

And then at the end of the long room he stood stock still, staring into the eyes of the girl Jessica, who called herself French.

The colonel's wife, unaware of anything unusual, brought them together. She was the typical, talkative army woman; more entertained at her own parties than any of her guests could possibly be. She laughed gaily now and placed a fat arm about the girl.

"Here's one of our real heroes, Jessie, dear; away in from the bosque. I'm placing him next to you."

She rushed off then to whisper shrilly to the house boy, who should have been in the kitchen instead of staring dumbly at the empty tray in his hand.

Dinner was announced before Cowan could find his voice. The girl, Jessica, after a cool nod of her head, had turned from him and was talking animatedly to a fat quartermaster major. And somehow, in the shuffling about the table a little later, she contrived to seat herself by the delighted corps man. There were no place cards and no one seemed to notice her lapse—least of all her chattering hostess.

THE girl was across the table from Cowan, and he watched her covertly while he pretended to eat the excellent food. It might have been bad rice and bony fish as far as he was concerned. His usually robust appetite was gone; the bitterness of the past few weeks aroused to a flame. The nerve of her! She had even succeeded in taking in the wise old war horse who had actually known this Captain French. Yet this wasn't so strange, he decided on reflection. The army was a simple guild, hospitable and socially unsuspecting. A member of an officer's family was always welcome in any set of quarters, even if personally unknown. A perfectly natural act, the entertaining of this personable girl, by the big hearted, mouthy old colonel's wife.

The girl avoided Cowan's eyes. He stared at her almost openly now through the mass of pink flowers that banked the center of the table with trailing color. He was amazed at her beauty. Among the other women with their sallow, tropic-worn faces, she seemed to glow.

Cowan, sick at heart, watched her, almost wishing that he were meeting her now for the first time—that her treachery had yet to come. He realized, as the table talk passed from one familiar topic to the other, that this girl's mission here was not a matter of general knowledge. He wondered where the man Sladen was. Probably wisely remaining away from her on the boat, so that these simple army yaps would consider him what he claimed to be: a mature, almost fatherly assistant. An old friend of the girl's parent.

After dinner, the First Lady of the post insisted that Cowan stay for the hop at the Officers' Club. When he demurred, as firmly as he dared, the colonel broke in:

"No need your starting until later. You've got to go back to your station any-

way; you can't load your men and get under way for Taluk before daylight tomorrow, and it's only a few hours' run to Siasi. Lord, when I was a lieutenant I'd

dance all night and drill all day. We appreciated the gals in those days!"

Cowan perforce stayed.

At the Club the music was going when the colonel's party arrived. Heroic, indomitable, he thought of the little brown musicians. As soon as he decently could he made his way to the bar and held a rather tasteless reunion with most of his old pals. They were a good gang. Fervently he envied them their station in a place where you saw a white face once in a while. Women's faces.

HE STRODE out onto the dance floor and towed the colonel's wife around for what seemed to be an hour. Then he made his way to a corner of the wide porch that hung over the bay. He was screened here by the palms and flowers that banked the dancing room. The music came to him more softly, the light from the swaying Japanese lanterns were mellowed through the lattice of verdure. He wanted to think.

Cowan lit his pipe. He leaned against the rail of the porch and gazed out at the bay. The sea echoed dully under the pilings of the building—the merest wash from a gentle swell. The lights of pearl luggers threw streaks of yellow on the level bay.

He was aware of a slight sound behind him. A new scent, faint, exotic, heady, came to him. He turned and faced the girl Jessica.

His thoughts up to now had prepared him. That contemplation of her beauty at table this night had beaten him. Nothing she could do, or say or scheme would stop him; make him hesitate. He had his orders. He had observed carefully the colonel and his wife with this girl. And against their apparent trust and growing love for her he had nothing more substantial to offer than that he had met her in San Francisco and had waked up the next morning with a big head and no valuables. He could prove nothing; she could indignantly deny it all. And she would. There was no doubt whatsoever about that.

No; he would see this thing through. He would at least have the bitter satisfaction of working for her—giving to her the dubious things she wanted from life. Money, treasure of a sort, of course. There was something in that grave that would justify all this craft and deception, he felt sure. As for Sladen——

The girl spoke first. She said, steadily:

"I have heard what your orders are; will you answer me, honestly, one question, Lieutenant Cowan?"

Cowan tried to hide the grim smile that twisted his mouth.

"That's an odd word—coming from you. What is the question?"

Her color rose a little; but her voice remained cool.

"Will there be trouble?" she said. "Fighting? I—I must know that."

Cowan smiled openly. Not a pleasant smile. Little as he knew by experience of the Bajaos, he had heard tales. Their ways were mystery; their hiding places obscure. They moved like restless, legendary creatures, forever over the seas. Their rovings took them to far places; and arms and ammunition were plentiful in Borneo for the bearers of pearls.

"I hope so, Miss *French*," Cowan answered her question. "You and your friend

have gone to quite a bit of trouble to insure it, don't you think?"

She was pale now; and her fingers knit and twisted against her breast. The band —an orchestra now—were playing really well, a Spanish piece they had heard in their cradles. It was difficult for Cowan to maintain the pose he had assumed in his bitterness, listening to that moving melody, looking into those appealing gray eyes.

"When you invade a peaceful settlement; tear up sacred ground; even the simplest people defend themselves. These Bajaos are a savage, fanatical tribe of pagans; with absolute belief and loyalty to their pagan gods."

The girl gave a low, sharp cry; almost a sob.

"Oh, I can't—I won't—even *he* wouldn't want it!"

"There's no need for an act, Miss French. You've seen enough and guessed enough of the army to know that when an order is issued it is carried out. My little company may fail—be wiped out. But more and more troops will sail. You've aroused them in Manila, and the report of one casualty in the press places the white man's pride at stake. You know your stuff all right!"

COWAN'S voice had risen to a savage snarl. He realized as he beat at this frail woman that it was the man Sladen he wanted confronting him. He could talk a little harsher to him, and in the end, drive his point home with his fists. Many of his little brown soldiers might die because of this civilian's crooked dreams; himself even. But if he could pound that hated face to pulp before the first shot were fired——

The girl tried to speak; she reached her hand towards him appealingly. He was aware that the hand was slim, very white; that a jewel shone dully on one of the fingers.

He pushed back from her until he pressed against the rail. He said, his voice hard, grinding, "And remember this; I'm in charge of this expedition! Your boy friend Sladen goes with me. And when the landing is made at Taluk, and the slugs begin to come over—well, Friend Sladen will be right up in front. And I'll have a gun in his back to see that he is! Good night, Miss French!"

Cowan spun on his heel, strode across the dance room, spoke to his hostess and hurried down the steps of the club.

III

THE launch that had brought him was tied up near the end of the long Jolo Pier near the small lighthouse. A dim lantern swung in her cockpit and the Scout officer observed that steam was up. As he climbed down the wharf ladder, the grinning face of the soldier skipper appeared from under her awning.

"I got my orders, Lieutenant. Soon's the lieutenant's ready we can push off."

Cowan observed that there were two natives standing watching him on the fore decking.

"What's their job?" he asked the Q. M. soldier.

The man grunted. "Engineer an' deckhand, the pay sheet says. I could do the works wid oney one hand."

Cowan liked the genial grin of the old soldier. He had been garrulously friendly all the way over that day; but Cowan had noticed that there was a shrewd practicality about the man. And he sensed, with his own knowledge of soldiers, that he was loyal and would be dependable in a pinch.

"Send those men forward, Sergeant," Cowan said quietly.

The old soldier's eyes gleamed. He harangued the Filipinos so sharply that they scampered forward in alarm and almost cowered in the small box of a forecastle forward of the engine room.

"We goin' into a scrap, Lieutenant?" the sergeant whispered hoarsely as soon as the two were alone.

Cowan laughed. He was glad that some-

one was pleased with the way things were going. He said quietly:

"Maher, I'm going to trust you; as if you were one of my own men and had been in the outfit for years."

"That goes with me, Lieutenant."

"All right. Now listen closely to what I say; and *do* just as I say when I'm through."

"O. K. Lieutenant," Maher said, his eyes glowing with anticipation.

"You know that motor pearler? The one this Sladen chartered to make this trip?"

"I heard somethin' about it. They brung a coupla goo-goo stiffs offen it a few days ago up here to the hospital. Some says they was jumped by pirates while they was prospectin' for pearls. But ain't nobody knows the low-down."

"Never mind all that. Do you know where she lies?"

"Right out there, sir. You can see her ridin' lights."

Cowan followed the sergeant's pointing arm. Not three hundred yards to the west of the dock the blurred outlines of a large pearler bulked in the dark.

"That's her; an' here jest astern tied up, see—that there's our other launch."

"What about her skipper? Another soldier?"

"He's a Filipino, but he ain't a bad guy. Useter be a Scout an' got a Certificate o' Merit for draggin' some wounded officer outa the fire at the fight at Baksak. Got a coupla these apes, though, for crew."

"All right. Can you get a small boat?"

"Easy, sir; they's a Q. M. one tied aways up the dock there."

"I want you to row out to that Pearler and do a job for me, Maher."

"I'm off, Lieutenant."

"Sit down. Give me a chance to tell you what you're to do."

"O. K., Lieutenant."

"Go out there and ask for the boss, understand? No names; just the boss."

"Right, sir!"

"Tell him you're in charge of the two launches to Siasi and that you're putting off at once. He's to follow."

"I get it, sir."

"He's going to ask you about what's at Siasi—about the officers. You're not to have it too pat. All you know is that you're to report to Captain Newberry of the Scouts there; but that you heard the quartermaster officer say in figuring the boat capacities that the other officer was away on leave. Get it?"

"Got it fine, sir."

"You've never even heard of me."

The big sergeant was on his feet now, flexing his bulky arms. He grinned down at Cowan, who sat in the stern sheets filling his pipe.

"I ain't takin' no orders offen this fella, am I, Lieutenant?"

"Not now or ever," Cowan said grimly, and the way he said it told a world of story to the old soldier.

A HALF hour later Sergeant Maher was back in the launch.

"I sent your seaman up to the club for some cold beer. I hope you don't mind?" Cowan said smiling.

Maher eyed the box full of ice in the cockpit with beaming approval.

"Sure 'tis gonna be hot tomorra like every other day in this garden of Aden, but who knows if we'll be alive then, Lieutenant?"

"It tastes even better at night," Cowan said. "Well, let's have it?"

"I seen him—a brute av a man," Maher said lowering his voice melodramatically. "They was a scut av a pock-marked ape alongside of him, an' seemed to be in the know, all right. You sure had the guy figgered right, sir. Right off he up an' asks me jest as the Lieutenant went an' said. But I left him guessin', I did. Sure he must think I'm an admiral the way I talked. Give him his sailin' orders, I did, like the Lieutenant said; an' he asked me about would they be fightin' and did we have enough troops and arms and such. I never let on to him about them beauties

lyin' up forward there—them Daddy Brownings an' the cases of extry ammunition in the belly o' her."

"Can the launches make it back there ahead of the pearler?"

Maher lifted his eyes from the ice at his feet with an indignant wrench.

"That stinkin' tub! Sure she wouldn't make five knots in a mill race! An' lucky she'll be if she raises Siasi by noon tomorrow, with us in an slapin' hard by daylight!"

"Not sleeping hard," Cowan said. "Cast off. Let's go."

Ten minutes later the two launches steamed out of the harbor and headed west, then south. As they passed the pearler it hailed. They'd leave when they loaded more gasoline.

THE green mass of Siasi loomed up with the first streaks of dawn. And by sunrise Cowan had given his orders to his first sergeant, and the barracks hummed with preparation.

No use moving on Taluk until the pearler arrived, according to Cowan's scheme of things, and so the Scout officer turned in for what sleep he might catch before that event. He left orders to be called as soon as Sladen's boat was sighted.

It was mid morning before Cowan's Filipino boy aroused his master from heavy sleep. He hurried to the barracks. His men were already drawn up in formation, the single squad—the least he could leave to protect the post—standing out of ranks, watching enviously.

He looked down the line of squat brown men. They held their heads high, their chins tucked briskly in. Their packs were taut, their rifles threw back the blaze of the hot sun; the bolos and bayonets hung true from their hips. The sanitary privates, with their glorified first aid kits stood in the file closers, at last, after days of senseless drill, come into their own. Heavy was their responsibility at a time like this; for there were no surgeons with a command of this size.

The ranks were opened and Cowan passed down them on a perfunctory inspection. The rankest martinet in the army could have found nothing to cavil about; but as a matter of form, which his men understood perfectly, he growled at a solemn eyed private here and there. He then closed ranks and detailed one of his sergeants to take over the machine guns. Marching them to the dock, he assigned them by platoons to the launches. One squad was designated to go to the pearler, which was now heading slowly into the land. Besides the corporal of the squad, he attached the best duty sergeant in the company for this duty. He called the men aside on the dock.

"Aspera, when you go aboard that pearler you're to be in charge, understand?"

"Si señor, Teniente."

Cowan knew the man for a strict disciplinarian, and one to whom loyalty was a fetish. He was devoid of imagination and would carry an order out to the very letter.

"There's an American on board there; he may give you some trouble. You've got eight armed men and yourself," Cowan grinned. "That's ten, Aspera."

"Si Teniente! That is— ten."

Aspera extended his deep chest as he echoed this truism. As a soldier he was indeed worth at least three privates.

"You will be in command. You will keep the pearler just astern of the launches."

"Si, Teniente!"

"You are to answer nothing when this American or any member of the crew talks to you. You must not mention my name; I am still back in the States."

"Si señor, Teniente."

"That launch at the end of the dock

will take you out now. That's all."

Aspera saluted proudly. He was aware that his companions in the other launches were watching him enviously. With a fierce and very military mien he marched his men away. Cowan followed him, slowly, so as not to detract from his grandeur, and gave his orders to the launch commander. When they took Aspera's squad to the pearler, they were to rejoin the others.

Then, with a final look up the sunny street, at the palm-shaded little bungalow that was all he had of home, he stepped into the waiting launch. A subdued cheer came from the men, the screws churned the clear water, and the boats cast off.

Cowan sat under the canvas awning in the stern of the launch. The men up forward were shouting and laughing, calling to their friends in the other launches. No use stopping them. No stealth about this expedition. Better even, for the Bajaos to note a loud and showy pageant of force. For that matter the three launches were too many for his few men. And with the pearler they made an impressive fleet. The Bajaos, scourers of the sea, would appreciate that. Would estimate at least twice the force he actually had.

Sergeant Maher stood by the wheel and grinned back at Cowan. "Sure we're off to the front at last, sir! I ain't heard a hos-tyle shot since a drunk Heinie cracked down on one of our M. P.'s in Coblenz. Would they be maybe a campaign ribbon in this for me, Lieutenant?"

"If we have casualties," Cowan said.

"Be jest my tough luck we don't sir," Maher growled. "Here I been in the service near thirty year and we had four wars countin' the border an' me wid oney a lousy Victory ribbon, an' one star what got so ashamed of itself it went an' dropped off."

BUT appreciative as he was of the other white man's presence, Cowan was in no mood for idle talk. He noted that his launch was now alongside the pearler, which was making slow way some three hundred yards off his own starboard bow. Cowan swung his glasses. They were of eight power and had a generous field; the figures on the pearler stood out boldly.

He saw Sladen at the rail; could see the very expression on his hard face. Aspera's men scrambled aboard, their rifles swung jauntily across their backs. The sergeant and Sladen faced each other, and Cowan could see that Sladen, leaning past the soldier, was calling down to the skipper of the launch. Cowan smiled grimly. He knew that Sladen was shouting, although there was but the faint whisper of it on the wind. Sladen was ordering the wise little ex-Scout to let him come aboard; telling him that he wanted to be put on the Scout captain's launch at once.

Clearly Cowan could see the Scout, Aspera's, answer to that plea. He waved the launch away; drove Sladen from the rail without words, but with gestures unmistakable. His eight men, drawn up on the pearler's dack, stood ready to back his commands.

Cowan had devised a simple code of signals for the launch skippers with the wig-wag flags of the company. He now called to the soldier standing by with one of the flags at the taffrail behind him. The man waved vigorously; the two other launches and the pearler swung into column behind, and Cowan said quietly to Maher:

"Head for Taluk—the south point. Use your own judgment about speed. Aspera, my sergeant on the pearler, will keep her up to top speed astern, say a couple of hundred yards."

"Right, Lieutenant!"

IV

THE flotilla headed northeast, the deep blue of the Sulu Sea rippling into translucent foam under the bluff bows. By early afteroon it rounded the lower end of the island of Taluk and proceeded at

half speed towards the reef-protected harbor said to be on the eastern shore.

During the short run Cowan had searched the surface of the sea in all directions for signs of hostile war craft; for he knew enough about the Bajao's scheme of maneuver to realize that the sea gypsies put their faith in a maritime defense. The first action, if action there was, would be naval.

But the sea seemed singularly devoid of life. Far off to the south he could make out the faint smoke of a steamer. A small coasting tramp, no doubt, bound for Borneo. A scattering of Moro *proas* and *sapits* had rocked in the wash of the launches further back near the shores of Siasi. But they were merely petty fishermen, uninterested in the doings of the white men and their odd fire boats.

One fact had impressed Cowan as significant. Many Bajao boats usually hung about the Siasi water front. These engaged in petty barter or more usually in mere nomadic curiosity. Their personnel changed with the days; never did the same group linger more than a night, and even that time was spent on the boats.

But for the past few days no Bajaos had been seen about Siasi. Like night wraiths their last boats had slipped away. And thinking this all over now, Cowan was convinced that there was more than unrelated coincidence in this with the abortive attempt on the island of Taluk by Sladen.

IN THE midst of these troubled thoughts Cowan was aroused by a cry from the bow. He could hear a tumult of wild Macabebe talk as his men surged up on the gunwales for a better view. He growled at the men to keep down, for silence in the boat. He leaned out from under the awning and swung his glasses towards the shore.

There was the harbor, all right. He could tell by the line of white that marked the natural breakwater of the outer reefs. A wide, placid cove lay inside those encircling coral arms. A white crescent of beach completed what appeared to be an almost perfect circle. And back of it all, the eternal jungle—green and bright now in the high sun.

But these natural attributes of the place held Cowan's eyes for the length of a brief, estimating glance only. His trained eye took it in only as the background of a tactical picture.

Above the sudden quiet in the boat the beating of the engines made a strange, unnerving sound. Cowan, stunned by the sight that met his eyes, leaned taut against a stanchion, his field glasses shaking a little in his gripped hands.

"My God, Lieutenant; Look at them boats! A regular navy of them, and nothin' like no *vintas* nor *proas* I ever seen. What in Heaven's name is they?"

Without moving his glasses Cowan spoke out of the side of his mouth.

"They're *garays,* Sergeant—pirate ships of the line. Fifty or sixty oars to each; and as you see, two masts. The sails are down now, because in this close water they can handle them better with the oars. See the shiny spot on them?"

"Looks like they was ornamented with brass work, Lieutenant."

Cowan laughed grimly.

"They are; ornamented with brass cannon, *lantakers,* they're called. Glorified shot guns that puke out double handfuls of rusty iron and brass slugs!"

"Howly mother av God! Ye're kiddin', sir!"

Cowan lowered his glasses and called to the signal man.

"Have them come up on line. You, Maher, just keep way on her."

THE flagship of the little fleet slowed to a bare forward movement in the water. Briskly the boats astern came up on line, the pearler not a hundred yards off the starboard beam of Cowan's boat. He scanned her closely as she rolled sluggishly up; but he saw no sign on her decks of Sladen. Two of her crew were visible;

the man at the wheel and a seaman, evidently a look-out, up forward. The squad of Scouts was scattered about the topside; and at the stern Sergeant Aspera was standing by the helmsman.

Cowan shouted through his megaphone for Aspera to bring Sladen to the launch. The pearler trailed a dinghy; and in a few moments it came bobbing across the light swell, Cowan could see Aspera sitting proudly in the stern sheets and the slouched figure of Sladen in the bow. The native look-out from the pearler was at the oars.

COWAN lit his pipe. He was jumpy, terribly worried. He had expected, of course, some show of resentment, resistance even, from the Bajaos of Taluk. But he had been led to believe that they were a scattered, nomadic tribe; spread thinly and flung far about the waters of the Tapul group. A loose tribe whose life was forever on the sea. At worst, he had anticipated only a frenzied group of leaders and a small guard on the sacred island.

But his estimate of this warlike array of fighting craft drawn up across the harbor mouth a short mile away, was awesome. He had counted at least ten of the mighty war canoes; and countless smaller

craft milled about them. And besides this there might be, probably were, other units hidden in the brooding jungle back of the beach.

He had to make a decision. Wisdom indicated withdrawal, if diplomacy failed. This was the job of a battalion—and a battalion reinforced with plenty of automatic weapons and light guns.

But if he did that, he confessed failure without having fired a shot; not the way of the Scouts. Through his troubled mind flashed classic examples of recent history, stupendous obstacles overcome by Scout forces even smaller than his own. Many cases there were of sudden, savage attacks by Scout companies against tremendous odds—victorious attacks, too.

And there was another thing. The brooding bitterness of the past weeks demanded outlet; violent outlet. It clouded, distorted his natural judgment. There was this man Sladen, now coming towards the meeting that he had visioned for days. He was going to make him cry—and like it. Make him go through with this racket, clear the whole damnable fraud up. Curiosity here, too. And this girl. She'd started something—something thought up in a luxurious hotel room, with bell hops, and telephones and soft music as a background. Something easy, based on the sappiness of chivalrous and susceptible soldiers. No blood, eh? Well, he had his orders. If he went through with this thing, even to the annihilation of his company, there could be no censure. Perhaps his colonel should have made a personal reconnaissance, a closer investigation before he ordered a single company to do what looked to be the work of a battalion. But that wasn't his funeral—or was it?

"That guy's comin' aboard, sir," Maher said softly.

COWAN stood erect in the cockpit and stared expresionlessly at Sladen as he stepped onto the deck of the launch. The man ducked under the awning, stumbled awkwardly onto the deck boards. Then he looked up.

Sladen's face was a curious mixture of shock and affected pleasure when he saw Cowan. He recoiled against the hatch combing even as he held out his hand.

"What luck—Cowan!"

The Scout officer didn't even look down at the extended hand. His face was hard and immobile; his eyes fixed bleakly on the other's now reddening face.

"I am in sole command of this expedition," he said coldly. "You will take your orders from me. You can figure how much chance you have of bucking by what happened to you on the pearler."

With a final, contemptuous look, Cowan turned from the man. He spoke tersely to Maher, who had been listening, open-mouthed to his words.

"Bring the launch alongside—the number two boat, pronto."

"Right, sir!"

Cowan called his first sergeant, who was up forward.

"Have the men get into the other launch. You will take command of the three boats. I am going in in this one to talk to the Bajaos. If a blast comes from our whistle, you are to attack."

The man saluted without a change of expression. Cowan kept looking at him. "And, Sergeant——"

"Si señor, Teniente."

"If you attack——" He looked briefly at the ribbons on the man's shirt. A psychological trick, this, of Captain Newbury's—making the men wear their ribbons on their O. D. shirts when going into action. Against regulations, but invaluable for morale. "You were at Baksak?"

The soldier lifted his chest proudly.

"And at Bud Dajo and Talipao, *Teniente.*"

"Then you know your duty. That's all. Leave Salcedo as interpreter."

THE two launches drew together; the men were transferred smoothly, and quietly. Then at Cowan's command to Maher, the number one launch gathered way, headed in towards the land, her ensign floating proudly astern.

Cowan looked forward, taking stock of his crew. There was Maher, white of face, serious-eyed, at the wheel; and the two natives of the permanent personnel. There was the man Sladen and the interpreter. And for the first time Cowan was aware of another—an evil-faced, pock-marked native who stood close beside the civilian whispering to him.

"Who's that man?" Cowan asked harshly.

Sladen's sullen face tightened. His eyes flashed hatred at the Scout officer.

"He's one of my crew. He talks Moro. Your sergeant said it was all right to bring him when I told him——"

"Salcedo!"

The soldier came aft. Saluted. Cowan pointed at the native beside Sladen.

"Find out if that man can talk Joloano!"

The little Scout soldier glared at the civilian Filipino. He spotted him for a hated Tagalog instinctively; and his first questions assured him of that fact.

"Dog-blooded Tagalog, talk! Talk for your life in the Sulu dialect! And if it is not like the very words of the Moro I cut the mango you call heart from your breathing body!"

A veritable gush of Moro words came from the other; but there was no flinching about him. His evil eyes flashed back hatred and defiance at the hated Macabebe. His Moro words were curses.

"That, pig, for what I know! One half the words would blind you!"

"Well!" Cowan barked at the Scout. "Can he speak it?"

"Poco, Teniente—a little."

Sladen stepped forward purposefully. He blocked the way as Cowan started to go forward.

"Now look here, Cowan!" he blustered. "You can't get away with any of this high handed stuff. I know what's biting you; some kid idea about my loading your drinks back there in Frisco. That it?"

"Stand out of my way!" Cowan snarled, his eyes blazing.

"Don't be an ass, Cowan! Remember I'm reporting to your colonel when we get back."

COWAN measured the man with a contemptuous glance. Outside of his basic feeling, the fellow's very get-up was an offense. He wore a flamboyant, elbow-sleeved white jersey, open at the throat, and flaunting a wide, roll collar. A veritable movie hero. But disgusted as he was, Cowan did not miss the pugnacious jaw, the corded neck, the hard, bulging muscles of the chest and arms. Here, if it came to physical encounter, was a tough nut to crack. Most certainly he outweighed himself by twenty pounds. And the look in those green eyes promised no mercy were he to obtain an advantage.

Cowan said, "*When* we get back. But I doubt very much, Sladen, if either you or I ever see Jolo again."

Cowan enjoyed that bit of melodrama. He pushed by Sladen, moved forward into the bow of the launch, and lifted his glasses to his eyes. With a start, he saw that they were within shouting distance of the Bajao fleet.

V

A GREAT roar came from the packed Moro boats; their gunwales were lined with men. And Cowan could see with the naked eye that they were armed, not only with barong and spear, but with a plentiful sprinkling of rifles. He flashed another quick look through his glasses: he wanted a closer look at those rifles. And when he picked up several of the nearer ones in the powerful lens, his heart jumped up in its beat.

Even from here it was clear that the rifles were bright with newness. Here were modern arms; Winchesters—some of military pattern. Undoubtedly Mausers.

Pearls had been traded in Borneo with a vengeance!

Cowan dropped his glasses and spread his arms wide in a gesture of peace. Before leaving Siasi he had talked at length with the venerable Jesuit father who conducted services for the faithful in the little whitewashed church. The old man had known French. He had made several abortive attempts to convert the heathen Bajaos. And although he had not succeeded, he had made friends. What little he had learned of their customs and temperaments he had passed on to Cowan with a wistful smile. Though of a militant order he had hated to see the company march for Taluk.

"I am sorry this had to come to pass, my son. It might have been that, in the end, these poor people would have seen the way of God. But go you in His care—and send your men to confession."

COWAN thought of the gentle old man now, remembering his warnings.

"Salcedo, call to them! Say that we come in peace. I want to talk to their chief."

The soldier had come close to Cowan on the foredeck. He raised his voice in a loud shout, translating to the Bajaos what his officer had said.

The launch was now close in to the outer reefs. Some two hundred yards, only, separated them from the nearest of the Bajao line of boats.

At the sound of Salcedo's call, a great hush fell on the Moro armada. Cowan had heard the voice of a leader raised among them. Then came an answering call across the water. Salcedo said, his voice shaking with excitement:

"We es-stop here, *Teniente*—or he can shot lantaker. Dato come near to us."

"Stop her, Maher!" Cowan called. "No firing unless they try to board us. And I'll give the command then." As he looked back he noted Sladen's taut, white face. The man had drawn the automatic pistol from the holster at his hip. He held it, half concealed behind his right thigh.

"You, Sladen! Get that gun out of sight, you bloody fool!"

Slowly Sladen put the gun back into the holster. "You'll get yours for this wise talk, Cowan! When you get back where you have to answer to your colonel, away from these cut throats of yours."

A call sounded from Salcedo before Cowan could form answering words, and he turned and hurried forward.

A Moro *proa,* decked with colored streamers and banners, had moved out from the line of *garays* and was moving swiftly towards the launch. As it came on Cowan could see that it contained six native paddlers. In the stern stood a giant of a man, stripped to the waist, but from there down, a clamor of silken color. He wore wide, red silk trousers; and from the bright yellow sash bound about him, stuck out the handles of two immense barongs. And as the *proa* came closer, the Scout officer made out the dangling purple war tassels. Father Acalde had told him about those, too.

As Cowan watched the oncoming boat he was aware that Sladen had come forward and now stood at his side.

"Go easy now with these fellows," Sladen said nervously. "Tell them the whole regiment is coming over. Explain that I've got an order to dig up just that one grave. Nothing else will be disturbed. Last time they must have misunderstood us. That's why they fired on us. You just use tact and say they're to withdraw their boats and men. Just leave a detail to guide us. Say we'll just hold our men in the lagoon as an escort of honor for the body. Won't land them—that's what all the row was about before—our trying to land."

Sladen broke off his jerky words at sight of the Scout officer's eyes. It came to him that the man was barely controlling an inner rage that at any moment might break forth in physical relief.

Cowan said through the corner of his mouth, his eyes now back on the approaching *proa,* "If you say another word, I'll knock you over board! See those sharks milling about out there?"

Sladen saw the sharks. As though in anticipation of bloody conflict to come, they sliced the mild sea between the launch and the shore with their ceaseless patrolling. He shuddered. For the first time he felt fear of this man at his side. Back there in Frisco he had seemed just a hulking, naïve kid. But here, away from white influence, surrounded by these inscrutable

eyed Scout soldiers of his. Could the fellow have gone native? This return to the hated heat and montony of Sulu—had it finally tipped the scales of his sanity as it had so many others?

THE Bajao *proa* lay tossing just off the bow of the launch. Cowan knew from what the priest had said that the giant in the stern was a chief. Salcedo confirmed this at Cowan's order. The Bajao said, standing regally in the *proa,* his arms folded across his great chest:

"I come from my people and from my father, the great chief of the Luwaan. They desire that the brave brown soldiers go in peace. Word has come that the white chief in Jolo has sent all these men to violate graves of the holy Bajao dead. My father says this is the lie of the followers of Islam—how says the white soldier chief?"

In simple words Salcedo translated Cowan's carefully worded explanation. He made it clear that only one grave was involved, that of the white hero, Captain French. That the Scout troops came because ordered by their chief.

The young chief, Minis, laid a hand on the hilt of one of the barongs in his sash. His dark eyes flashed. He leaned forward, speaking vehemently.

"The same words that came from those others!" Here he pointed a shaking finger at Sladen's white face. "They come with good words and beads and rings fit only for the half-wit children of Mohammed.

They try to step on the sacred soil of Taluk. They kill two Bajao women with child when they shoot."

AND here Cowan made his fatal mistake. Afterwards he realized what he should have done; asked to be conducted to the old chief with only his interpreter. But at the moment he considered only that it was past noon· that come what might, he was going back with the remains of Captain French. These people were determined; they never would have gathered this fighting force unless they meant to resist to the end. Nothing could be gained by waiting—much lost probably. They might disinter the body themselves. Destroy all evidence of it. Every moment he delayed made this more feasible, and his tactical problem more involved. Bajao reinforcements might be on the way. His rear might be impeded. And most of all, perhaps, this lordly and wordy resistance from one he considered a petty, sea gypsy dato, irked his vanity before the eyes of his fight-loving men. Hadn't the colonel indicated that dispersal of this undesirable tribe was in line with his policy of progress in the archipelago?

"Tell him we want an answer now! Let us land in peace and take the captain's body or we attack!"

Sladen made a stifled sound in his throat. The soldier, Salcedo looked down at his rifle, furtively flipped up the safety catch. He repeated his officer's ultimatum in loud, ringing words so that all might hear.

The young Moro chieftain bowed his head. Even as he sneered at his petty gaudiness, Cowan was impressed by the simplicity, almost nobility of the gesture. Minis made no reply to the ultimatum. He made a slight sign to his paddlers. The *proa* spun about on its center, streaked back to the waiting Moro fleet.

"You've played hell now!" Sladen groaned.

"Shut your yap! Put her about, Maher —full speed! It means fight."

VI

PRIVATE TIBAL was getting along in years. Over a dobe cigarette and enough wine in some *barrio tienda* he would sometimes boast that he was one of that gallant hundred, all true Macabebes, who had cooked the Tagalog, Aguinaldo's goose. Yes, and he had served with the Spanish before the fighting *Americanos* had come.

Tibal was wont to become a hero in his cups.

Because he was old now, and because his wine tippling had materially shortened his wind and the range at which he could hit a bull's eye, the first sergeant had selected him to stay aboard the pearler. It had been Cowan's order that the pearler, with her native crew and one soldier as guard, was to lie well out. Take no part in the action. If things went wrong she was to make for Jolo and report. Old Tibal had growled ferociously. What! put him on watchman's duty while all those recruits were covering themselves with glory?

The top sergeant who like the old man, explained to Tibal that it was exactly because of the many hash-marks on his sleeve that this position of trust was given to him. Wouldn't he be in command of a ship? The last, decisive element perhaps in the coming action. If that Tagalog crew were left to their own devices, they would be off for home at the first shot.

A sudden thought came to old Tibal. Here was a gallant ship, now devoid of her American commander since Sladen had joined the launches who were destined for the actual fighting.

"I'll take over that command," he had said sonorously. And with great dignity, albeit some awkwardness, had dropped into a dinghy and rowed grandly away towards the pearler.

Tibal had adopted the airs of an admiral once aboard the little ship. He had at once assembled the crew aft. There were only two: a weazened Visayan skipper and

a half grown Becol boy. Tibal looked them over fiercely and addressed them in a loud voice. After a few indelicate questions as to their origin he said:

"You can thank the mother that bore you that you are not Tagalog dogs. In that case I might have had to put you in irons."

The two grinned ingratiatingly. So now they could continue their sleep in peace.

Tibal had cleared his throat. It was very dry.

"There is a cabin below? Your first commander's room?"

The Becol boy looked at his captain. The old man said mildly:

"There is room for the soldier in one. In the other is the American lady. The door is locked by the order of the Captain Sladen. I think she sleep now."

Tibal assumed a most official look. Not for him to admit that all had not been made clear to him before taking over this command. He waved an imperious hand.

"Keep on the alert, sailors! I may take a short siesta below." And with that he strode purposefully away.

Tibal looked at the nearly full whisky bottle for almost five minutes before he gave in. After all, it was not theft. Was he not now the commander of this fine vessel?

It was very good, and for some time Tibal continued to prove it so. True, certain sounds came from afar—down here in the ship these sounds resembled the falls of the little river near which he was born. Tibal began to think of that little river; the gleam of the leaping fish that he chased with his childish spear; the young girls, their wet, brown bodies gold colored in the sun as they laughed and beat their washing on the smooth rocks. And as he thought, it seemed to Tibal that their voices were here, with him in this dark room.

THERE was no key to be found to the little door across the narrow alley; but Tibal bent it back from its bolt with a length of iron he had picked up. He was extremely polite and used what little English he had to reassure the white-faced girl who stared at him out of frightened gray eyes. It was her calls that had reminded him of those women in the river.

"Where is your officer, Lieutenant Cowan?"

At mention of this name Tibal saluted. It flurried him a little; for the liquor he had drunk had not yet brought him to his usual reckless peak.

"He go fight Moro, *Señora.*"

"And the other American man?"

Tibal swelled out his chest. "*I* am in the place of that man—*capitan* now, *señora.*"

The girl pushed hurriedly by him, raced up the companionway. Tibal, reflecting upon the irrational way of women—white and brown alike—returned to his half-empty bottle.

The old pearler creaked as she rolled in the ground swell. And above her creakings Tibal could hear distant rumbling sounds—the sounds like the falls of the little river. The rattle of small arms he would have recognized—but this rumbling. Merely the surf on those distant rocks. He didn't know it, but Cowan, having laid out a plan of campaign was attacking.

LATER, when perhaps two thirds of the bottle had been appreciatively smacked down Tibal's hardy gullet, a new sound came to his ringing ears.

Put-put—put-put-put.

A pity to waste machine gun bullets on those mangy sea rovers, Tibal thought. This new kind of fighting—all done at a distance now, killing with these machines at hundreds of yards away. These young soldiers couldn't be trusted to do the job with their proper tool, the trusty bayonet. They might get cut with a barong. Too bad!

Tibal laughed softly at that. He thought back to Baksak. No machine guns there! The blood ran right down your hands, sizzled on the hot barrel of your rifle.

These martial thoughts and the drink aroused old Tibal. He got unsteadily to his feet. He began to sing in a loud, echoing voice. He shouted out wild, fighting words of his own to the brave tune of "Zamboanga"—the battle song of the Scouts.

The Becol boy came running down the companionway. His face was the color of a faded lemon, his gasping words thick with fright. *Mucho molesto* top-side, he tried to explain.

Tibal was not interested in Becol boys or their petty troubles; but the hot, dead air of this stuffy cabin was doing things to his stomach. He made a virtue of necessity. He stalked grandly up to the deck. He blinked in the bright blaze of the sun. He saw that the boat was moving, its little skipper cringing at the wheel. And with mild amazement he saw the beautiful white lady. She stood a few feet from the old Visayan, and in her shaking hands she held a rifle pointed at the helmsman. It required no second look from old Tibal to tell him that the number of that rifle was 33,666. A lucky number, he had always insisted; for hadn't he made expert rifleman with it five years running? Of course that was before his eyes went bad from too much sun.

The girl shifted her intent gaze from the Visayan's back to the swaying Scout soldier.

"Keep your distance! I'm running this boat in. I'm going to stop this fight. Do you hear all the firing? I'll go right to the native chief. See—I've made the boy put a white flag up so they won't shoot at us."

Tibal looked up at the white flag—an old shirt fluttering at the forward masthead. Then he looked back at his rifle.

"It is mine, that rifle. If the *Teniente* come I go to guardhouse."

"You shouldn't have left it by the steps."

TIBAL pondered craftily. If only he had properly interpreted that *put-put* sound as the motor of the boat! A sudden inspiration came to him. He was close enough to the woman to see, in spite of his weary old eyes. Yes, the safety was on that rifle. It just went to show how useless women were.

Tibal made a couple of quick steps forward, and snatched his rifle. It felt good in his hands; and he rubbed it with affectionate palms.

"Ah—" Tibal muttered, "Now we shall see."

The girl, Jessica, began to plead with Tibal, when he ordered the engine stopped. There were no glasses on the craft, and the pearler was nearly two miles out; but they could hear the distant rumbling of *lantakers* and see clouds of black smoke from their muzzles rolling out across the water. Cowan's attack was well under way, and meeting an even greater resistance than he had anticipated.

The girl implored Tibal to run the pearler in close; signal to the Moros, and explain to their leader that this shooting must stop. She would make it plain that hers was the only interest involved; that she wished only to stand a few minutes over the grave of her father. His body would not be disturbed.

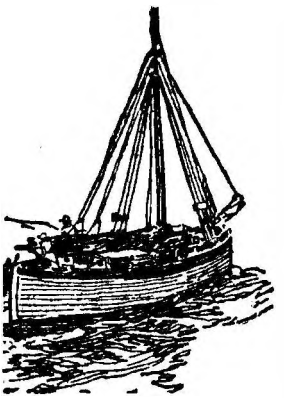
Old Tibal listened with a great show of respect, holding his rifle in a jealous embrace. What was all this about a grave and a father? Tibal's drink muddled brain and his paucity of English were not of much help in the matter. Vaguely he remembered his orders, funny orders, to give an old hero of the Scouts. Run away from a fight and go to Jolo for help if the company was beaten. Beaten by mangy sea gypsies!

Tibal laughed out loud.

The girl began to talk faster, urging haste. Tibal mopped his forehead with a red and blue cotton handkerchief. All this talk was annoying him; and his stomach felt so much better. He bowed politely to the woman, hiccuped loudly, then with his rifle grasped tightly, he descended the steps of the companionway carefully. But before he disappeared from sight he shot

a wicked look at the old Visayan. And with the look went words. No engines were to start while he was resting; they would disturb his dreams.

The fierce sounds of battle drew nearer; the old pearler rolled with the ground swell; and Tibal in the cabin again took up his martial song. He had meant at first to drink merely enough from that bottle to while away his boredom—small reward for his enforced idleness while other men fought. But he had already passed the mark he had set for himself. As the bottle lightened, the reckless mood of his distant youth came back to remind him that for the first time in his life his outfit had gone into battle without him. By the time Tibal's faded old eyes gazed sadly at the dregs, inadequately filling his dirty tin cup, he was completely aroused.



He tossed off the drink and stumbled up the companionway to the deck. With a determined air he took stock of his command. The two natives were stretched on the forward deck, lost in dreams under the shade of an improvised canvas awning. The white woman was crouched in the bow, staring with set face towards the shore.

Tibal rubbed his eyes. That shore was close, far, far closer than he had remembered it. The sound of rifles came to him very clearly; he could make out the outlines of launches on the beach. Cowan's full command had never reached it, but this Tibal could not see. The Moro fleet was beached; and poor as was the old private's eyesight he realized that at last contending forces were fighting on an element he was familiar with. By the looks of things they had come to the bayonet. It would be all over in a few minutes now; and over the mess kits there would be jeers for Tibal the Watcher.

TIBAL rushed at the two sleeping sailors; kicked them awake. He ordered that the engines be started, the pearler rushed full speed ahead. The frightened crew did as they were bid; and at Tibal's direction the boat headed for the opening to the lagoon.

"We'll take them in the rear!" Tibal exulted. "Maybe I didn't make expert my last hitch. They said my five hundred rapid was bad. It was my sight leaf that slipped down. But now—" he wrenched at the sight screw viciously—"that little rogue will stay put. I'll make a 'possible' right in their backs!"

The old Visayan begged Tibal to turn back; the Becol boy fell on his knees, sobbing and crossing himself. The girl, her face deathly white, tried to reason with the old soldier. Tibal just looked at her briefly and grinned mirthlessly.

"This is how we do it—we of the fighting Macabebe!"

Tibal showed her. He fell prone on the deck near the bow. Very fussily he arranged his rifle sling, squinted at his rear sight leaf, spread wide his legs.

"Five hundred—no; we're moving; four would be better. Say one point—" here Tibal wetted his finger and held it critically up to the wind—"yes, one point left windage. Ten shots to the minute at this range."

Tibal began to fire carefully, grunting as the recoil of the rifle jarred the stock against his shoulder. He was deaf to all entreaties, blind to everything save the blur ahead he took for his target.

With the pathetic fatalism of the aged Filipino, the Vissayan skipper stood by his wheel. The Becol boy had run below; but his cries could still be heard, muffled, from the depths of the ship. So the old pearler chugged grandly into the lagoon —moving to her fate like the rest.

VII

FOR Cowan's attempted landing and attack had failed. One launch had been wrecked on the treacherous coral reefs of the harbor. In saving its load, his forces had been divided, and the Moros had been quick to see the disadvantage of the Americans. They had made a flanking attack from the jungle; a hundred of them had come from the rear, screaming their war cry, waving their gleaming barongs. For Cowan, on the beach where he had landed from the first launch, it was too late now to give commands; too late to do more than face the nearest enemy and fire into him to the last. Cowan saw that the second launch on the beach was empty. Above the roar of yells and shots he heard Sergeant Maher's deep voice. Narciso killed no doubt—old Maher earning that ribbon he would never wear. In a last, quick glance, Cowan saw that the old soldier had spread his few men out. They were down on their knees in the sand, firing doggedly into the Moro flank attack.

Then Cowan turned back facing the lagoon. He drew his pistol. His men were already on their feet, the rifle slings cast from their arms. They stood there, steadily, emptying their last clips.

The leading Moros were almost upon them. As fast as he could pull the trigger, Cowan blazed into the yelling mass. He slipped in another clip. Now he saw the young chief, Minis, racing forward, barong above his streaming black hair. Cowan fired steadily at him; for the elimination of this daring leader seemed desperately important. Savage discipline depended so much on inspired personal leadership. Bring this Bajao chief down before the eyes of his men, before the fighting got too close for them all to be aware of his loss, and at least a temporary advantage would be gained. Another leader would have to take charge; changed orders, confusion might result.

Cowan was both a rifle and pistol expert as most Scout officers are. His shame at having so far not hit his target rankled in him. He hurled his pistol from him with an oath, picked up a rifle from where he had laid it against the rock nearby. Its bayonet gleamed wickedly in the sun. With a yell he dashed forward through the sand, the bayonet extended towards the Moro leader's chest. Then he was aware only of himself and this other man. The din of battle around him died to a mere background. There was a terrific shock; his bayonet passed under the Moro's arm; the descending barong missed his head by the breadth of a hair. Then he and the Bajao were struggling madly.

Cowan was a powerful man; with a sudden lunge, he snapped the rifle butt upwards. It caught the Moro on the lower side of the jaw, jerking his head back, momentarily stunning him. It allowed Cowan just time to snatch the extra barong the Bajao carried in his sash. Then Cowan dropped the rifle, raised the captured barong to strike. The Moro staggered back, saved himself by a lightning twist of his body. The two barongs clanged against each other, as Minis countered with his weapon.

THE next few seconds seemed like hours to Cowan. Earlier in the day a slug had slashed his head; the blood from the wound now ran down into his eyes half blinding him. He saw through a haze as he slashed madly out.

Cowan had met the Moro a few yards in front of the position of his platoon. The mass of the Bajao assault had now passed him by, swarming over his men. A few stragglers came in, making to aid the young chief. But Minis, occupied as he was, ordered them harshly away. There was not much of science to this barong fighting Cowan decided, so the young scout officer dropped his weapon, thrust back from the other with his left hand, and as their bodies separated, drove a terrific right hook to the Moro's jaw. Minis relaxed, sagged to his knees, and as Cowan stared down stupidly at him

through his own dripping blood, he felt himself violently seized from behind. He went down fighting—but he had no chance against the many who leaped upon him.

IT WAS all over when the valiant Tibal, confident of victory, brought the pearler into the seething harbor.

Some of the lighter Moro boats saw it; marked it down for their prey. They swarmed about the old tub; their crews poured over its rails. The helmsman had just time to call out to the Virgin, cross himself, and take two meaningless steps forward before they cut him down. Loottres found the Becol boy almost at once. His life died out on one long, piercing scream.

Old Tibal, on his feet now, emptied his magazine into the very faces of the boarders. He resumed his battle song as he lunged and parried with his beloved bayonet. For several minutes he held off his pressing foes with its bloody point. He taunted them as he swung the blade through glittering arcs.

"Ho, Moro dogs! Come taste the steel of a Macabebe!"

To the very end the old warrior thought he was fighting a winning fight—that any second he would hear the encouraging yells, applauding yells, of his mess mates.

He went down at last, hacked almost to pieces—but not before the deck about him ran with the blood of his attackers.

The girl, Jessica, being a woman was unharmed. For such is the way of the uncivilized Moro, be he pagan or true believer. . . .

VIII

IT WAS the period of the round, yellow moon; sacred time of prayer and fasting for the pagan Bajao. Even victory changed this not.

About the level plateau in the center of the island, the high wall of the jungle closed in. An almost perfect circle it made; the result of years of steady pruning and cutting. For here was the most hallowed spot on earth; the resting place of the beloved of the coral god. The faithful of the Luwaan, buried with all that had made their happiness in the preliminary life.

Rows of colored lights were strung at regular intervals up the wall of giant jungle trees. Candles glowed through the fantastically shaped dried fish bladders that made the lanterns.

The Bajao warriors stood in a thin rank about the enclosure. They stood in their fighting clothes; those with blood upon them, leaving it proudly unwashed.

In the center of the great circle of grass grew a small circle of lofty coco palms, their fluttering tops forming a magic necklace of bright silver under the mellow moon. And inside the sacred circle of the tenderly protecting trees were the graves of the beloved dead.

There was a ceremonial entrance way to the graveyard proper; the road of it paved with coral. For some distance out from the inner row of palms ran thick, ornate

hedges. In this space, some hundred yards square, the tribal rites were conducted; the sonorous burial ritual expressed. And it was here Cowan found himself, bound hand and foot, as the pot-like yellow moon rose over the palm tops. The hedged in square was brightly lighted by hundreds of tiny fish bladder lanterns strung along the enclosure on vines.

Cowan's head throbbed, his very brain seemed an agonized pulse beating against

his skull. The thongs about his wrists and ankles had so numbed him that he was not conscious of his limbs. He marveled that he was alive; yet he knew that this reawakening was merely a preface to a horrible death.

He looked about him curiously; all at last seemed ready for whatever was to transpire. Some half dozen Moros were grouped about a circular basin in the center of the coral paved square. Like the base of a beautiful fountain, the receptacle rose in a smooth coral wall some three feet from the ground. This basin was some fifteen feet in radius. A placid surface of water reflected back the lights of the lanterns about a foot from the top of the bowl. The whole thing looked like a fairy pool for the nyiads of this beautiful jungle dell.

The six Moros around the pool were seated, spaced at equal intervals. Their flowing trousers and voluminous sashes were of purest white silk. They wore for arms only the ceremonial dagger-like *kris* —miniatures of the fighting weapon. Their faces had been smeared into a chalky white mask. Behind each of the chiefs, or priests stood a huge slave holding aloft a white banner on a bamboo pole. At the top of each pole hung a lighted lantern blown into the shape of a bird.

The six gazed into the pool as though absorbed in prayer. They seemed utterly unaware of the throng about them.

COWAN studied the circle of ghastly faces intently. Intuitively he realized that these men held his life in their hands.

Directly across the pool, faced towards him, was the young chief Minis. He could tell him by his great size. And on his left was a still more curious sight. Four statue like slaves bore on their shoulders a litter, wadded and draped with white silk. On the litter reclined a man, half sitting up. Like the others his body was bare; but what once must have been a heroic torso was now but a framework of skin covered bones. The legs, Cowan could not see; but he sensed from the looks of the man and from his faint, abortive attempts to move now and then, that he was paralyzed. And he also sensed that here, above them all, was the greatest of the living Luwaan.

Beyond the six sere-like Moros were laid out the bodies of the sacred dead. Long frameworks of bamboo had been cut and cunningly storied above each other like a succession of great ladders. The Bajao dead, each form swathed artfully in guava leaves, lay with their sightless eyes opened towards the moon.

Cowan shuddered. There must be three hundred of them in that ghastly array.

Between Cowan and the pool a motley mass of captured articles was neatly piled. The captured rifles of his men laid out in trim piles; the belts, bayonets, canteens, pistols, machine guns—all the loot of battle triumphantly displayed.

And Cowan shuddered again. No need to count those articles of equipment to know that to the last man, his command had died with their hot rifles still in their hands. And no need to look for their bodies. The avid sharks that swarmed about the reefs had buried them.

Cowan knew that the man Sladen lay bound near him. Once he had looked at him, listened stonily to the fellow's babbling. At first he had cursed Cowan, damning him for the plight his leadership had brought them to; then a desperate hopefulness had come into his shaking voice. Help should be due. The pearler would have made for Jolo some hours back. Could be there almost by now. They'd sent fast launches—maybe a destroyer would be in. If they only could hold the Moros off a few more hours.

Cowan was thinking all this, too. If there was only some way to talk to these people; play for time with a long harangue. It was obvious that the Luwaan were a ceremonial loving people. The fact that they had so far spared the two white men indicated that some sort of trial was to be held before the final act was played. He

felt that He and Sladen, considered chiefs of course by the Luwaan, were to die in some ghastly manner as a fitting rite in conjunction with the interment of the heroic Bajao dead.

THE music rose and fell with pulsating rhythm. The deep throated drums beat in a steady monotone. The six about the pool began to sway in time; and now Cowan noticed that they tossed, in cadenced intervals, handfuls of whitish powder into the limpid water of the basin.

Cowan dragged his fascinated eyes from the spectacle. Again his glance settled on the pitiful array of captured, familiar equipment. Nearest to him were the packs; olive drab webbed affairs, lined up in precise piles. On the very top of the center pile was an alien object, black, with a bright gleam along one edge. Cowan focussed his blood shot eyes on this thing. It looked for all the world like a leather hand bag such as women carried. He wondered vaguely where one of his men had got such a thing, or why he had carried it into action. Some token from a woman, maybe. It hadn't done the poor devil much good.

What was all this waiting for? Much as he prayed that it would continue, Cowan chafed at it. His nerves were torn to shreds. He feared that a few more hours of this physical and mental torture might cause him to weaken, to break in the face of the coming ordeal. And he knew that it was the presence of Sladen that sent this great fear through him. More than the fear of the coming torture, was his panic that Sladen might be witness to it. He prayed that they would take the man first.

Cowan was somberly staring down at the ground, thinking these frightening thoughts, when he was aroused by a wild, exultant burst of music. The tempo had changed; the music become harsher, more savage.

He looked up to see.

A small procession had appeared from somewhere; two groups in column, chanting, preceded by naked slaves carrying great, flaming torches. Long poles rested over the shoulders of the men; suspended from these poles were two huge, box like affairs, from the seams of which water dripped. A low, thumping chant went up from the entire Bajao assembly. The chiefs about the pool sat erect, their arms held out before them, their palms crossed against each other. Not a sound came from them as they gazed like seers into a crystal down into the depths of the pool. It was only then that Cowan, watching fascinated, thought that the beautiful pool might have great depth.

ON CAME the procession from the direction of the beach. They filed up the coral causeway, circled the pool. They chanted as they moved in a sort of jerky half step. Then they drew up in line, still holding their burdens aloft, and faced the immovable head chief. Minis, for the first time, looked at the old chief. The latter made a faint movement with his head. The bearers let out a great cry; raised their burdens high above their heads and tossed the contents of the huge boxes into the water.

Cowan saw two huge bodies; black, sinister, shining, flash under the lights of the lanterns. There was a terrific splash, a turmoil as the water of the pool was beaten into foam by their whipping tails. His heart stopped beating.

"My God! Sharks!" It was Sladen's voice.

With an almost superhuman effort Cowan got a hold on himself. He turned his eyes from that boiling pool as a man tears his magnetized gaze from contemplation of a giddy height. He cursed Sladen.

"Quiet, you fool! No use reminding them of us."

NOW that the avenging aides of the Coral god were blessed by the welcome of the chiefs and priests, the short and symbolic feast was in order. It was

informal: bamboo troughs being passed out and balls of rice and fish apportioned to the warriors. Polite, unofficial talk was in order among the leaders. The bonds of the white men were cut; food ceremoniously placed before them. Their attendants were polite, almost officiously attentive to their wants. From the preliminary bathing of their hands and mouths, to the final wiping of those hands and mouths, the Bajao slaves gave dignified, courteous service. For there was no rancor in the hearts of the Luwaan. For the first time in the memory of the oldest, victory had attended their arms unaided by alien warriors. The ancient glory of a once proud race had been miraculously revived. And this victory had been gained over what were known to be the greatest warriors on earth—the famous es-Scout; savage men from the north led by the god-like white giants.

Minis turned to the old chief.

"Oh, Tulian, my father, at last has come the glory of our people."

But Tulian bowed his head. His wrinkled face was sad.

"Not so, my son. It is the end of our race. Our time is done on the sea and on the land. They are too strong, the fierce es-Scout; and a friend turned enemy is the wisest of foes. He sees into the soul and you can not outwit him."

Minis let his grave eyes wander about the enclosure. His heart was sad. This day he had fought his first great battle and he had conquered. Martial dreams fired his throw-back soul. His eyes came to rest on the captives.

"The leader of the es-Scout—he is young as I am; he is a true man. He worsted me breast to breast."

"He shall die with honor," Tulian said simply.

Minis sighed.

"There is always true brotherhood between the bravest of warriors. The tales you tell, honored one, of the great white captain who lies buried with our holy and who became brother to you in battle. It is sad that this one should take arms against us, people who had learned to love his kind."

"He worshipped a different god," Tulian said quietly. "And perchance that god was jealous of the choice his soul had made. So he sends this one to bring back that soul. The fault lies not in the messenger of a god but in the false god himself."

There was a long silence between the two. Hardly once during that silence did the young chief's eyes leave the Scout officer. At last he muttered:

"He does not eat."

TULIAN said, "My son, many days to the sun bed there is the island you know of. There the es-Scout cannot follow. There are white men who say they own these lands—the people they call them Heen-glesh; those who gave to us the rifles for this day's work for the miserable handfuls of impure pearls. In the big *garay* you take the girl Minka——"

Minis bowed his head.

"And you—my father-chief?"

Old Tulian, with a great effort, twisted his head on his scrawny neck. There was a dull glow in his dim eyes now, as he stared into the inner circle of palms.

"I remain. I have already drunk the juice of the Rembra drawn for me by the priest, Hibid. By the fall of this moon my soul will be ready. I lie by the side of my warrior friend, the es-Scout French."

"God has spoken!" Minis said softly.

Minis said, "The girl, Menka, desires that the white female go with her as slave. What is my father's wish?"

"Minis is then the chief of the Luwaan," Tulian said with dignity. "And the wife of his heart is the law of the woman."

A soft smile played about Minis' mouth. He said gently, "My father, how can it be the end of our race? The place we go to is lonely. There will be others of the Luwaan. And the child Minka will bear me many hardy sons."

The old man smiled faintly.

"Woman is the glory of youth," he said. "The young warrior sees all in the splendor of the sun."

Minis said thoughtfully, "The white woman is graceful and has the beauty of a pearl in the first flush of evening. Is it then the custom of the white warrior, my father, to take the female into battle?"

Tulian pondered this, his eyes solemn.

"Never before have I looked upon the women of that race, my son," he said gravely. "Their ways cannot be our ways."

Minis appeared to ponder this. His eyes again sought the Scout officer.

"This woman was taken alone," he said. "With a blade in her hand. Can it be she is the mate of the brave white es-Scout?"

A young warrior came and stood respectfully by Minis. He held his hands before his chest, flat, the knuckles against each other.

"Speak," Minis said.

The man spoke rapidly in a low voice. spoke rapidly in a low voice. Tulian stared into the pool, his eyes following gravely, the two swiftly circling fins that rippled the smooth surface of the water.

"My father," Minis said. "The girl Minka has sent a story. The white woman pleads in her strange tongue. She has touched Minka's heart."

The old man stared at the young chief.

"You are the son of my strength. Woman is woman," he said at last, "but there is no one among us with the words to talk with her."

Minis spoke up eagerly. He had been a little afraid before to confess to his father what he had done.

"There is one," he said. "One found crouching in the fire boat on the beach. As my warriors ran for him he cried out in the Moro tongue. They would cut the craven down as was proper; but the thought came to me that his words were useful. They were about to give him the speeding thrust, when, hearing his cries in our tongue, I ordered he be saved."

Tulian scowled. Was this a sign of weakness in the blood of his blood?

But he thought of his approaching death; and the scattering of his tribe. What difference now if the Luwaan softened?

"The girl Minka is your burden," he said simply.

MINIS gave swift orders to the messenger. And so it was that Jessica, the white girl, and Minka, the golden, stood with bent heads before the chiefs of the Luwaan tribe.

Two Bajaos bore the captured Tagalog, with the evil eyes, on a litter. He was bloodied and weak, but he could talk. At a word from Minis, the bearers laid the broken Filipino on the pile of captured packs, bowed and withdrew.

He began to plead, his whole body shaking with fright.

Minis said sternly, "You die, Filipino dog; but first you tell us the words of the white woman who stands before you!"

With trembling voice the man spoke to the white girl. She stood, supported by Minka's strong arm, staring with dilated eyes at the bound figures of Cowan and Sladen. She looked from Sladen's white face to Cowan's sneering one.

Sladen started to speak; but Cowan interruped him. He called harshly:

"So you double crossed me to the end, Miss French? Or maybe you didn't trust your boy friend?"

The girl shook off Minka's arm. Slowly she walked towards Cowan. There was utter silence, as she moved, unhindered around the pool and stood between the piles of loot and the two trussed white men.

"I hurried aboard the boat, forced Mr. Sladen to take me. Just to prevent this awful bloodshed," she said.

Cowan laughed loudly. "You did a good job!" he said.

"I was locked in a filthy cabin," she said, her eyes blazing down at Sladen. "I pleaded with your sergeant. He wouldn't even answer me."

Sladen twisted uncomfortably.

"I had no choice," he muttered. "Wasn't going to have you crying to this Scout captain I expected to meet. Have you call the whole thing off the way you threatened."

Cowan jerked up at that. He watched the girl closely.

"You meant to do that?" he said incredulously.

She bowed her head. "I told you so—back there at Jolo."

"You can hardly expect me to believe a woman who could dope me and pick my pockets of the few dollars in it."

Her face went even whiter.

"That's a lie!" she said.

Cowan shrugged.

"I woke up at noon; a glass of liquor by the bed; pockets cleaned out," Cowan said succinctly.

"Thank the woman that was in there with you! She was so brazen she even left the door open for the world to see!"

"What are you talking about!" Cowan almost shouted.

THE three stared at one another, so enwrapped in their petty drama that for the moment their surroundings were forgotten. The Moros, reassured by the quiet interest of their headmen, watched in fascinated silence.

"I had to pass the door," the girl said in a tense voice. "I couldn't help seeing. Mr. Sladen can verify it. She was very—loving."

Cowan swung about, facing Sladen. "What is she talking about?"

Sladen said nothing. He stared at the ground.

"Sladen, you're going to die in a few minutes. We're all going to die. You saw those man eaters they put in the pool? We'll be shreds in their belly's before long. You'd better come clean, Sladen!"

The fierceness in the Scout officer's voice aroused Sladen. He lifted his bloodshot eyes. His whole face had gone slack with the horror twisting in his brain. What was a petty frame-up like that to what was in store for him? For until Cowan had put this frightfulness into words, he had refused to admit the fate he knew was to be his.

He screamed out his confession now.

"Yes, I framed you, damn you! I doped your booze in my room. I hired the woman for fifty bucks and left the door open for Jessica to see as we went by to the boat. She cleaned you, naturally, before she left."

The girl never took her eyes off Sladen. She said quietly:

"Why?"

Sladen twisted. He began chafing his bruised wrists. He didn't raise his eyes as he muttered:

"He was nuts about you; an idiot could see that, even if he hadn't blabbed it out when the stuff got working in him. I didn't want him messing into things over here. I figured in the end you might fall for him. See him in uniform; romantic tropics and all. And if that happened, he'd get too personal about the whole business. Be on our neck all the time. What I wanted was some officer in charge who'd carry out his orders and no more. Provide us with a guard; but keep his nose out of things."

The girl was now looking at Cowan. She took a step towards him, made a faint gesture with her hand.

"I'm sorry," she said simply.

Cowan said, watching her steadily:

"Tell me the truth. I'll be dead soon. You'll live. These people won't kill a woman. And you are going to have to live a long time with your thoughts. Was your story about your father on the level?"

"Yes," she said. "Every word."

He was silent for a long time. Then he said softly:

"I'm glad—Jessica."

A stifled sob escaped her. Cowan said:

"They've got Sladen's man there. Tell your story to them as dramatically as you can. Back at Siasi the priest told me the old chief here, Tulian, thought your father was almost a god. If you can convince him that you are the real daughter they may release you. Is there any way?"

The girl thought.

"Tulian——?"

"He must be the old one—all bones. Father Acalde said that in the last fight, when your father was killed, he was so badly cut up he never walked again. Or at least this was the tale some of the wandering Bajaos told."

"I used to get letters with marks on them," Jessica said. "His marks. Father told me lots about him. And once there was a ring."

"This Tulian knew of it?"

"He sent it I think. Father wanted me to sell the others. They brought a great deal of money; and he didn't want me to be a drag on Aunt Agnes. But this last one—it was a lovely black pearl set in strange silver mounting. I kept that."

"Ah! Where is it?"

"It was in my bag—everything. The orders from Manila, Mr. Sladen kept. But all my things—even that last letter were in the bag. I brought that because I thought it might be useful in Manila. It was in that last letter that father said about—about wanting to be brought back. Maybe he had a premonition then."

"Where is your bag?"

She shrugged hopelessly. "When they overpowered me—on the pearler. They tore it away from me?"

"Overpowered you?"

She lifted her head proudly.

"Why not? You don't think I hid away? Your old soldier fought them all alone. It took a dozen of them to kill him."

"Poor old Tibal!" Cowan muttered. "He was a grand old bird."

HE LOOKED up at his guards. Their eyes were fixed as though unaware that such strange things were happening before them. Taking a chance, Cowan arose to his feet. He stood, looking down at the girl, his heart knocking strangely.

"They're calling now, Jessica. Go to it! Remember the melodrama. These people eat it up. Give them the works!"

He held out his hand. The interpreter was calling, saying that the Moro chief asked for the white woman. There were tears in the girl's eyes. She lifted his hand, held it briefly, lightly against her cheek. Then she turned and walked steadily towards the waiting chiefs.

The Moro girl, Minka, met her. She wanted this beautiful white woman for her own slave. In her simple heart she feared that it might be otherwise. There was Hibid, the Apostle. Already his beady eyes were upon this white flower. And he had many women; still he was powerful. And when the great Tulian died the young Minis might find it hard to direct the greed of this man.

Minka held Jessica by the hand. She addressed the Tagalog in slow *Joloano*. She had already made her respectful plea to her husband, and at his encouragement, to Tulian. She had their permission to talk to the white woman through the interpreter.

In simple words she reassured the girl; explained that she was to be her own slave; that she would know nothing but kindness. She smiled at the girl as she gave the man the words to translate.

But the white woman didn't smile. She asked to speak before the head man, Tulian. Minka stared at this unheard of request. Women did not speak to chief, she explained. She tried to keep her voice low as she said this to the native so that Minis, and especially Tulian would not know of the profane request. Hibid, she could see was watching it all through slitted eyes. His harsh interference might be expected at any minute.

But the keen-eared Minis heard. And

as the wounded Filipino translated the white girl's reply, he started up. He spoke rapidly to Tulian.

AN UTTER silence fell as Tulian spoke. His voice was low but its tones vibrant, compelling.

"Bring the white woman to me!"

Slowly Minka led the girl forward until she stood facing the old chief.

Tulian called to the interpreter.

"You say the name Captain French, he say," the Filipino said. "Why you say that name?"

"He was my father!" She looked squarely at Tulian as she answered.

"Come closer," Tulian said. He looked at her as though attempting to hypnotize her. She met his fierce gaze without flinching.

"Have the woman speak all," Tulian demanded. And when the Filipino had explained, she spoke slowly, clearly. She remembered what Cowan had said. But she didn't find it difficult to be dramatic. The weird lights about her, the fantastic armed men, the sinister pool beside her—all these drove her to desperate eloquence.

She began at the very beginning, telling of her father and her lovely young mother. She told of her birthdays and the pearls her father sent her. Of the wish of her father to be buried with the woman he loved; and of her dying wish that it be so. She described dramatically how the great chiefs in Washington were against her; how she fought and finally won the grudged permission to come for her father's body. And at the last she pleaded for the white men who had come with her. It was a duty they did against their will.

Tulian's eyes never left her face as she spoke. And after a long silence when she had ceased, he said:

"The woman's hair is short—not like the hair of the picture girl."

He seemed greatly disturbed; not sure. At last he said:

"Where is the ring? The white girl speaks of a ring."

Jessica said they had taken it from her. "Tell him," she said to the Filipino, "his own mark is in a letter in my bag; the bag his men took from me."

The words were hardly explained before Minis called to a warrior who stood guard over the captured equipment. The man picked from the top of one of the piles the black leather bag Cowan had noticed. He placed it in Minis' hands. At a movement of the head from Tulian, Minis, after some difficulty with the strange fastening, spread the contents before his father. There indeed was a ring; and Tulian, with feeble movements of his skeleton fingers caressed it. His own mark also on the paper he saw.

He raised his eyes to Jessica's. A great change had come over his face.

"Come hither, my daughter!"

MEANINGLESS as the words sounded to her, she understood them perfectly. With a deep sob, she moved towards the old man and held her hands out to him. He covered them with his shrivelled palms and bent his head against his chest. Briefly he remained thus; then he lifted his head. His time was short. He must address his people for the last time. All listened in awe struck silence, for he prefaced his speech with the words:

"People of the Luwaan, I, Tulian, have drunk of the Cup——"

He summed up briefly what the white girl had said, stating the bald facts in his own picturesque metaphor. His voice weakened as he spoke. He hastened his words so that all might be clear to the farthest warrior. He concluded:

"And so, my children, we gave to the noble friend of our people our greatest honor, not knowing it was against the cus-

toms of his own people to lie in a grave not blessed by his own gods. His woman child asks for his sacred ashes."

A deep murmur went up as Tulian ceased speaking. Warrior spoke to warrior, curiously questioning. The wizard, Hibid, was on his feet. His vicious little eyes flashed fire. He moved his hands across his chest with strange, quick gestures as he spoke rapidly, angrily to Tulian.

"This cannot be, this taking of the body of the great captain. The word is writ in the coral floor of the lagoon—for all to see! All know that only the man-head of a family can look upon the sacred remains of the dead warrior."

Tulian knew that the Apostle was right. He had hoped that, since it was his last wish and presented a unique case, the literalness of the law be not invoked. His people, he saw, would of themselves make no protest. But he knew the Apostle, Hibid. Only his own great influence had kept the schemer in his place these many years. He feared now for the little power left to his son. Better soft words with the holy ones.

TULIAN bowed slightly to the excited priest. Minis, spoke angrily.

"The es-Scout officer is her man; the son by marriage right of the hero French! Holy Hibid, by the very laws you quote, he then has the right to act for his woman!"

It was evident that the news subdued the Apostle. He muttered a string of incoherent words. Then he said to Tulian:

"If that be so—what of the *two?*" Here Hibid pointed a long finger towards the moving fins that rippled the water of the pool ceaselessly.

Tulian stared thoughtfully before him, and Minis said surlily, "There is the Filipino dog! The minions of the god can share the white and dark meat between them!"

Since the heroic leadership of Minis this day, Hibid was not quite so sure of the future, the almost complete power he had so long contemplated under a weak young chief. He now appeared to think deeply. Tulian, by his silence had tacitly relinquished the decision to the religious headman, as was the law of the Luwaan. This was not a matter for loose choice; the law had been laid down back in the far ages.

At last Hibid spoke:

"The law says, 'The woman is the man; the man is the woman; and the man is king over the woman.' So be it! Let the man and the woman, the lawful issue of the white hero, do with his bones as his own gods decree. There is no good to come from the mixing of the holy spirits of the dead. And the gods who are forever with them will pull different ways; and the souls will not be at peace."

THERE was a deep silence. Then Tulian spoke. He explained to the girl that her man should live. The two could go in peace with the body of her father.

"Which of the white men is your husband?"

The Filipino interpreter was dying slowly from loss of blood. But he summoned up enough strength to repeat these words of the old chief.

The Moros, always alive to the pull of drama, maintained an intense silence. Every eye sought the two white men—bloodied, disheveled, sitting side by side under the bared blades of their guards.

Jessica, too, turned to face them. Under the smoking torches, the swaying lanterns, the rustling palms, the whole scene looked as though cut out in colored wax. The girl was in an agony of indecision. Nobody could help her. Hesitation might ruin all. If she failed to chose, both men would die; if she chose one, she pointed the finger of death at the other.

Sladen, she hated now for the thing he had done back there in that hotel room. And she had done her best for him. She had pleaded for him, even as she had for

the other. But she must consider this in Sladen's favor. He had been kind to her; volunteered to help her in her loneliness and helplessness. He had asked for no reward. So far as she could see his help was merely an act of friendship in memory of her father whose friend he said he had been. The Scout officer was here because he had been ordered.

Desperately groping for a way out, Jessica walked slowly towards the two men. She looked into their faces in turn. Cowan met her look steadily; there was even a faint smile on his lips. Sladen was wordlessly pleading with her; his eyes almost darting from his head with supplication. And as she stood at last looking down at them she knew; knew that not only must she choose Cowan, but that she loved him.

She looked away from Sladen, quickly; and Sladen knew, too. He leaped to his feet, with a hoarse cry. Before she realized what he was about he had seized her by the arm, was dragging her towards the waiting chief. Wildly he was crying:

"She is mine—my woman! She is my wife!"

No need to translate that dramatic act with words. A low, understanding murmur came from the assembled Bajaos. The sorcerer, Hibid, was satisfied; Tulian bowed his head solemnly upon his chest. The girl, Minka, uttered a low, disappointed cry. But the young chief Minis stood fiercely erect, a great scowl on his brow.

"What says this woman! What says the daughter of the dead white hero?" he shouted above the babel of sound.

A GREAT silence fell at these words. All looked at Minis; and all saw that his hand was on the handle of his dagger. Then, with one accord, all those savage eyes centered upon the white woman. They saw that she dragged back from the big white man who held her; that her eyes flashed. That she spoke rapid and harsh words to him.

Tulian raised his skull-like head.

"Hear! Hear the woman!" he said sonorously.

Sladen knew what she would say. In a final panic she had screamed the words in his face as she struggled from him. And the Filipino interpreter, his evil eyes all this while fastened upon Sladen's white face was calling to be heard. The girl and Sladen were standing near the piles of loot upon which the Filipino was propped. Sladen whirled on the man. There was deadly menace in his voice.

"You!" he ordered. "Tell them she is my wife! That you know it! I swear I will save you!"

The native's eyes half closed—the only movement he made. He said nothing to Sladen. He said hoarsely, speaking to Tulian:

"The white woman belongs to the other. She so declares; and I know this thing to be true."

"Have the chief of the es-Scouts come forward," Tulian said.

Hibid, annoyed at all this delay, frowned. His own big moment would come when the sacrifice was tossed to the minion sharks. Instinctively his sympathies were against this cockerel Minis.

"Should the word be taken of this Filipino dog?" he shouted. "His very eyes show the hate he bears this white man before us!"

Minis leaned threateningly towards the Apostle, pointing a trembling finger at the haggard faced Sladen.

"That man cowered in the fire boat while the es-Scout chief stood toe to toe with my best warriors. He, alone, bore me, your chief, to the earth. The law says, to the strong goes the woman!"

A MURMUR of approval arose from the Moro ranks. Hibid bit his withered lip. He was beaten, but he was wiley. He appeared to think deeply. Blood was what he wanted; blood he would have. It was when ceremonial blood poured that he came into his own.

Hibid looked up from his pondering.

"The young chief is right," he said as though pronouncing sentence. "The two white men shall do battle with blades; and the stronger shall take the woman. Such is the writing in the coral bed."

Tulian bowed his head.

"It is just," he said. "The Filipino dog will so say to the white men——"

The interpreter twisted his pain distorted face towards Sladen. At the top of his voice he pronounced the decision as though glorying in his brief importance. A guard led Cowan forward until he stood on line with Sladen, the girl between them. A deathly hush had come over the jungle glade. Every eye was focussed on the three white people.

Then the girl began to plead with the interpreter, begging him to appeal to Tulian. Cowan interrupted her. He said in a swift undertone:

"It's no use. Only arouse them more. Listen; they won't hurt you. They've already promised to let you go, and a chief's word with them is sacred. You're not to blame for what we do."

Cowan looked at Sladen. The man's face was ghastly.

"There's just one chance for us, Sladen," Cowan said. "You're a dirty rat and don't deserve to live. I believe I can kill you with a barong. I'm not sure. You're a brute of a man; and you've got the killer instinct. But right now, the only thing I'm going to remember is that we're both white men. We'll fake this fight. We can get away with it for a few minutes at most. They'll give us the whole world to battle in. I'll give ground; you drive me out by these hedges. I've been thinking; and I have the route pretty well in mind to the launch. I'm not sure but I don't think they'd have damaged it. Afraid to tinker with machinery. We'll take the gas one; I can run it. Just as soon as we get by the inner ring we make a break for it. We'll have the jump on them and we'll have sharp barongs. You can bet on that. Are you game?"

A quick gleam had come into Sladen's eyes as Cowan raced off his plan. All his life he had lived by his wits; and his wits were peculiarly adapted to trickery. But his was not the desperate courage of the Scout officer. There was only a bare chance of making it Cowan's way. Even escaped from the inner square there was yet the hazardous open space to get through before the beach were reached. And that open space, and possibly the entire way to the water would be blocked with armed men. One chance in a million.

And if they did make it where would he be? Discredited, broke, adrift in the Orient.

No; Sladen had a better plan. One so simple, so richly promising in results, that it inspired him even as Cowan talked. But he must be artful for just a little while.

He mustered a distorted grin. "Fine business!" he said, and before another word could be exchanged, they were led before the chiefs and two huge barongs were put in their hands.

The guards withdrew back into the ranks of the men lining the hedges; the drums beat out a prolonged roll; the two white men faced each other, their blades raised.

The drums stilled after a final wild pounding. A yell went up from the Moros—the same sort of yell that is roared from a fight crowd of their more civilized brothers.

The blades fell, rang against each other. The fight was on.

Cowan had deliberately placed himself so that his back was to the entrance of the square. Out of the corner of his eye he had noted that the path was clear of Moros behind him. Gradually he would work his way backward as though pressed by superior power. Step by step he would give way until that opening was reached.

HE WAS aware that Sladen was slashing at him viciously. A shout of approval went up from the watchers. They loved the attack. It took all of Cowan's agility of foot and quickness of eye to avoid that flashing blade. He was

glad now for the boxing days of his youth. For with Sladen's realistic attack and his own skillfulness of retreat, there could as yet be no suspicion in the minds of the Moros that all was not as bloodthirsty as they supposed.

To put yet more realism into it, he would now and then rally; side-step, feint and bore in towards the bigger man. He wondered as he looked at Sladen's eyes. Hatred and intentness were there. If nothing else, the man was a superb actor. Well, he had had evidence of that before.

Cowan was tiring. Sladen's weapon had twice sliced him on the arm, once torn him across the ribs. He had lost a good bit of blood that day; he had eaten nothing since morning. He felt suddenly weak; and a strange ringing beat in his head. He knew that he must hurry; move backwards faster. For when the break was made, speed was of prime importance. They must race to the boat, get aboard and start the engine before the Moros could be after them in force. Surprise would give them a start; but the boat was heavy. It might be well up on the land. In that case a *vinta* would have to be located and paddled away with great speed if they were to escape pursuing boats.

They were now on the far side of the pool. Slowly Cowan was giving way by the piled up equipment. He was getting in too close to it; he moved away to the right. The pile of packs was behind him. In the placing of the Filipino interpreter upon them a few had become dislodged. They lay in a scattered heap, their blankets bulging out, their straps tangled.

It was almost time. Cowan caught Sladen's eye; muttered a word of warning. Then as he stepped back swiftly, his feet caught in a fallen pack; one ankle tangled in a shoulder strap. Cowan, hard pressed by Sladen, cried out a word of alarm, lost his balance and tripped to the ground. Sladen leaped on him. A triumphant grin bared his teeth. He raised this barong.

"Now you get what's coming to you!" Sladen snarled. *"And so do I!"*

IN THAT startled second Cowan saw everything. Sladen had planned this all along. Hadn't played fair from the first. He would kill him; and the Moros would do him honor. The girl would be his; have to agree to it as the best way out. He would get away with everything just as he had schemed to do in the beginning.

A last wild anger flared in Cowan. He knew that he was done. That that blade would be cleaving his defenseless skull in another second. But he wouldn't die on his back, on the ground like a butchered pig.

He tried with one final surge of strength to heave himself erect with the hand that was spread out behind him. He saw the blade moving towards him, the lights flashing from its polished surface. Then, in the awful, waiting hush, he heard the sharp sound of a shot. He saw the blade quiver, slip from Sladen's hand. He heard it clatter on the ground beside him as Sladen swayed above him, his hands, one over the other clutching at his heart. Then Sladen fell, half across him; and he heard the Filipino's voice close by him, cursing. He turned his dizzy head slowly and saw the Tagalog still holding the pistol he had snatched up from the pile beside him.

A GREAT clamor broke out. Guards rushed at the interpreter, spears before them. But above the uproar came the loud voice of Minis, ordering the men back; and sharper than that was the scream from Jessica.

Order was quickly restored; and at Tulian's command, the Tagalog spoke. The evil seemed to have gone from his slant eyes; the calmness of the dying had replaced it. There was even a curious dignity to his words. The circle of chiefs listened attentively. Cowan, his arm about Jessica, stood half leaning against the coral pool. He held the trembling girl close, unable to speak.

The Tagalog said, "I am about to die; and I do not wish to die with evil in me.

The man I killed was evil. He stole and he was placed in prison with me—the great prison of Bilibid in Manila. He spoke words to me of assistance; and I listened. Then I told him of the last great pearl the chief Tulian brought to my one-time master, the Scout captain, French. I think this pearl is buried with the body of this man; and so I tell this man. He leaves the prison before me; and with this girl he comes back and I meet him as arranged in Manila, for then my time is done from the prison. He tell me then that he find this girl by asking in Washington where the daughter of the Captain French lives. He lies to this girl in the hope to get this great pearl. He tell me that the Bajao are few; that the might of the white soldiers will frighten them to let us dig as we will here. He promise me one half and no danger. But I die; and because of his lies. So I kill that man because I wish to do one good act before I die. The Captain French was good to me; so why should I injure his daughter, I, Felipe?"

Felipe said all this in halting English; then he repeated it in the Moro dialect. When his last word died away, there was a long, vibrant silence.

Then Tulian spoke in a low voice; and men lifted the body of Sladen. Others raised Felipe from his litter; and the two groups moved together towards the pool.

Jessica shuddered against Cowan, her hand before her face.

"Steady!" he said. "You've got to hang on!"

WITH his arm supporting her he led her before the old chief. He pointed towards the sea. Tulian nodded and spoke rapidly to Minis.

Cowan said to the interpreter; asked him to explain that they wished to go in peace as the Moros had promised. That the daughter of Captain French desired that her father's body rest forever where it lay.

Felipe lifted his dull eyes from the surface of the pool where those savage fins raced ever faster. He spoke; and his words were listened to solemnly. And then for the first time Tulian smiled. He said softly:

"It is well. In a few more breaths from the sea I, Tulian, will lie beside my friend, the white captain. A guard will go with the two children of the hero to the fire boat. The pearl the white man seeks is to be found in his own house. It was not buried with my friend. He put it where he was wont to hide the others."

Felipe translated, and Cowan suddenly remembered the solid ebony floor boards of the hut French had inhabited. Perhaps they *had* a purpose after all; what a safety vault they would form! He brought himself back to the present. Minka wept. Minis gave orders to the guard and himself led the way towards the beach. And as the moonlit sea broke upon their sight through the jungle trees a great cry of elation rent the quiet night behind them.

The minions of the coral god had been appeased.

Cowan had quieted Jessica's sobbing by the time they came on the boats. They got both of them launched with the eager assistance of the Moros, and Cowan spun the wheel, heading for Siasi. The girl snuggled against him. The moon lay low over the water.

At last Cowan spoke. "By morning there won't be a trace of them. They'll be scattered all over the Sulu Sea."

"The Sulu Sea!" she breathed. "In spite of it all, I'm happy. The blood of my father, I suppose."

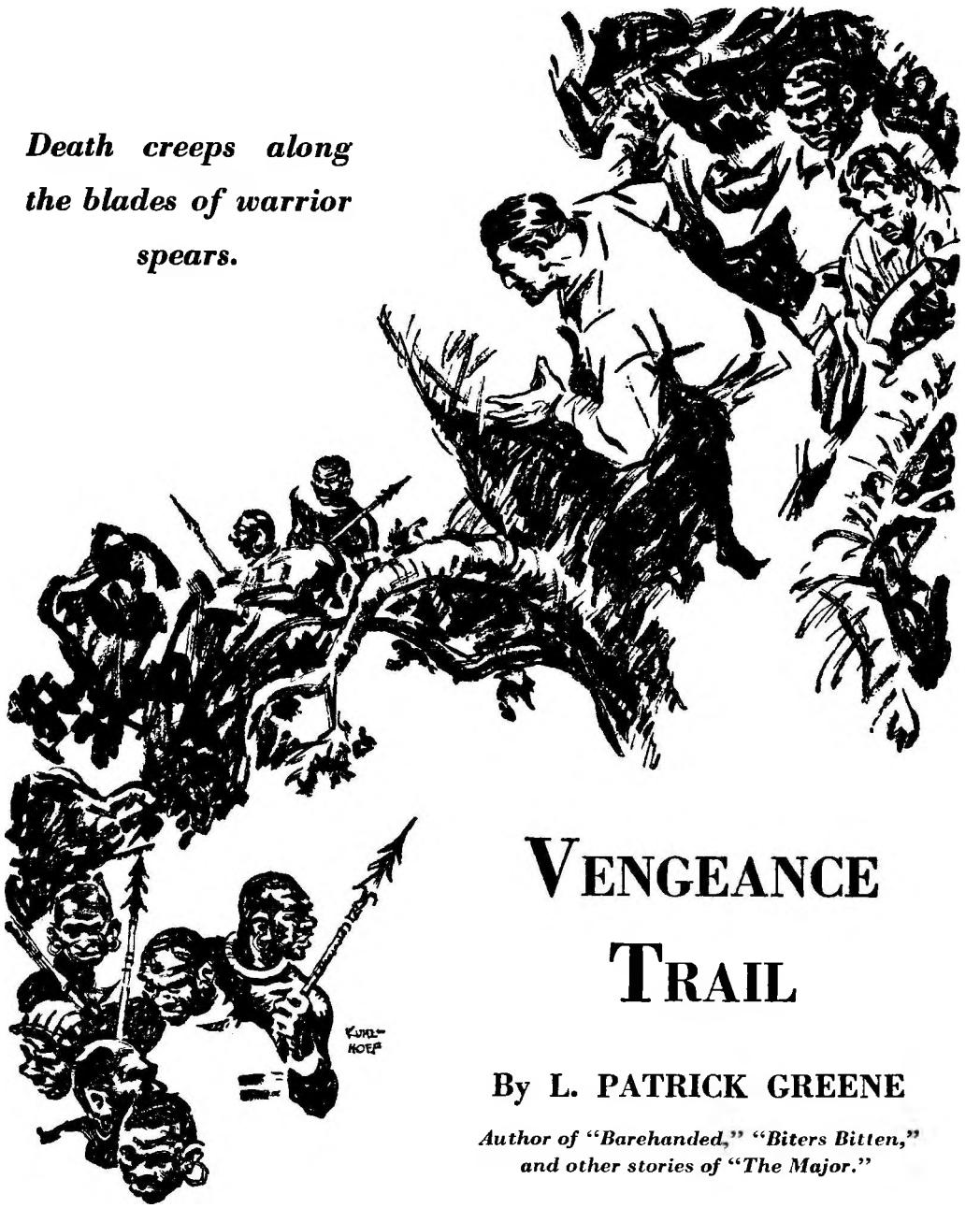
Cowan held her close; and for a long time no word was spoken as they crouched there by the wheel. Then came the lights of Siasi, and Cowan heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"There's home," he said softly. "That old boy was right. The pearl I seek is in my own home—or will be in a few minutes. Am I right?"

"Yes," she said, "you're right."

"And it took what we call a savage to put it into such beautiful words," Cowan said, and he kissed her.

Death creeps along the blades of warrior spears.



VENGEANCE TRAIL

By L. PATRICK GREENE

Author of "Barehanded," "Biters Bitten," and other stories of "The Major."

I TELL you," said the missionary, the kindliness of his eyes clouded by an expression of troubled concern, "that this is an evil thing you have done, Hottentot."

The Hottentot scowled and exclaimed fiercely:

"It is good to make the wicked suffer—not evil."

The two men were seated on a bench in the shade of a large, well-built hut. Above them the African sun infused the sky's blueness with the hot yellow of molten metal. All about them was the desolation of the desert region: flat, scrub-covered wastelands, hemmed in on the distant horizon by hills which danced in the heat waves like macabre fantasies of a nightmare.

Not far from where they sat a white

man was going through a series of setting-up exercises with a deadly seriousness which gave to his occupation a greater importance than that of man in search of bodily fitness. He was dressed in white running shorts and vest. His face, arms and legs were tanned to a deep mahogany. His hair, brushed back from his forehead in an immaculate pompadour, was salted with gray; not the gray of age, but the grayness which comes to a man who has undergone a severe physical and mental strain.

Evidence of that strain was apparent in the man's finely drawn face and the expression in his eyes; they had something of the coldness of hard polished steel; the high lights were like the reflections from a blade of Damascus steel.

The missionary said heavily:

"In the desert I found you and your Baas who was as one already dead. I brought you here. And I've watched you give back life to your Baas. I think you gave him your own strength, Hottentot. For that great praise is due to you. But you also gave your Baas hate and a desire for vengeance. *Au-a!* At a time when his strength was no more than that of a child you poured words of hate into his mind——"

"He thrived on it," the Hottentot interrupted fiercely. "It gave him the will to live. It fed his strength."

The missionary shook his head.

"It was an evil thing to do, Hottentot. You should have spoken words of pity and of forgiveness."

The Hottentot laughed harshly.

"We trek in a circle, *umfundisi.* Six evil men captured my Baas and, after ill-treating him, took him into the desert, stripped him of his clothes and left him to die. He would have died had he been a man of lesser worth."

"He would have died," the missionary amended, "but for your loyalty. You saved his life, Hottentot."

"And if I did—what of it? The balance is still in his favor. But *wo-we!* This evil you talk of! To seek vengeance on the men who left my Baas to die is not evil."

"Hate has blinded your eyes and dulled your wits, Hottentot. Consider the man your Baas was. Consider the man he is. He was much given to laughter, his courage was that of a lion, his mind set always to good deeds. He was a friend of all men—an enemy of none. And now—I tell you, Hottentot, the evil that came to him when he was left helpless and naked in the desert is nothing to the evil you have thrust upon him. The other harmed only his body, but the words you poured into his mind when the sickness was upon him have destroyed his soul.

"Are you pleased with your work, Hottentot?"

A LOOK of doubt came into Jim's eyes. He sighed as he thought of the happy years he and his Baas, the Major, had trekked up and down the land which is South Africa. They had faced death in a hundred guises. They had taken the disasters of great wealth and cramping poverty in their stride; they had always enlisted on the side of the weak against the strong, the oppressed against the oppressor; they had fought again and again against that right which is only might.

And in all their wanderings, laughter had always been with them.

But now——

Laughter and the joy of living had departed from the Major. He was stern and unbending, taciturn where he had been gaily talkative. Until now, vengeance had been a word foreign to the Major's vocabulary. Now it was the breath of his body.

"Wo-we!" Jim muttered. "For a day and the half of a day the sun dropped its rays on his head and naked body; a weaker man would have crumpled entirely beneath the load of them. My Baas is still as one stunned by heavy blows. The hand of the desert still holds him. But it will pass. Six men and two women trapped my Baas in their evil net. He

went, as he thought, to save a woman from a beating—and they trapped him. When he has avenged himself upon them laughter will return to him."

"A madness possesses him, Hottentot," the missionary said sadly. "And you are the author of that madness."

"Tell him so, *umfundisi,*" Jim challenged.

"I have," the missionary replied.

"And his answer?" Jim prompted sarcastically.

"He laughed for the first time since health returned to him. But there was no mirth in his laughter. In that way, I think, a dead man might laugh. Well, now I must go. I do not return until tomorrow's sunset."

The missionary rose to his feet. A few minutes later, mounted on a sturdy mule, he rode away from the mission heading for a desert water-hole where he hoped to meet a group of pigmy bushmen to whom he would preach his faith.

JIM watched him until he had passed out of sight then he recalled his attention to the man who was still exercising with a serious singleness of purpose His eyes glowed as he appraised his Baas' muscular development and easy, graceful movements. Mentally the Hottentot compared his Baas to the wild beasts of the veld and jungle.

"The strength of an elephant," Jim muttered. "The speed of a springbok, the smooth soft walking of a leopard; the courage and cunning of a buffalo. *Wowe!*" he laughed softly. "And yet my Baas is a man.

"It's enough, Baas!" he called aloud.

Concluding his exercises the Major donned a large woollen dressing-gown—its coloring was startlingly vivid—and walked slowly toward the Hottentot, his hands clasped behind his back. There now seemed to be no spring in his body—just as there was no animation on his face.

The Hottentot frowned slightly. Then he shouted excitedly, "Behind you, Baas!"

The Major pivoted swiftly, his right hand leaped to the bulging pocket of his dressing-gown and emerged with the speed of a striking snake. The sunlight glinted on the barrel of a revolver; a shot broke the noon day silence and a tin can some distance away leaped at the impact of a heavy bullet. It leaped twice again as two more bullets followed the first. And it was all done so swiftly that the last word of the Hottentot's warning seemed to be drowned by the report of the third shot.

When the Major turned again a suspicion of a smile broke the stern contour of his face and softened the steely glint of his eyes.

"Really good shooting, eh, what, you old heathen?" he called in a drawling affected voice. "Quick on the draw an' all that."

The words meant nothing to the Hottentot. Despite his long association with the Major his knowledge of English was rudimentary and his vocabulary consisted of little more than a few phrases which he used parrot-fashion at strangely inappropriate times. But when his Baas spoke to him in English in the tone he had just used, Jim knew that laughter was not far away—either laughter or some decisive devastating action against an enemy. Well, here was no enemy and Jim's ugly face began to pucker into a thousand and one wrinkles which was his preliminary to ejaculating one of his English phrases and bursting into a peal of uncontrollable laughter.

But he conquered that impulse. Instead he said gruffly, "It was good, Baas. And soon it will be time to shoot at a man instead of an empty tin."

Instantly the sparkle went from the Major's eyes.

"I'm ready now, Jim," he said, speaking the vernacular with an ease and purity of inflection. "Before sun-down the wagon and mules will be here with the rest of our outfit. Tomorrow's sun-up will see us on the trek."

"And where do we trek, Baas?"

The Major replied with the glibness of a child who has learned his lesson by heart, "We go to find the evil ones who left me alone in the desert without shoes for my feet or clothes to protect my naked body."

"And when we have found them—what then, Baas?" Jim asked. The question seemed to force itself from his lips. He asked it as if he were hypnotized by the creed of vengeance he had preached during the long days of his Baas's convalescence.

"When we have found them, Hottentot, we will make them pay for the evil they did to me."

The Hottentot rose to his feet and looked up into his Baas' face, trying to read the thoughts the impassive eyes concealed.

Failing, he sighed, turned and led the way into the hut where a pigmy bushman awaited them.

A few minutes later the Major, sprawled full length on a narrow camp bed, surrendered his body to the administrations of the two natives.

THEY kneaded him and massaged him with the knowledge and expertness of trained masseurs. For a time he ceased to have a human identity to them. He was only an animal to be trained for a sporting event. They laughed at his little gasps of pain as their probing fingers sought out and straightened a knotted sinew. At last, hypnotized by the light ceaseless flicking of their hands, he slept.

"It is enough," the Hottentot whispered hoarsely as he covered his Baas with a light blanket. "We go now."

They tip-toed softly out of the hut.

"Tomorrow we trek from this place," the Hottentot continued as he closed the door. "My Baas' full strength has returned to him."

"And where do you trek—you and this Baas of yours?" the little man asked.

"To seek vengeance! *Au-a!* I have told you that many times."

The pigmy shook his head.

"Take care! It may be that the vengeance will fall back upon yourselves and destroy you."

He chuckled softly and walked swiftly away.

The Hottentot stared after him thoughtfully. Once again doubts and indecision wrinkled Jim's face.

II

IT WAS nearly sun-down of that same day. The Major, dressed now in white duck, and Jim were expertly appraising the stamina and speed of eight mules which were tethered to a line stretched between two stakes driven into the ground.

The inspection finished the two men looked at each other and nodded approval.

"They'll do, Baas!" Jim said grudgingly. "They're too fat—and, it may be, when work has melted their fatness, faults will appear which are now hidden. Still ——"

A fat, good-natured looking man who leaned against a wheel of the wagon which stood near-by, laughed.

"They're good mules, Jim. And you know it. How about it, Major?"

The Major nodded gravely.

"They'll do, Thompson. We won't grumble about the price."

Thompson laughed again.

"No, I'll gamble you won't. Them mules are priceless—to you, at any rate, Major. You ain't goin' to pay me anything for them. No—" he held up his hand, silencing the Major's objections —"I mean it. Mary 'ud never forgive me if I took money from you, Major. She

said if I gave you all we'd got it 'ud still make us in your debt. An' I ain't denying it.

"Well; if you're satisfied with the mules I'll be getting along. I left my boys and wagon at the water hole—we're outspanning there for the night and trekking back to the *dorp* on the morrow. It's a thirsty three days' trek and I'll be glad when it's over. I wouldn't come into this blamed desert for any other man, Major, but you—oh, yes! And perhaps for that good for nothing nigger of yours." He laughed happily at Jim who now led up to him the horse which had been tethered at the rear of the wagon.

He climbed awkwardly into the saddle, and then said, "The wagon's as good a one as I could get, Major. And you'll find it stocked with all the stuff you asked for—including, you blamed good for nothing dude!—a dozen monocles. You'll find them in the black uniform case marked A. Mary went to Jo'burg to get 'em for you. And say, I bet them tailors of yours there never turned out clothes in such quick time before. As for the rest—Mary said she felt like she was buying a bridegroom's outfit." He laughed again.

"Thank you, thank you for everything, Thompson," the Major said, interrupting the garrulous little man. "You have told no one about hearing from me?"

"No—neither me nor Mary. We know how to keep our mouths shut when we're asked to."

The Major nodded. He knew his friend could be as mute as the grave when occasion demanded.

"Well, I must be off," Thompson said. But he made no move to depart. Instead, he sat looking down thoughtfully at the serious Major, a puzzled expression on his face. He might have been looking at a stranger who resembled an old friend.

"Thompson," the Major said abruptly. "This is serious. I don't want you to tell anyone you've seen me. I'm *dead,* you understand?"

Thompson scratched his head.

"You haven't got the police after you for something serious, have you? If you have—there's me, an' plenty more like me who owe you more than a bit, only too glad to have a chance of lending a helping hand. Why——"

"No, nothing like that, Thompson. This is just a personal matter between me and——"

His lips closed in a firm hard line. A killing light steeled his eyes.

Thompson leaned forward.

"Ain't there anything I can do, Major? You look different, somehow. God! You *are* different. You don't laugh. You ain't cracked a joke once since I've been here. And you ain't aped the drawling dude. You look fit to fight for your life—so it ain't any sickness that's ailing you and making you look as though you'd been dragged through hell."

"I have—more or less," the Major said heavily. Then he asked casually, "Have you heard anything of Tank Hale, Soapy Sam, Slick Fenton, Kaffir, Scar Gaynor—or any of that crowd?"

He named the six men whose diabolical plot had so nearly caused his death.

Thompson looked at him shrewdly.

"Funny you should ask about them," he said. "They ain't exactly friends of yours—or of each other, for the matter of that. Yet I did hear they go together some time back to pull off some dirty deal they all had an interest in—but maybe you know about that?"

"Maybe," the Major said non-committally. "But go on."

"Well, I heard they went off on a trip together somewhere. They were away about a week. When they came back they had a big dinner to celebrate whatever it was they wanted to celebrate—any idea what that was?"

The Major knew that it was to celebrate his supposed death, but he shook his head.

"Well, anyway," Thompson continued, "they parted company after that and each went his own dirty way. That's all I know about them—except that Scar Gay-

nor left the other day for the Congo. He boasted he had a gun-running deal on. The dirty swine! I'm no moralist, but a man who'll make his living selling guns to niggers—knowing they'll be used sooner or later against his own color—is about as low as a man can get. I hope Gaynor gets caught whilst he's up there by a Belgian official he can't bribe. That's all! He'll get a taste of hell then.

"Well—I've got to be moving. S'long, Major. S'long, Jim. Sure you don't want to tell me anything, Major? Well—don't worry. I'll keep my mouth shut."

With a wave of his hand he rode off and the Major, rousing himself from the fit of moody dejection which had suddenly fallen on him climbed up into the wagon to examine its fittings.

THOMPSON had not, he quickly saw, over-stated things. The wagon was wonderfully equipped with everything needed for a long trek into regions where supplies would be hard to come by.

The Major—though he could, if occasion required—travel with a bare minimum of equipment—knew that Africa is hard to beat under the best conditions and was wise enough to take care of his bodily comforts.

He knew that a mosquito bite can be as fatal as a rogue elephant; death lurks as surely in a stagnant pool as in the bite of a momba; a sleepless night might mean a shaky hand on the morrow and a moment's fatal delay in firing at a charging lion.

Having that in mind, the mosquito net, the water filter, the air mattresses and the rest were necessities—not luxuries.

The sun had set when the Major concluded his inspection of the wagon's contents and sat down again on the driver's seat. He watched Jim who was examining the mules' harness.

Conscious suddenly of his Baas' scrutiny, Jim looked up with a grin.

"It is all good, Baas. And tomorrow we trek."

The Major's answer surprised him.

"Tonight the moon is full, Jim?"

"Yah, Baas—you know it."

"Then inspan, Jim. We'll trek now."

"But, Baas——" the Hottentot stammered.

"We'll trek now," the Major repeated slowly. "Inspan—or must I do it for you?"

"Au-a! The Baas shames me," Jim exclaimed. "Before the sun's afterglow has gone from the sky all will be ready."

The Major nodded absently and climbing down from the wagon went to the hut which had been his sleeping quarters since he had been brought to the mission.

He packed up the kit which a messenger had brought out from the *dorp* some time previously and wrote a short note of thanks to his host. The amount of the check he attached to the note would enable the missionary to carry on his work independent of other help.

THAT done, the Major shouldered the pack he had made and went out to the wagon.

Jim—he had worked very swiftly, the mules were already inspanned—was sitting on the driver's seat, the reins gathered in his powerful left hand, his right holding the long stocked, long-lashed whip.

The mules were dancing restlessly, eager to be off.

The Major threw his pack into the wagon and then climbed on to the seat beside Jim.

"Where do we trek, Baas?" Jim asked.

The Major looked at him as if for the first time conscious of his presence.

"I am trekking north, Hottentot, for the Congo. It is a long trek and a hard one. Much of it will have to be done on foot—and you do not like walking! Death will hedge the way and——"

"What of it, Baas?" Jim interrupted uneasily. "Death has often lined the trail we traveled together——"

The Major silenced him with a wave of his hand.

"I would only say Hottentot that there is nothing for you to do on this trek I am now taking. You shall go to your own people until I return—if I return."

Tears filled the Hottentot's eyes.

"Baas," he said brokenly, "we have trekked together for many years and now I have no people, no life—save as I live it in your service. If it is my talk of vengeance that has changed you so that I hardly know my Baas—then forget the folly I uttered. It was no more than a sudden up-springing wind."

"But now the wind blows, Jim," the Major retorted, "and blows me with it."

"Then it blows me too," Jim cried desperately. "I *will* go with you, Baas. Vengeance is my need as well as yours. Was I not beaten by those men? Did not death come near to me also in the desert?"

He waited anxiously for the Major's reply.

It came suddenly:

"I cannot deny you, Jim, and—and I should be lost trekking without you. So, give me the reins, Jim."

He took the reins in his powerful hands and Jim, standing up, his feet wide apart, braced against the sudden jerk of the wagon, plied the big whip. The lash snaked forward over the heads of the leaders and, recoiling with the rifle-like report, bit into the hides of the two wheelers.

The mules broke into a mad gallop. The vengeance trek was begun.

III

AFRICA jealously guards her own secrets, but she announces full throatedly the secrets of the alien white man within her borders. The sun-baked veld preserves the impressions of passing natives' naked feet for only a fraction of time; but a white man's booted footprints are recorded as indelibly as his actions are recorded in the Book of Fate.

Africa, too, has a way of reading a white man's most secret motives. Maybe she judges from the expression in his eyes —for no white man can lie as convincingly as the natives who are all, in that respect, as little children.

And whatever Africa reads, sees, hears or deduces, she broadcasts by her own mysterious wireless. And so, news of a white man's movements become the casual gossip in kraals far remote from his sphere of activities.

Consequently there is nothing miraculous in the fact that Scar Gaynor knew all about the Major's trek in search of him although he was seven days ahead of his pursuer.

The news was given to him by Tom, his half-caste mule driver.

Gaynor's first reaction was one of disbelief. He could not hold the thought the man he had left in the desert—naked, without food and water—could have lived to survive the ordeal. But when Tom's story was corroborated by the natives of the kraal where he had outspanned for the night, he gave way to a panic of fear. This manifested itself in an exhibition of senseless brutality. He raged up and down the kraal, thrashing every luckless native who crossed his path. In less than five minutes there was not a native to be seen in the enclosure—but from several of the huts came the sound of pain-filled moans.

Gaynor stood then before the headman's hut, hoarsely shouting to that man to come out and be beaten. There was a mad glare in his eyes; the scars which distorted his swarthy face blazed with a silvery whiteness.

"Boss!" he started at the sound of Tom's voice.

"It is not good to beat without cause," Tom said softly. "It would be better to

make these kraal people your men so that they will deal hardly with the one who follows you."

Gaynor nodded. The fit of insensate anger went from him and he stumbled to his wagon. There he thoughtfully considered the best way of dealing with the Major, having accepted the story of that man's escape from the desert.

He considered returning to the *dorp* and warning the others who had joined with him in the cowardly attack upon the Major's life and he smiled grimly as he pictured the consternation into which news that the Major was alive, and out for vengeance, would throw them.

"The cowardly swine'll bolt for their holes," he muttered. "Well, to hell with them! I'm not going back. They must take care of their own skins. And it's a fact I don't need their help in taking care of mine."

THERE was a good reason for Gaynor's decision not to return. He had put a lot of capital into this gun-running expedition on which he was now engaged, and if he gave it up the combination of circumstances which had made it both possible and profitable might not occur again.

As for the Major——

"No need for me to worry about him," his thoughts ran. "I'm as good a man in the bush as he is, and as good a shot. The blasted dude! I'll take care he don't catch up with me until I'm ready for him. That'll be after I've got rid of the guns to Amali. That's it! I'll wait until we're up in the Congo before dealing with the Major. Before I'm done with him he'll wish he'd died back there in the desert —the interfering, mealy-mouthed dude!"

He called to Tom and loading him with some bottles of rot-gut whisky said, "Take these to the headman of the kraal, Tom, and tell him that I'm sorry I ran amok. It was the fever-madness, tell him. And say that I'll come up the kraal again presently with more presents—*puza,* for the men, beads and cloth for the women."

There were wild scenes at the kraal that night. The natives mixed the so-called gin Gaynor had given them with their own pungent brew. The result was a heady mixture which broke down all barriers of restraint.

IN THE days that followed Scar Gaynor was kept almost constantly supplied with news of the Major's progress. And at each kraal he visited he made the headman generous gifts, and filled him with stories of the evil of the white man who followed.

Yet, despite all that he could do, the Major was gaining on him. Specially was this true when the wagon and mules had to be left behind and the trek continued on foot. Then Gaynor was forced to adjust his pace to that of the heavily ladened carriers he had engaged to carry the rifles and ammunition he was running into the Congo.

The Major, on the other hand, traveled light. He and Jim carried the few essentials they needed in small packs.

It was during this phase of the trek that the Major demonstrated his physical fitness and ability to live off the country. And he demonstrated, too, his wonderful understanding of, and sympathy with, the natives. Despite Gaynor's campaign of lies against him, backed up by generous gifts, the Major succeeded in gaining the respect and esteem of the natives at each kraal he visited. They always received him with suspicion and, sometimes open hostility; but his subsequent departure was attended by sincere expressions of regret.

AFTER many days of hard trekking, Scar Gaynor came to a large kraal in the heart of the jungle country. It was the kraal of Amali, the headman who desired to arm his warriors with guns in the hope that he would be able to throw off the white man's rule.

Amali, a fat, autocratic chief, welcomed Gaynor with enthusiasm and lost no time

in effecting the transfer to himself of the guns and ammunition. In exchange he gave Gaynor such a large quantity of ivory that the gun-runner's pig-like eyes opened wide with astonishment. He had expected some trouble—being well-versed in the ways of natives—in collecting payment; at the very least he expected to waste long hours in seemingly fruitless bargaining. Instead of which, he arrived at Amali's on the evening of one day and by the morrow's sun-up, he and his carriers were on trek again.

Gaynor was in a very good humor and he whistled cheerfully as he marched with Tom at the head of the long line of carriers—each of whom carried ivory in addition to his usual load. The fact that the Major was scarcely a day's trek behind him did not disturb him. So many things might happen to the Major now! There was the chance that the Belgian native soldiers might capture him and execute him out of hand on suspicion of being a gun-runner or ivory poacher. Or Amali, influenced by Gaynor's lies, might decide to torture the Major to death in order to encourage his young warriors.

Gaynor hoped vindictively that the Major would escape the soldiers, for most of all he wanted the Major to follow him without hindrance. It was in that hope he now headed his carriers straight for a vast tract of swamp-land instead of trekking south.

The swamp was an old haunt of his. It was there he meant to cross swords with the Major. Not that "cross swords" is a good definition of his intent; that suggets a sporting, face to face combat. Whereas Gaynor meant to ambush his adversary. Certainly he intended to take no risks.

Near the center of the swamp there was an "island" of solid, rising ground. It was for that island he was now heading. There he planned to pitch his camp and wait for the arrival of the Major. Not that he would be there to greet him. He was going to wait in the branch of a thickly leafed tree overlooking the trail his carriers would make. The first the Major or Jim would know of the ambush would be when the crippling shots he would fire bit into their bodies. Gaynor was a good shot and, at the range he meant to fire, two shots would be sufficient to render both men incapable of offering resistance.

After that he was not sure what he would do with the two who had dogged his trail—save that he knew their ultimate fate—a slow and painful death in the stinking swamp.

Yes, Scar Gaynor had planned well. Except for one point he had planned perfectly. But it was unfortunate, from his point of view, that he had neglected to inform Amali that the guns he had traded him would prove more dangerous to the users than to the enemy at which they were fired!

THE Major and Jim arrived at Amali's kraal at sunset of the same day. Both men showed signs of the strain to which the weeks of arduous trekking had subjected them. The few garments the Hottentot wore were reduced to tattered rags; the Major was in scarcely better plight though he contrived to look freshly tubbed and shaven.

On their arrival at the kraal they were immediately surrounded by armed warriors and dragged before Amali. There was talk then for a while of torture and death. And when the Major finally persuaded Amali of the folly of such a course, Amali gave orders they were to be beaten, their scanty possessions taken from them and they were to be driven from the kraal. Once again the Major's eloquence turned Amali from his stated purpose and the chief, pretending to work himself into a tremendous rage, ordered them to be taken to an empty hut until he had decided upon their fate.

Once in the tumbledown hut they silently ate the food a woman brought to them and, their appetites sated, gloomily discussed their ultimate fate.

Suddenly the Major rose to his feet and, taking his revolver from its holster put it on top of the pack beside his rifle.

"Where do you go, Baas?" Jim asked anxiously.

"To talk with Amali, Jim."

"But we are not going without weapons, Baas!" Jim protested.

"I go alone, Jim," the Major replied calmly. "And I go without weapons. There are times when the sight of weapons begets fighting—and I go to Amali as a peacemaker."

"You go to your death, more like," Jim groaned. "But wherefore go at all?"

"Because Amali is a fool. He thinks that his warriors, because he has armed them with guns, are strong enough to fight against the white men. But we know that the day he rises in rebellion will see the end of Amali and all his people It is to save him from that folly that I am now going to talk with him."

"And must we always concern ourselves with the folly of others?" Jim wailed.

THE Major made no reply but left the hut and made his way to the place of the chief.

"What now, white man?" Amali demanded angrily.

"I have come to warn you," the Major replied.

Amali looked around at his councillors

and the warriors of his body-guard who stood just behind him.

"Warn me! Of what?"

"Of the folly of rising against the white men," the Major said quietly. "They will wipe you out easily—utterly. So!"

He brushed the palms of his hands lightly together.

"You do not know the strength of my warriors," Amali boasted. "You do not know that they will be armed——"

"I know that an evil white man has sold you guns," the Major interrupted. "But, I tell you, the guns will be less than worthless in the hands of your warriors."

He intended to explain that as Amali's warriors knew nothing about the operation of firearms, the guns would be useless to them. But Amali refused to listen.

"Enough, white man!" he said. "I will not listen to you. Nor will I permit my warriors to listen to you lest you put fear into their hearts. Now take heed to my word concerning you and that black dog of a Hottentot. You will return to the hut which has been set aside for you. And you will not leave it until food is brought you tomorrow at sun-up. Having then eaten you will leave my kraal. Should you fail to do so, your death will follow. I have spoken. Now go before I forget that I am merciful. It would grieve me to slay you; you are more of a man than that other who waits for you in the swamp. But he brought guns! You come to me empty-handed. Now—go."

The Major made one last effort to urge Amali against the folly of rebellion, but the warriors closed about him and forced him to return to the hut.

BY SUN-UP the following morning the Major and Jim were on trek, following Gaynor's trail.

They had been traveling about two hours when they were overtaken by a large party of warriors.

"The word to you is peace," their leader said, after he had given the customary greeting. "You are Amali's friend. He bids you return to the kraal where a feast is being prepared in your honor."

"And Amali sends armed men to bring a guest to the feasting?" the Major said dryly.

"Our spears are not aimed at you," the warriors replied, "but at the heart of that other white man."

"Wherefore?" the Major asked sharply.

"*Au!* This morning, having in mind the things you told him concerning the guns, Amali decided that they should be tested. To that end he called his nephew, Timali, who, having been in the service of white men understands the magic of guns. But when he fired the first gun Amali told him to try, it flew into many small pieces. And, when we had raised our heads—we had hidden them in fear—we saw Amali's nephew on the ground. He did not speak —he was dead. Then was Amali in great anger—and sorrow, too, for the man Timali. He ordered that all the guns should be destroyed before more of his people were killed. And when that was done he sent messengers with peace talks to the white overlords, promising to pay the taxes when the time came. And us he sent with a message of friendship to you—who spoke brave words, warning him of the folly of rebellion. But for that other white man. *Wo-we!* Death creeps along the blades of our spears toward him."

With that the warrior rejoined his men and raced on with them along the trail.

"And so," the Major mused, "out of evil comes a great good." And he silently considered the queer twist of fate which had led Amali to misconstrue his warning about the worthlessness of the guns. But, because of that, because of the death of one man, the bloodshed and misery of rebellion — senseless rebellion — had been averted.

"Things go well, Baas," Jim cried. "Let us return to the kraal. Wo-we! I am tired of trekking. Come, Baas. Laugh! You are now avenged on one of the evil men. I think he will not die very easily. These jungle men delight in torture. He will——"

At that the Major jumped to his feet with an exclamation of dismay.

"Come, Jim," he said, and set off at a fast run along the trail.

"This is not the way to the kraal," Jim panted as he caught up with his Baas.

"We do not go to the kraal, Jim. We are going to the white man. We must reach him before the warriors——"

"That you shall not do," Jim exclaimed fiercely, pulling the Major to a halt and locking his sinewy arms about the Major's body. "Are you mad that you run to gather the spears of the warriors into your own heart? Have you forgotten the vengeance you swore? *Au-a!* I will not let you go."

"Am I a woman, Jim?" the Major said coldly. "Shall I let Amali's warriors stand between me and my vengeance?"

HALF an hour later the two men were fighting their way through the long, coarse grass at the verge of the swamp, thinking this way to get ahead of the warriors on the trail. As they advanced the ground under foot became a quaking bog where stinging plants grew which raised white, leprous looking blotches on the Major's skin. The noon-day sun beat down upon them with merciless force and the atmosphere of the place was like that of a gigantic greenhouse filled with rotting vegetation.

At times they were up to their knees in water and slime. About their heads swarmed dense clouds of mosquitoes. Snakes and foul smelling lizards hissed at them as they passed; apes screamed at them from the tree tops.

Once Jim pitched head first into a deep hole, its presence masked by the mass of putrid vegetable matter which floated on its surface.

Thorn-armored bushes tore their flesh, their misery increasing with every forward step.

"It's a big price you pay for vengeance, Baas," Jim wailed. Apparently he had long since forgotten that his behavior had been responsible for sending the Major in search of vengeance. "Let us go back!

Leave the white man to the warriors—they will take care of him and your vengeance."

The Major shook his head and halting, held up his hand—commanding silence.

Somewhere in the swamp to their left, sounded the wild exultant shouts of warriors; their voices echoed through the swamp like the deep baying of hounds in sight of the quarry.

IV

THE day opened inauspiciously for Scar Gaynor. He had no sooner ensconced himself in the branches of the tree from which he planned to ambush the Major, than he was disturbed by the sound of angry voices coming from the direction of the island, a quarter of a mile away.

He thought at first that Amali had sent warriors after him to take back the ivory. If that were so, his best plan was to remain hidden. To return to the island, under the circumstances, would probably mean his death. Meanwhile, of course, the warriors would ill-treat his carriers—but that did not concern Gaynor. He was not the type of man to rescue others at the risk of his own life. He thought that if he could manage to evade the warriors now he would have no difficulty in reaching the nearest Belgian post. And he had no doubt that the story he would tell to the Commander would regain for him the ivory and bring Amali to a swift accounting.

He decided eventually that it could not be Amali's men. If the chief had wished to he could have prevented Gaynor from leaving the kraal; it did not sound feasible that he would send out his warriors—with the risk of them meeting other white men.

Gaynor then thought that the trouble at the island might be caused by the arrival of the Major on the scene. But the Major's advent would not be accompanied by the din of fighting. The Major would have handled things peacefully.

Then Gaynor considered the idea that Belgian native soldiers had captured his carriers and the ivory. But there had been no rifle shots—and native soldiers, Gaynor knew, liked nothing better than an opportunity to fire their guns, even if they only aimed at the sky.

WHEN, presently, the noise of fighting ceased and was replaced by the sound of laughter and singing, Gaynor laughed and congratulated himself on the fact that he had not been stampeded into returning to the island in order to investigate. The trouble, he now told himself, had simply been the carriers quarrelling amongst themselves—as they so often did when he wasn't on hand to check them with a sjambok. And he was not at all disturbed when, later, the singing died away and he was engulfed by the brooding silence of the swamp.

The hours passed swiftly. Gaynor had food, whiskey and a plentiful supply of tobacco with him; he brooded happily on the fullness of the revenge he meant to enact on the monocled dude.

The sun was high when he heard the sound of some one making his way painfully through the swamp—coming from the direction of the island. His alarm and bewilderment was not lessened when Tom stumbled wearily into sight.

The half-caste was evidently in sore straits. Blood from a deep wound in his forehead and dried on his face giving him a ghastly appearance. He was spattered from head to foot with mire and he walked with difficulty, his hand pressed to his left side.

As he neared the tree where Gaynor was hidden he shouted:

"Boss! Boss—where are you?"

"Quiet, you fool!" Gaynor commanded sharply. He did not descend from the tree to go to Tom's assistance. There was no pity, only contempt, in his eyes as he looked down at the half-caste who was now leaning weakly against the tree trunk.

"What is it?" Gaynor demanded.

"The carriers, Boss," Tom gasped.

"They have run away. I tried to stop them and—and I think they have killed me."

"You live!" Gaynor sneered and swore viciously at the man whose only virtue was loyalty to a man so little deserving of loyalty.

Calming somewhat, Gaynor asked presently, "Did they take the packs and the ivory, Tom?"

The half-caste made no reply. His remaining strength suddenly ebbed from him and he slid in a huddled heap to the ground.

Gaynor hesitated a moment and then descended from the tree, rifle in hand. He bent over Tom and shook him roughly.

"The packs and ivory, Tom?" Gaynor demanded. "Did the carriers take them?"

The half-caste looked up at the white man with pain-filled eyes.

"They took the packs, boss. The ivory they threw into the swamp." Before Gaynor could vent his rage upon him, the half-caste added, "And they did kill me, boss."

His head dropped back, his body utterly relaxed and Gaynor's frantic shakings failed to bring back the life which had crept out through the spear wound in Tom's side.

REALIZING then that the half-caste's dead body would betray his ambush, Gaynor callously picked up the dead man and heaved him into a pool. That done he returned to the tree intending to climb back into his hiding place. He still had the Major to deal with. After he had settled that account he would return to Amali's kraal; he would still find a way of recouping himself for the loss of the ivory.

The noise of men splashing toward him through the swamp startled him and before he could climb up into the tree a party of Amali's warriors sighted him. Their wild shouts filled him with despair. Something had gone wrong and the warriors were out for his blood.

He swiftly brought his rifle to his shoulder and fired at the leading native, grunting with satisfaction as the man dropped.

Then panic seized Gaynor and he fled. Fear lent speed to his legs and he managed to gain the cover of a thick clump of bush before the warriors, who had gathered about their dead leader, had recovered their wits sufficiently to give chase.

Now that he was under cover, Gaynor's first feeling of helpless panic left him and he moved through the tangled undergrowth with the silence and cunning of a clever hunter.

He swung himself over wide patches of swamp by low hanging branches and creepers, he doubled on his tracks using every cunning artifice for disguising his trail known to him. And so he succeeded in throwing the warriors off his track for a time and inwardly exulted. There was still a good chance of life for him, he told himself.

BUT Fate had not yet finished with Scar Gaynor. At the very moment of exultation he tripped heavily, falling to the ground with a crash and spraining his left wrist and ankle. Worse than that; his left hand hit the ground very close to a puff adder and the venomous reptile struck at his hand.

Not that Gaynor was conscious of that fact; he had fainted from the pain of the sprains. Recovering, he struggled to his feet and moved on—leaving his rifle deep in the mire where he had fallen.

His ankle and wrist were badly swollen; his arm throbbed madly; his sight seemed bleared. He felt strangely cold and lethargic; his breathing was rapid and irregular. . . .

Suddenly he saw before him the Major and Jim the Hottentot. He stared at them dully, thinking for the moment that they were wraiths conjured up by his fevered imagination.

But they talked! They moved toward him!

With a curse he drew his revolver and aimed at the Major's head. He pulled the trigger. But the action of the weapon was

clogged with mire and the hammer did not fall. In desperation he threw the weapon with all his might at the Major's head and followed it up with a clumsy charge. But the revolver missed its target and his rush was ended when he tripped again and sprawled headlong at the Major's feet.

He was finished then. When the Major bent over him he whined for mercy.

"Kill him before Mali's warriors come, Baas," Jim urged. "Kill him—and let us go."

THE Major did not reply. He was looking down at the man who had been guilty of so much evil, and there was a somewhat dazed, wondering expression in his eyes.

"If you will not kill him, Baas," Jim exclaimed impatiently, "then I will." He raised his knobkerry threateningly over the head of the prostrate man's head.

The Major prevented the blow from falling.

"But to what end is all this waiting, Baas?" Jim asked. "Hurry! Amali's warriors are coming! Listen."

Men's voices sounded in the swamp all about them.

And then the Major knew the long trek he had made on this man's trail, his trek of vengeance, had turned to ashes at the moment of success; he knew that his oft reiterated statement that he would not rest until he had avenged himself on the men who had left him in the desert to die was only a parrot cry. Vengeance had no real part in his life. Neither could he leave a helpless man to the vengeance of others.

He picked Gaynor up in his strong arms and made his way to a near-by tree. As he did so he whispered soothingly to Gaynor who was whimpering unspeakable things.

Somehow, with Jim's grudgingly given assistance, the Major hoisted Gaynor into the tree. Then they hid themselves amongst the thick foliage. And they gagged Gaynor for fear lest his babblings would betray their whereabouts.

They had hardly done so when two warriors came into sight, calling excitedly to unseen companions as they explored each clump of bush with their spears.

They stood for a suspense filled minute under the tree which hid the three men. At last they moved on, called away by the shouts of warriors who had discovered Tom's body.

The Major felt it safe then to attend to Gaynor's hurts.

Gaynor had sunk into a state of coma; his face was a strange ashen color; his left arm was tremendously swollen.

"Look, Baas!" Jim whispered, pointing to two tiny, badly inflamed punctures on Gaynor's wrist. "He is marked for death. A snake has bitten him."

The Major's face was grave.

"Perhaps if we sucked the wound," he said, "we could save him, Jim."

"Au-a! What a man!" the Hottentot murmured. "Is this your vengeance, Baas?"

The Major made no reply. He was opening his sheath-knife, preparing to make an incision in Gaynor's wrist. He hoped that a copious flow of blood would carry with it the poison that was menacing the man's life.

But before he could act a convulsive shudder shook Scar Gaynor's body as his evil soul departed from it.

"We came too late, Jim," the Major said.

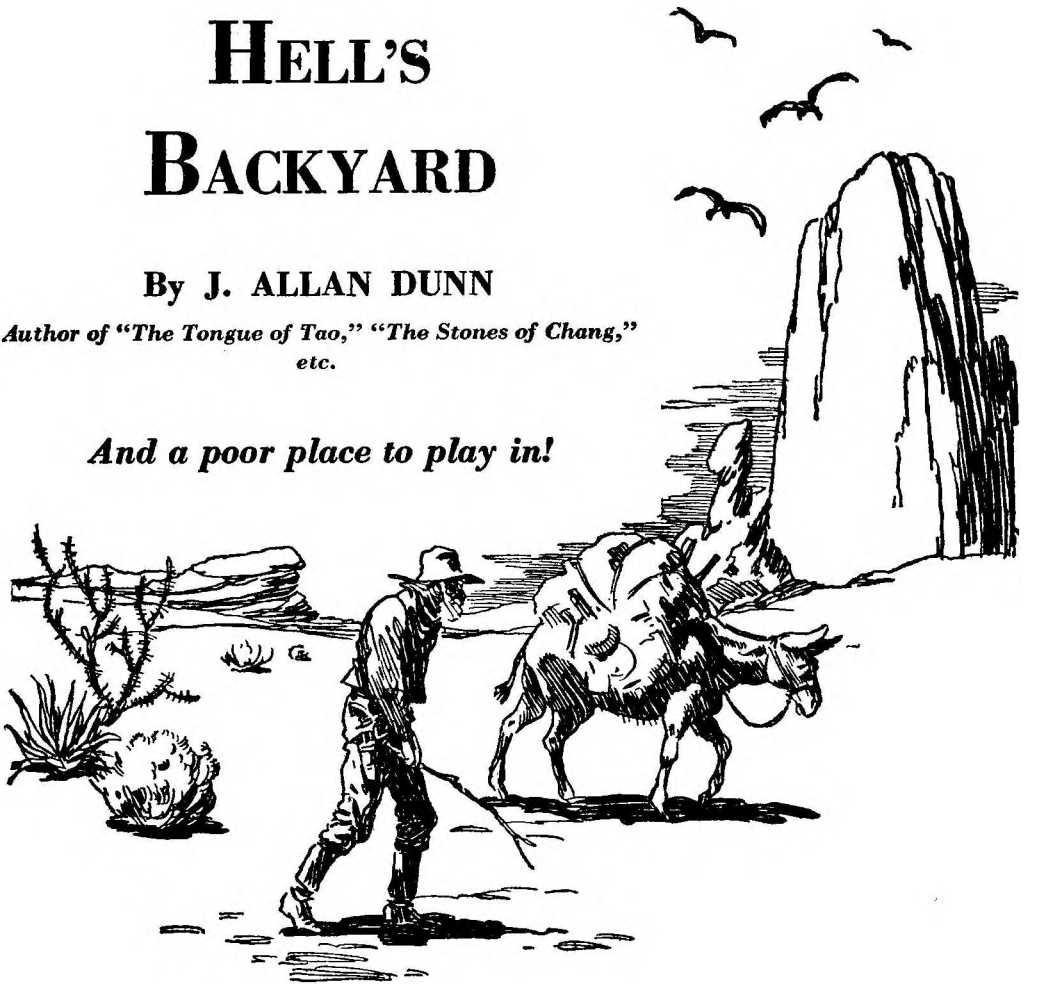
But there was a happier look in his eyes than had been there for a long time. It was not happiness at the death of a man he had every reason to hate and who so richly deserved his fate. It was a deeper happiness than that; the happiness of a man who has played the game which Fate put before him and played it well.

HELL'S BACKYARD

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "The Tongue of Tao," "The Stones of Chang," etc.

And a poor place to play in!



THE desert lay all about them, scorching, arid, lifeless and menacing The jointed, flaccid cactus growths, the seared and stunted sagebrush, all was gray with alkaline dust. The heat was like a gauze curtain suspended in the air, a curtain that waved and distorted vision.

Miles to the east, circling to the south, the peaks of the Esquelito Range showed flat, jagged; as if a child had cut them uncertainly out of slate-colored cardboard, curved his strip and set it on edge. Nearer, but still far away, to the west, was the snarling jumble of cliffs and monuments called by the Mexicans "The Devil's Rocks."

They looked it. They were colored and shaped fantastically, and were never the same an hour at a time. Size meant nothing in the desert, where illusion breeds. Now a mesa land, now a ruined city and, at this moment, as Dick Byrne frowned at them, striving to locate a bearing; they suddenly appeared upside down, jigging at him.

"It's no use, Pop," he said to Hardrock Haines, "there's too much mirage and refraction this time of day to get a line on things. No wonder they never find these lost mines. I reckon we're just two more suckers to try and locate the Oro Perdido, even if Buck did give you a map."

Haines grunted. His beard was filled with dust, his cracked lips were caked with it. At any time he was a man of few words. A lava ridge cropped out through sand fine as flour and threw a grudging

shade in which they had halted for noon. There was not enough difference in years between the two for Byrne to call the other "Pop," for he was twenty-six and Haines was only forty-three, but Haines had married young, his daughter Helen was nineteen, and Dick aspired to be Hardrock's son-in-law.

HELEN was willing, Hardrock did not dissent, but Mrs. Haines issued an ultimatum to the fairness of which Dick Byrne reluctantly subscribed. Both he and Hardrock were out of work. The depression had hit the mines and all other enterprises where a first-class driller and his mucker could earn good wages. They had made good money, but neither of them were savers by nature. Mrs. Haines was, and she rubbed it in a bit.

"I'll not have Helen starting in with nothing," she said. "Love's a grand thing but you have to eat once in a while. I'll not have her scrubbing and patching and darning. I did it, but she'll not. She'll have a house fit to live in, if it's but a small one, and you'll furnish it, Dick Byrne. If 't was not for the money I've pinched and put away where would we all be right now? There'll be money in the bank before you two go to the preacher."

"'T would be safer in a sock, these days," muttered Haines. Dick felt humiliated. He boarded with Hardrock and he had not paid his boardbill for seven weeks. He knew Ma Haines didn't mean it as a slam but it hurt.

"You'll not be minding her," Hardrock said to him as, man-fashion, they crawfished outside. "Some of those savings she brags of came from the profit she made on feeding and sleeping you, my lad."

That was poor consolation, and Dick said so. It was then that Hardrock brought out the crumpled map that Buck Johnson had given him.

"He was a friend of my old man's," said Hardrock. "They did some prospecting in the old days till my old man got married and settled down. Marriage and prospecting don't go together, you see. To make a long story short, Buck was a grizzled old desert rat when he came in one day from the malpais, half crazy with the sun, and with a story of free gold. He had the stuff to prove it, rimrock you could crumble in your fingers, all larded with gold. But the sun had muddled him. He couldn't remember where it was. He couldn't find it though twice a party took him to where he thought it was. You see the sand shifts, and that's why they're so many lost mines. But Buck kept figuring he'd remember something important until the state senator got him in the Miners' Home, over to Oromesa.

"My old man went to see him, and me with him. After my father died I kept on seeing Buck once in a while. I was with him the day he died. He had been waiting for me. 'My mind's clear at last,' he said. 'I remember—the two horns that come together over in the Esquelitos and then the split in the big castle with the doorway. Get those two right, and you'll find the gold.'

"It sounded crazy to me but not so foolish after I looked at the paper where he'd set it down; this one we've got with us. He set his bearings by compass, you see, and of course there's lots of those malpais cliffs look like castles, with doors and windows. We might be trying it, Dick, the two of us?"

Byrne nodded. There was nothing in sight. He had no mind to live on what he considered the bounty of his future mother-in-law any longer. Plenty of men were out working old placers, washes and dumps. This might be a bonanza. Youth colored the prospect. Helen stood at the foot of that rainbow.

"The old lady pays cash at the store from what she's got stowed away," said Hardrock, "but I can use my credit for a grubstake. We need a burro——"

"Schwartz, down at the feed store, wants my watch," said Dick Byrne. "That should furnish the burro."

So, here they were.

A FAT gila monster, hideous in mottled orange and black lizardry, sprawled in the sun, bloated and poisonous. A sidewinder wriggled away, emblem of sudden death. The desert itself seemed like some dull-hided monster, drowsy yet watchful, expressing its magic to bewilder them, to hold them lost, and keep them. It could be conquered but it was always waiting, always menacing, biding its time until they made a slip.

There were times when it held hope and raised bright visions. There were times when it bred despair, when it seemed to mock them, goading them on to find the treasure it surely hid.

Dick was discouraged, watching the wavering shapes of cliff and range. Old Buck Johnson's compass was probably untrue. The formation that had seemed a castle to him might be very different in normal appearance, if one knew what *was* normality, or at what hour of the day Buck had noted down his bearings before he started back with his crumbly rocks, larded with yellow gold, and the sun smote him down.

"Better wait a while, Dick," said Hardrock. "The sun's dancing bad. Wait till it lowers. Looks like we got those peaks close to right, anyways. I figure Buck wasn't so loco when he went West. Folks who've been delirious get lucid right at the last. I've got a hunch we'll find it."

"Every prospector's got a hunch," said Dick sourly. "And any one is loco to come into a Hell's Backyard like this. We'll have to turn back tomorrow or the next day, anyway. Grub's low and so's the water. Ten miles back to that waterhole and ten's a hundred out here."

Hardrock warmed the campbread, crisped the sow-belly bacon.

"Chuck's ready," he said. "Come and get it, before I throw it out."

Coffee helped. Byrne's grouch left him. The narrow shade of the lava fin extended. It did not change the temperature but it kept the glare out of their sunburned, bloodshot eyes. They crept into a shallow depression, a gas blowout of ages when the lava had rolled in liquid waves and the Esquelitos had spouted fire. The wise little Jenny-burro joined them in the shallow cavern for a nap. She was a useful beast but her disposition was worse than a camel's.

They were undoubtedly close to the Oro Perdido mine, the Lost Goldmine; if it could truly be called one, and if it in truth existed and the whole thing was not a fantasy of Buck Johnson's brain, disordered to the end.

It would be free gold in decomposed rock, a dyke or reef that might clean up a few thousands or might turn out to be a small bonanza. It would not be a true vein, or a lode. The float or rimrock from which Buck had gathered his specimens would almost certainly be buried.

Others had sought for the Oro Perdido, might even now be looking for it as a forlorn hope, throwing dice against destiny and death with the chances all against them. It was not likely but it was possible. They had seen nobody on their way in, unless those vagrant puffs and moving clouds of dust were not made by wind.

IT WAS close to sunset when, with binoculars and compass, they got the bearings adjusted. The sky was olive in the east, a blend of rose and amethyst in the west. Overhead, the first star trembled in the deep blue. In that fair light, clear of haze, of refraction and distortion, the two horny spurs of the Esquelito incurved and touched; a towering mass of sandstone dark against the west, loomed like a castle, turreted, one battlemented tower split apart. There was the gothic arch of a door, there were windows. The compass readings were exact.

"She should be there," cried Hardrock, his hoarse voice tremulous, pointing to the high dune whose nigh slope was wind-rippled like a seashore after ebb. Its crest was irregular. The desert winds set a limit for all dunes. The lack of smoothness suggested rock beneath.

Dick Byrne waded up, kneedeep, through the soft alkaline silt, shoveling furiously, a prospector's hammer stuck in his belt. He found rock, uncovered it, umber in color, not unlike saltwater taffy. He did not need the hammer. The top, which had been exposed, broke off at his eager clutch.

In the flaming level rays of the sunset, which were spoking through the Devil's Racks like beams of spotlights turned on to display the victory; flecks of gold showed yellow, not sparkling like mica but yellow like butter.

Dick came stumbling, floundering down to Hardrock, his pulses pounding, his mind already shot with dreams. Helen was in them, dominant; the furnished house, the money in the bank . . .!

"We struck it," he cried. "We got it, Pop! The rock's plumb lousy with the stuff!"

Hardrock came charging up to meet him. They scrabbled at the weathered rock, gloating over the precious fragments until the light faded and the sky was bright with stars above them. There was hard formation extending deep down into the belly of the dune.

"We'll go at it in the morning, Dick," said Hardrock. "By Gosh and Gideon, it's a strike!" He tested the sample in his rough fist with his tongue, wetted it to catch the last of the light. "Tomorrow we'll bust her wide open with drills and giant. Tonight we'll set what we've got under our heads an' dream on it, like it was wedding cake. Your wedding cake, young fellow!"

They were too excited for much sleep, and they hefted and appraised the samples again and again, pounding them up by the firelight, panning the fragments. It was rich. It would run, Hardrock said, a thousand dollars to a ton. Maybe more.

"The old lady," he said finally, as he squatted on his haunches, finishing a pipe before rolling in, "won't have to spend the rest of her savings. There can't be a heap left. We mortgaged the house that time to buy stock in the Ophir and that petered out. It's been worrying her and she took it out in talking acid. That ain't her way. It'll all be different now. I wish Buck knew we'd struck it. Maybe he does."

It did not seem incredible, in that magic waste, with all its cruelty soothed and masked by the night. They had camped by the cavern in the lava and its back made them comfortable with reflected heat from the fire. Beyond the radiance all was black, transparent darkness and mystery, filled with the tiny, whispering noises that made up silence. The sky was like a dome of deep purple velvet, the hue of a pansy petal, the stars burned like candles set on heavenly altars. The partners had won. Fickle Fortune had yielded treasure to its hardy hunters.

Truly it was not hard to imagine Buck Johnson listening in.

DICK awakened first. It seemed as if the desert was drawing a deep breath. It lay leaden, dull, vague. The sky leaned down, the stars were paling. The mountains were to be felt, rather than seen. They formed the vaguest of horizons, revealed only as they screened the lower stars.

Then they could be seen, black as obsidian, sharp etched. The Devil's Rocks began to become luminous. The change was subtle, not to be measured. It was still gray when the burro, on its feet, faced the east and brayed like a trumpet heralding the dawn. There was more desert magic. Why a bird should choose that waste, waterless, inhabited by scaly things with idle, malignant eyes; is Nature's mystery. But one sprang into the air and began to sing, a song less than a meadowlark's, but as sweet.

The rimrocks were limned with liquid

coral. The line broadened, the fantastic colors of the formations showed through the rosy medium, asserted themselves as the sun rolled up beyond the Esquelito peaks and it was day.

Hardrock came blinking out to where Dick was starting the scanty fire. Fuel was rare and precious. But they were rich! The world was their oyster, and they had opened it to find a gem.

The burro shared their breakfast. Fodder was not to be found, the feed they had made part of its load was eaten but, the animal was an old-timer. It enjoyed flapjacks and crisped pork, it liked coffee diluted in water. In the course of years and experience it had become almost omnivorous.

They forgot lunch, absorbed in the revelation of riches greater than their best hopes. The rock blasted easily and every shot showed the stringers and pockets of gold. The sweat poured off the two miners, and the fierce sun beat down upon them but they did not notice it until they stopped from sheer exhaustion, their energy burned out, their reserves used up.

"No telling what we've got," said Hardrock as they rested, ate and drank a little. "I don't see much chance of our claim being jumped but, with what we've got in sight, I don't aim to take *any* chances. We'll set up our monuments, Dick, and then one of us'll go in and record it, while the other stays here and watches it. It's too big to let alone, I tell you. Some old-timer might just stumble on it while we were gone. He wouldn't have to look twice."

The magnitude of their strike had steadied Byrne considerably, after the first excitement. He considered Hardrock's advice.

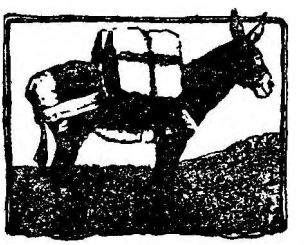
"It ain't likely there is anyone else on the desert," he said. "They all said we were fools to try it. We didn't tell 'em about the map. If they did fall into it after we left, they'd have to record it, wouldn"t they? And we'd have the start on them."

HARDROCK was stubborn. "Possession is nine points of the law any time and place," he said. "Red Hill ain't the only place nearby to record. County line runs plumb through the desert. It's shorter to Agua Fria from here. No sir, we make out our notices and set up the monuments. One takes in a fair load of what we got, not that it needs assaying any, but to get fresh supplies. He records the mine in your name and mine. The other stays here."

"I reckon you're right, at that," said Dick. "I'll stay. You go in and tell the good news to Ma Haines and Helen. I'll work on the claims meantime."

"You'll be wanting to give Helen the good news yourself," Hardrock objected, but he was not convincing. Byrne saw the eagerness in his eyes to show Ma Haines—who had proclaimed their quest a fool's wild goose chase—that he had made good, that they need not worry. Dick insisted and Hardrock gave in.

"I'll start after sunset," he said, "when it's cool. The burro'll travel fast as I can walk. She's well rested. I ought to make it there and back inside the week. Let's make out the declarations and fix the monuments, then we'll split the grub, have early supper and I'll pack. What message'll I give Helen? What do you want me to bring back, special? I'll buy another burro so's I can tote plenty. Mebbe two more, so's they can pack in the gold. We'll crack it up. We can fix up an arrastra and pulverize the ore. We can dry-pan and take back just the meat. . . ."



He forgot his general lack of loquacity and talked as they worked. The air was beginning to cool, the Devil's Rocks were casting long, grotesque shadows to the east as Hardrock threw his diamond-hitch over the pack on the burro's back.

The ways of an ass are hard to understand. The jenny might have resented being packed though she was not galled. Something might have stung her, or startled her, or it might have been sheer innate deviltry. An Indian would have said that a desert devil whispered in her ear.

Hardrock was ready to tie off when the burro kicked him. She set her ears back, tucked her head between her front fetlocks as she stood on her front hoofs and swung her hindquarters up and struck out, horizontally and sidewise. It was a terrible kick with the swift force of frightful and suddenly released tension back of it. The sound of it was like a heavy stroke upon a drum as it hit Hardrock over his diaphragm, knocking the wind out of him, paralyzing him, tearing through his clothing, ripping his flesh. The burro was unshod for the soft desert going, but her hoofs were flinty and sharp.

He went down under the burro, and the ass squealed as she trampled him before Dick Byrne could control her, drive her off, or drag Hardrock's body clear. He had not been looking when it happened, had not been near enough to avert it.

The burro galloped off, still trumpeting that strange blend of squeal and bray. She seemed to know she had done evil and she was possessed with the idea to get away. She threw herself and rolled until the pack, its last tie unhitched, came apart, its contents scattered, some of it pounded by her hoofs as she bucked over a dune and vanished.

BYRNE let her go. He had thought only for Hardrock, lying senseless and bloody. Dick had seen the last strokes of those desperate hoofs and he was afraid Hardrock was killed, that his head might have been crushed in. He got the water that was to be left behind for him and used it recklessly. He could not tell how badly Hardrock was hurt with his torn clothes and the blood. It looked bad.

Hardrock gasped, painfully and terribly. His tanned face was a dirty putty and his eyes, as they opened, rolled until Dick, feeling horribly helpless, could see only the whites. There were no stimulants stronger than coffee. Hardrock had not swallowed any water. He moaned as his middle heaved, and a gush of blood stopped the sound. Dick held up his head, wiped off the blood. Hardrock spoke, feebly and jerkingly.

"Tough luck, boy. Reckon I'm done. That cussed burro busted my ribs and there's something ruptured inside. It's me who'll be staying, after all."

"Don't say that, Pop, don't say that!"

"No sense dodging it, boy. It don't hurt so bad, long as I keep quiet, but I reckon you'd better help me get to the cave."

He bled more on the short but harrowing trip, bled from the mouth. Dick in an agony of resentment that, unreasonably, was mixed with self reproach, made him as soft a bed as he could of all their blankets. He bathed the flesh wounds tenderly, and as Hardrock sank back and relaxed quietly, started to build up the fire. Sagebrush was the only fuel, and he had meant to gather a lot the next day.

The light was beginning to go and Dick surveyed the scattered articles of the pack. He passed them on his way up to the ridge of a dune, following the burro's tracks. But he could not see the burro, nor any dust it sent up. He could not leave Hardrock. They had been calling themselves lucky—now. . . ?

He stopped short by the side of the water keg they had originally reserved for the journey in for both of them. Since Hardrock's determination that one should stay by the find, it had been divided, with enough left in it for Hardrock and the burro. Now the sand was moist about it. The burro's hoofs had broached it. There were only about two gallons left, if that, though it had spilled to the level of the leak.

Two gallons, for a wounded man, who would soon be running a fever and for

Dick, whose own share had already gone to relieve Hardrock! The gathering darkness seemed to Dick like the spreading wings of some monster of despair and doom as he carefully carried the little keg in his arms and set it down where Hardrock could not see him. He put some fuel on the fire. Hardrock's eyes gleamed crimson in the lava recess, reflecting the flames.

"Come here, Dick," he said. "I'm a goner. I can't walk, I couldn't ride the burro even if it hadn't run off; you can't carry me. I doubt if anything could help me, but long before you could bring it I'll have met up with Buck, out West, beyond the sunset, telling him my luck didn't last much longer than his, at that, though we found his gold.

"So you see, Dick, there's just one thing to do. You got to go in, right away, before we use up too much water, you wasted a lot on me, I reckon. So we'll split what's in the keg and you light out and get the Oro Perdido recorded——"

"And leave you here? I can't do that, Hardrock."

I AIN'T asking you to do it for me, Dick, or for yourself. But, I saw you toting the keg the way you did. Burro busted it in, didn't it?"—his voice was growing weaker—"if you stayed here, what with me getting fever and delirious, you'd give me all I wanted. You'd be stranded here yourself. You'll never find that burro and if you got weak you couldn't pack much yourself after I cashed in."

"You ain't going to cash in, Hardrock. You'll get——"

The dark blood welled out of Hardrock's lips again and stopped Dick's would-be optimism. He wiped it off, brought water.

"Don't argue with me, Dick. I'm hurt inside. Pretty bad. But it don't hurt. It won't hurt. I've seen men hurt that way before. You're in good shape. It's up to you to see that Ma and Helen get their share of the find. Up to you. If you don't there'll be two of us out here, and no record filed. Time they find us, if they do, if we ain't covered over, the mine will be. You got to go, Dick, and you got to go now." His voice got lower and lower; it was almost a whisper. "Else you'll be robbing them, Dick, you'll be robbing me, your partner; Helen's father; you'll be robbing the dead."

"My God!" The ejaculation was half a prayer, wrung from Byrne in the agony of the situation. He could see Hardrock's logic, even better than Hardrock imagined, for he knew just how little water there really was. He would have to leave it with Hardrock, in easy reach against the time when his fever burned, when his ruptured insides developed torment. He must take only enough to sip now and then, a pint; and he must go at once.

Leaving a dying man, Helen's father, his partner, there in Hell's Backyard.

"I can't do it, Pop," he said, his eyes wet, his face wet with tears. "Don't ask me to. I can't . . . I can't. It ain't human."

"You got to do it, Dick. You got to start right away and trail while it's cool. You got to promise me you'll go, you got to swear to me that, even before you see Ma and Helen, you'll record the mine. Swear it to me, Dick. Last thing I'll ever ask of you. I got a chance to leave them fixed and you won't grant it me."

There was fever mounting now on his hot head where Dick laid a soaked neckerchief. But Pop's mind was clear, and his persistence about the recording of the mine was not unnatural.

"That feels good," he muttered, "but you mustn't waste water. Dick Byrne," he went on with a flare of energy, "if you don't go—now—I'll curse you dying, and I'll haunt you dead. I'll go myself, if I have to crawl in a trail of my own blood."

He made as if to rise, and Dick broke down.

"I promise, Pop," he said. "I swear it."

"On my love for Maw, on your love for Helen?"

"On our love for them, Pop. I'll record it and then I'll tell 'em what happened." If I get through, he added to himself.

IN HELL'S BACKYARD, Dick Byrne was creeping, crawling towards his last hope, though he did not know it as hope. His mind had ceased to function normally, now only the desperate clinging-to-life of a spent man urged him on, clawing with raw fingers, staring with burned, blood-injected eyes at the object that was now large as a globular gasoline tank, now small as a marble, almost invisible, vanishing. Now it rose like a balloon, now it was close by, then miles away; as if some evil djhin was juggling it, torturing him.

It was the third day out from the mine and the cavern in the lava where Hardrock lay. The sun and thirst had taken frightful toll. Dick's lips were cracked, his tongue had first swollen and now was more like a dried mushroom in his parched mouth. Without water he could not eat the rough fare he carried. He had thrown some of it away. He was like a man in a nightmare, with a few lucid intervals when he remembered his oath, his mission, and Hardrock.

It was in one of these conscious flashes that he had seen what he believed was a bisnaga, an Indian melon or barrel cactus. They grew from a few inches high to four or five feet and he could not tell with his dulling senses and the miragic conditions whether these green globes and ovals he saw resting on the blistering sands were going to save his life or turn out another grim jest of the desert.

To those who knew the secret the bisnaga seems almost a miracle, an incredible gift hidden in mockery so that the bleached bones of an ignorant wanderer may be found next to the plant that would have rescued him.

Dick reached the nearest and lay panting and palpitating like a spent lizard, striving to gather his forces. His brain seemed to want to split, to explode and break his skull to fragments. It was only by a prodigious effort he controlled it. He had to get through, for Ma and Helen. He had sworn it. Now. . . ?

The bisnaga was half his own height, squat, deeply ribbed, armed with pale green spines like a force of bayonets to defend its heart. Circles of greenish-yellow flowers encircled it. With prodigious effort Byrne got to his knees and got his hunting knife from its sheath. He sliced off the head of the cactus and the very sight of the pulp revived him. He slashed at the mass, crushed it, squeezing it out into the only utensil he carried beside his empty canteen. This was an aluminum skillet, used at once for frying pan, coffee pot and oven. The liquid splashed into it, astoundingly cool, lacking the acrid taste of other similar pulps. There was an amazing quantity of it. It was nectar. Nectar of the gods.

And there were other bisnages.

THE recorder hardly knew him, even when he signed his name, registering claims for Hardrock, his wife, Helen and for himself. Dick's clothes were torn, caked with dried sweat and alkali paste, his face was haggard, and he walked like a drunken man. He was keeping his promise, and the hardest part of his task was to come.

"Look like you've had a hard time," said the official. "Where's Haines?"

"I left him out there," Dick answered. "He figured one of us should stay with the mine. It looks good." He could not talk about Hardrock to anyone before he had seen Ma—and Helen.

"Don't do to take chances on a good find," agreed the other. "How about a drink?"

Dick needed it. He took it, took another, good enough whisky that warmed him,

stiffened him—and then betrayed him. He was near his limit, starved, racked and weakened with dysentery, for the bisnaga has medicinal qualities upon occasion. The liquor went to his head. He found himself staggering as he answered the hail of a man he knew. He knew it was on his breath when he groped up to the porch of the house, before Helen withdrew from his arms and Ma Haines accused him.

"You've been drinking, Dick Byrne! Where's father? We've been worried stiff since you two sneaked out on us, just leaving a note to say you were going hunting a gold mine. I suppose you *found* it?"

Dick pulled himself together. He showed her the recorded claim credits and they went into the house. He had brought along some of the richest specimens. He set them out on the table. Ma Haines surveyed him closely.

"You're holding something out," she said. "There's something wrong. Pop's sick. Where is he?"

Her intuition grew to certainty as she read the misery in his eyes. Her face grew stony as he miserably told his story.

"So you left my man out there alone! Bleeding from his insides. Dying! And before you came here you stopped to record the mine. You made sure of *your* end of it."

"Yours too. And Helen's. That's why he made me swear to leave him, to do just that. Can't you understand?"

"Maybe I've missed something," she said while he felt Helen's eyes on him, wondering, accusing. "Tell it all again, from the beginning."

He tried to make them see it but they showed only rising horror. He had not thought of this angle, since he had once set out, fighting through Hell's Backyard to make good his oath.

"No, I don't understand it," said Ma Haines, her voice cold as the drip of glacier ice. "I know you abandoned my man to die in the desert. I wouldn't, not for all the gold you could pile man high from here to China."

It was unfair. Hardrock had made sacrifice to secure her that gold, Dick had trailed through hell to back that sacrifice. She was Hardrock's wife.

"It ain't human," said Ma Haines. "I'll get some *men* to go out there and bring in his body, or his bones——"

"Ma!" Helen protested, almost hysterically. Sobbing, she held Dick off.

"You left my Daddy out there to die," she cried.

"I told *him* it wasn't human," said Dick Byrne and faltered at sight of Ma Haines's finger pointing to the door.

"Go," she said. "I don't want those papers. Take your Judas gold with you. You ain't any better than a murderer to me, or Helen."

Dick felt the curse of Cain upon him as he left. His world had crumbled. Hardrock was dead. Helen hated him. Her mother had called him a murderer. He was mentally incoherent, but his haziness was shot through with one strong purpose. They could not find Hardrock's body without him. He would find it first. He'd show them. The mine. The broken keg. Hardrock's body would bear out the yarn. *Men,* Ma Haines had said. Men would believe him. He would go back.

He was sane enough to see Schwartz, who had bought his watch, to sell him the gold in the crumbly matrix, vastly under value. He bought a hot meal and some supplies and, half crazed, started back on his mad journey, striding on through the sage, across the mesa, plunging to the desert floor, guided by the stars; imbued with false strength, upheld by the sense of having been misunderstood, vilified for serving his friend.

If that was the way they felt about him, he did not want to come back alive.

IT LOOKS bad," said the sheriff to Mrs. Haines. "Especially his lighting out thataway after you'd called him. Mighty funny his being so careful to record the

mine first. Looks like a cover, for one thing, but it also looks like he figured to make sure of all he'd get out of it. He was going to marry your daughter, I understand."

"Not now," said Ma Haines. "She's upstairs, broken down. Just what do you mean, Sheriff?"

"Well, marm, I'm getting some men together. You might call it a posse. Byrne bought some supplies last night. He's streaking it for cover. You felt the same way about it I do, and you tipped him off, without meaning to. We'll try to pick up his trail but me, I'll head for the desert with an outfit. It looks like it might be murder. To me, same as you."

"I don't say that, Sheriff. When I first——"

"Murder! Did you say that Dick Byrne murdered my daddy? It isn't true. He couldn't. He didn't. I. . . ."

The girl stood in the doorway with her eyes blazing.

"The law's taking care of this, miss," said the sheriff.

"Meaning *you?*" she demanded. "Then I don't think so much of the law. My daddy may be dead, but Dick didn't kill him. You're crazy."

She swept out of the room. They heard her quick steps on the porch. The sheriff shrugged his shoulders.

"A hard filly to handle," he said.

"*My* filly, Sheriff," Ma Haines replied. "Mine and Hardrock's."

Her face hardened, then softened, her eyes filled with tears and her head went down on her arms on the table.

The sheriff scratched his nose and twiddled at his mustache.

"I got to do my duty as I see it," he said, and left her.

A HORSE was no good for travel in the desert of Hell's Backyard. Only mules or burros could stand up under the heat, and they could go no faster than a man walks. The sheriff and his posse gained time on the first part of their chase but Dick Byrne still had a good start when they reached the desert, and he maintained it. He was far from being in good shape; he needed rest and proper food to recover from his trip out but his frenzy over the injustice done him sustained him, gave him vigor that drove him on.

A madman produces super-quantities of syntonin, charging his muscles with fibrin, giving him superhuman strength. So it was with Byrne. The bitterness of shock and disillusion following the realization of high hope, the revulsion that came with death and, finally, Helen's turning against him; urged him on, made him ignore dust and heat. He drank sparingly and ate mechanically, resting now and then like an intelligent automaton. He was, in effect, a robot animated by one desire, to reach the body of Hardrock. Beyond that he did not consider.

If they came after him he could prove his statements. He supposed they could trail him. Conditions would favor them. There had been a spell of almost windless days, as often happens in places that breed their own weather. So much the better.

If they did not come, or if they took long to find him, he might be dead and he told himself he did not care. In his present mood he did not. Life was a blank, a void.

He found the bisnagas again and used their pulp to save his water. It might weaken him again by laxation, but he was beyond ordinary hindrance. His will functioned in him like a dynamo, it would continue to do so until he was burned out.

He was not very far from that when he saw that he was getting to the end of his journey. Until then he had gone unerringly, without conscious attempt at direction, oriented by the same power that upheld him. He had only a short trip ahead,

he figured, as he saw at sunset, as they had before, the closing peaks of the Esquelito Range, the castle with its riven tower. The peaks were not quite merged; Dick really only guessed at the bulk of the castle rock but he had no doubt of it.

He lay down, blanketless, to get some rest. His feet were in bad shape. With the realization that he was almost at the end of the trail he began to sense his utter weariness. He had never looked back to see if he could see dust of pursuit.

Sanity began to be restored. He slept and awakened under the quiet stars stiff with cold. He looked for the Big Dipper and knew by its position that the time was not far from dawn.

DICK'S will was still strong, but his false energy had dwindled. He shivered, aching from head to foot, conscious of his condition. For the first time a wave of self-sympathy flooded him. What had he done to suffer all this, to lose his partner, his sweetheart at one fell swoop, to be accused of murder by her mother? It wasn't fair.

He shuddered, soul and body, and then braced himself, calling himself a yellow-backed crybaby. He knew he had to get going, that he was on the verge of a breakdown, physical and mental. He wanted to fling himself on the sand and quit, and it was a hard fight he put up for the two hours before once more the slow mystery of false dawn commenced and, by degrees that could not be reckoned, visibility increased.

He saw the familiar shape of a judas tree. The dune with the lava fin and the cavern loomed ahead of him. There was no point of fire, no smoke against the pearling sky, but he did not expect it. Hardrock was dead. Instant and expert attention might have saved him. A miracle.

At least he could show that he was not a killer. He might be blacklisted by those who knew him, they might share Ma Haines' opinion, and consider him a craven for having left Hardrock to die. He would be an Ishmael wherever the story followed him. Helen, too. That was the bitterest dose of all. She would never forgive or forget that he had left her daddy to die in the desert.

But he fiercely determined to clear himself of the fatal charge. There had been the marks of the burro's hoofs on Hardrock's midriff. Now they would be livid bruises. There was no danger of desecration. Coyotes never came out into Hell's Backyard. Even buzzards passed it up as an unfruitful source of carrion. Bodies of men or cattle found there were mummified until at last the shriveled carcass split and turned to dust, leaving the gleaming bones.

The cavern was empty.

It was incredible but it was true. Hardrock's body had vanished with the blankets. The broken keg was there, dry. The food Dick had set out in easy reach, hoping Hardrock might need it; was untouched.

The sun rolled up, the desert took on its dreary day colors, the Devil's Rocks glowed in their garish hues, and the peaks of the Esquelito sierra showed saw-toothed against a sky that arched like a dome of turquoise, hard, nonlucent.

Dick Byrne sat in front of the shallow cave with his knees hunched, his head on his hands, his elbows on his knees, and in the apathy of desolation and despair watched the dust cloud coming closer. He tried to conceive what might have happened. Someone had taken Hardrock away, dead or alive. He had nothing on him worth robbing but they might have found the gold. They might not have realized there had been two, that the mine was being recorded. They would go to Agua

Fria and they would destroy all evidence of other ownership or discovery.

How slow the men were in coming. They would never believe him now. Never.

They were coming on foot but they had two pack burros with them—three. Someone was riding the third burro. Dick's overstrained heart thumped and left him dizzy. The rider was a girl. It was Helen. So she too had come along to take back her father's body. There were the sheriff and three other men. Dick did not move or look up even when the girl ran ahead and spoke to him.

"Dick, can you forgive me? You'll have to, and mother too. Dad's safe. He's alive and he's going to get well. We heard from him, we know that he made you go and—and—and. . . ."

She broke down, sobbing, as she misinterpreted Dick's dazed silence. He felt this was unreal, a dream. His eyes were vacant. The sheriff sat down by him. He knew what the desert did to people.

"It's straight, Byrne," he said. "I'll have to apologize to you, myself. I didn't expect to find you here when we started out. I figured you'd made a run for it. But Helen, here, she was sure we'd find you. That was before we met up with the science sharp. Helen was on her way to you to tell you she didn't take the same stand her mother did. She had a duplicate map her father had given her, but he hadn't given her mother one because she didn't put much stock in Buck Johnson's mine. And she was figuring on making it out here on foot.'"

DICK'S eyes began to shine. He put an arm about the weeping girl.

"I don't quite get it yet," he said. "Seems too good to be true. You say Hardrock's going to get well. And what about this science shark?"

"It's all simple enough," said the sheriff. "We overtook Helen. She knew we were set on coming here and she showed us the map. As it turned out we didn't really need it. Your trail was plenty plain. We met a party coming out of the desert. One of them was some science chap hired by a museum to find a big meteorite that's supposed to have fallen here one time. There's an Indian legend about it, and prospectors have found scraps of iron and nickel.

"He's got two men with him. One of 'em is Salina Joe, the half-breed. Joe found a burro ranging free, with a packsaddle on it with one tree broken and ropes trailing. Well, that was like reading a book to Joe. Someone had lost his burro and would be in bad shape. He explained it to the sharp and they backtrailed the burro's tracks. It went along with 'em willing enough after they give it some water and grub.

"They find Hardrock, in tough shape. But the science sharp knows something about fixing him up. He's got stuff with him to stop hemorrhages and relieve pain, in a medical kit he carries along. Cannabis indica was the dope he gave him. I've known it used for hawsses. They take him out and leave him at Soledad Rancho, over to the south end. Man name of Herrara runs it He promises to send to Agua Fria for a doctor, pronto. The sharp says he'll get well. Three ribs busted but the internal trouble ain't too bad. It ain't like his liver was ruptured. Likewise we chin a little and we get the straight of the story, just as you told it. So. . . ."

"I want to go to the ranch and see Dad, Dick," said Helen. "They'll take the news back to mother, and she'll come later. But I don't want to wait. Will you go with me?"

"He didn't make no reply that you could call verbal," said the sheriff later, "though it was sure oral," he added, airing a vocabulary acquired in court. "I heard it, plain, though I had sense enough to turn my back. First time I ever figured lovemaking in connection with Hell's Backyard."

MISSING—BELIEVED DEAD

By LEIGHTON H. BLOOD

Author of "The Saxophone Salute," etc.

Those who serve the secret ends of France.

IN ORDER that the record be made straight in the case of Rene Falk, soldier of the second class, French Foreign Legion, it would be well first to recite what the Legion itself knew about this strange and now legendary figure, from the time he disappeared early one morning in the great, segregated district of Marrakesh, Morocco, leaving behind only a cry of alarm in the night and his bloody khaki neckcloth.

The sergeant of the patrol had his story, which will be related in its own, proper place. Private Serge Medvedenko, Falk's closest friend, added a few piquant details, and the officers and enlisted men of the Legion supplied—up to a certain point—the rest. But the real story—the story behind that early morning happening in the Street of the Women of the M'Touga—lies embalmed in the files of the famous Second Bureau of the French Army, and fills a great *dossier* in the secret archives of the Ministry of War in Paris.

Attached to this record is an order of the army, signed by a Major General, which few have seen. It is an order promoting to the rank of lieutenant a man who has never learned, and probably never will learn, of the honor that has thus quietly been bestowed upon him; an order keeping on the active duty list, and at full active duty pay, the name of a man who, for nearly thirteen years, has been posted by his regiment as "missing—believed dead."

THE name, Rene Falk, was a *nom du guerre*. That had been apparent from the first, and there is no record that Falk, so-called, ever tried to deny that he was hiding his true identity.

In manner, he was cosmopolitan. From appearance, he might have been English or German. In fact, he was an American, born in Chicago and educated in an Eastern college. His real name was Lockett—John Edward Lockett.

Falk was a personable chap—handsome, cultured, gifted with a rare assortment of talents, and an expert linguist. Everyone liked him; many desired his friendship. But with all his charm, there had been a certain aloofness which effectively discouraged even the most persistent of his admirers.

He seldom went to the cafés, preferring, to the company of his fellows, the danger-

ous pastime of prowling alone about the native city, which he seemed to have known —and known rather thoroughly—prior to his enlisting in the Legion. Of these excursions he said nothing. Nor did he speak of his past, save to the Russian, Medvédenko, who was his only intimate, and with whom, as will be shown, he had much in common.

Of his now-famous disappearance, all that the Legion knows is contained in the report of Lieutenant Colonel Fornet, executive officer of the Fourth Regiment. His investigation gives in detail the stories of both Medvédenko and of Sergeant Gottlieb Kuhn who had been in charge of a squad on patrol duty in the native city on the night of this strange occurrence, and who was unquestionably the last man to see Falk before he vanished. Kuhn's account is as follows:

"I was at my post in the segregated district, near the head of the Street of the Women of Mogador, shortly after one o'clock in the morning, when a legionnaire approached me from the direction of the Place of the Dead. I stopped him to examine his *permission,* and also to send him back, since he was alone."

Here is interpolated a note by Fornet to the French War Office, explaining that legionnaires are forbidden to go alone into the segregated district, because of the custom among Berber women of killing lone soldiers for their uniforms. Sergeant Kuhn's report continues:

The legionnaire proved to be Falk, with whom I was acquainted. He had the required *permission.* Also a written message which he said was a summons from someone who might have information of importance to the Legion."

Question by Fornet: How was this note worded?

Answer by Sergeant Kuhn: I do not know. It was written in Arabic, which I cannot read.

Q.: Did the Legionnaire Falk say who sent this message?

A.: He did not.

Fornet: Proceed.

"We walked for a short distance down the Street of the Women of Mogador, to the point where it is joined by the alley called The Women of the M'Touga. There, Falk left me and entered the alley."

Q.: You know that is against regulations?

A.: Yes, my colonel.

Q.: Then why did you allow it?

A.: Since the mission was possibly one of importance, and because Falk was sober and well known as one who could take care of himself in the native quarter, I thought it best to let him go.

Q.: If you though his mission important, why did you not go along with him?

A.: I suggested that. Falk would not have it.

Q.: Continue.

A.: After Falk left me I remained where I was for perhaps three minutes.

Q.: Why did you not return immediately to your permanent post?

A.: I was smoking a cigarette.

Q.: That is against orders.

A.: Yes, My colonel.

Thus Sergeant Kuhn's testimony runs through thirty-eight pages of foolscap written in Colonel Fornet's fine, almost effeminate hand; interrupted frequently by the officer's astute queries—interspersed freely with the colonel's comments for the edification of the bureaucrats of the War Office.

BOILED down to their essentials, the facts are these. Kuhn had been standing on the corner, smoking his cigarette, when he heard Falk cry for help. He blew his whistle, summoning three men of his patrol, who were just rounding the corner of a nearby street, and ran down the alley in the general direction from which the cry had come.

As he ran, he heard a second cry, and a third which ended abruptly as though it had been stifled. Then he saw a man dart from a doorway and run down the alley.

Kuhn drew his pistol, shot the man down, and ran to the doorway. There, his three men caught up with him, and together they entered the house. Inside they found twelve frightened Berber women penned in one room by a heavy bed drawn up against the door, and in another room, a bloodstained khaki neckcloth with Falk's number—78946—inked in the band.

That was all. No sign of Falk. No trace of his assailants, though a door at the rear of the house, opening on another alley, afforded a clue as to their means of exit.

So much for Kuhn's story. There is little to be added. The women were questioned and told their tale. Mountain men had come to the house and herded them into one small room. There they remained until freed by Kuhn's arrival. The native Kuhn shot had been searched. Nothing was found on him but a Luger pistol.

At the bottom of the last page is a note by Fornet reporting that Kuhn was given thirty days *consign* for smoking on duty and for allowing Falk to go alone into the segregated district.

MEDVÉDENKO'S questioning was but slightly less revealing. It cleared up the riddle of the missing man's past, but gave no clue in the matter of his disappearance.

Both he and Falk—and his statement is backed up by documentary evidence—had been Allied agents during the World War.

Falk had operated in Morocco—which explained his penchant for mingling with the Arabs of the native city—and was so successful at blocking attempts to arm the Berbers that a huge price had been put on his head by the German government. Later he was transferred to Europe where he joined Medvédenko and a third man in espionage work on the Swiss border. There, a locked railroad car packed with Bolshevists had slipped through their net and into Russia. As a result the Bear made a separate peace with the Germans.

Followed dishonorable dismissal for all three. The third man shot himself. Falk and Medvédenko crossed into France and joined the Legion on the Western Front as privates.

Both the Army Intelligence and the highly organized native affairs bureau went diligently to work on the case of Falk's disappearance in Morocco, which by this time was attracting considerable attention in the French war office. Kuhn was quizzed repeatedly on the theory that he might have killed the ex-spy in a fit of patriotic fervor. Some credence was given the idea that Falk, deserting, had staged the play himself, to cover his departing tracks. The legionnaires, ever reluctant to accuse a comrade, favored the belief that the women were lying and that the missing man had been simply murdered for his clothes and money.

The truth is that none of them was right. The actual story, as it is contained in the files of the Second Bureau, is far more dramatic than any of their speculations.

WHEN Falk left Kuhn and entered the street of the Women of the M'Touga he had no misgivings. True, he was answering a message brought to him by a strange Arab, and unsigned save for the tribal mark of El Hiba which belonged in common to half the native population of the city. Anonymous notes were no novelty to the legionnaire who had once been a pawn in the game of World War espionage, and he had no reason to fear in peace time the city which had harbored him in safety during the very height of the conflict.

He walked slowly down the street, counting the houses as he went, until a tall Berber in the brown burnouse of a hill tribesman, stepped from a doorway and hailed him.

The Berber moved closer and peered at Falk in the dim light which filtered through the open doorway. Then, apparently satisfied, he turned and led the way

into a large, square chamber that was empty save for the usual generous scattering of cushions, and a great, wooden divan incongruously sprawled across the threshold of the huge, oaken door.

The Berber bowed low and glided silently away in the direction from which they had come. Almost at once, a curtained doorway on the right opened. Falk heard his name called, and, straightening his tunic, walked toward the light that was now visible from the inner room.

Inside were several men in camels hair burnouses—hillmen, all of them, judging from the straightness of their shoulders and the arrogant light in their black, beady eyes.

Falk stepped inside the door and bowed his head, following the Oriental custom of greeting. As he did this a dirty arm encircled his neck and he was pulled over backward, a lean knee pressing sharply into the small of his back.

He let out a sharp cry and struck over his shoulder at the man who had caught him from behind. The hold loosened and Falk shook himself free. With another cry, he started for the door, but by that time, a dozen hillmen were on him, grappling and clawing.

A pistol butt struck him in the face and blood spurted from his nose. His khaki neckcloth, all but torn off in the scrimmage, was hanging by one hook over his left shoulder, and he tore it off, dropping it unobtrusively at his feet in the hope that it would pass unnoticed and furnish, perhaps, some slender clue as to his whereabouts to the legionnaires who might come in answer to his cries. Then, as he tried to call out for the third time, the pistol butt descended again, and the lighted room went black before his eyes.

WHEN Falk came to again there was a terrible stench in his nostrils. Every bone and muscle in his body was aching, and his back felt as though it had been branded in criss-crossed stripes with a red hot iron. He tried to move, but sundry twinges of pain about his wrists and ankles warned him that he was trussed up in a ball like a fat sheep ready for the roasting spit.

His body was moving curiously—swinging, jouncing, bumping with almost rhythmic precision against some soft object. Now his ear caught the thud of hoof beats. Then, suddenly, consciousness came flooding back.

He was in a camel hamper, jogging along somewhere out in the endless Moroccan *bled*. The stench in his nostrils was the pungent, never-to-be-forgotten smell of camel. The burning, criss-crossed lines on his back were the chafe-marks of the ropes that formed the net-work of the hamper.

Falk opened his eyes and saw only the thick cloth something that covered them. An old *djellaba* robe, probably, in which they had wrapped his naked body. If he knew the Berber rightly, they had long before this sold his uniform for the few francs it would bring.

For an hour—two hours—he swung there like a pendulum, listening to the cries of the drivers and the steady beat of the camels' hoofs on the ground below. It was a small caravan, judging from the number of voices. Five—ten animals. A dozen at the most.

AT LENGTH the procession slowed and halted. He heard slippered feet padding on the hard shale and the shrill yells of the drivers, beating the camels to their knees. His own great beast, with a series of protesting squeals, settled on his haunches and the rope hamper came bumping to the ground. Then Falk felt hands tugging at the ropes that bound him and a minute later he was standing in the sunlight surrounded by a dozen hillmen all armed with rifles.

Falk looked around with cool deliberation. The caravan had stopped in a deep *whadi,* hemmed in on all sides by the towering peaks of the High Atlas. They were, he judged, about forty miles out of Marra-

kesh, on a minor caravan trail, heading in the general direction of the Sous.

He finished his leisurely survey of the neighborhood, turned his attention back to the men who surrounded him, and singled out one who was apparently the leader.

"Why have you brought me here?" he asked in the Atlas dialect.

The man stared hard, apparently startled to find a *roumi* who spoke the hill tongue. Then he regained his poise.

"Does the ewe ask the lion where he takes her to dine?" he asked, showing his teeth in a grin.

Falk shrugged and turned away. He sat down on a rock and watched the hillmen idly as they prepared a meal over a small fire of camel dung. A Berber brought him a handful of dried dates and a brass bowl of hot tea. After that he was bundled back into the hamper, and the little caravan set out, moving rapidly toward the south.

So, for four days, he jogged along through the *blcd,* trussed up in the stifling rope basket by day, tied to a guard when they slept at night. On the fifth day, toward dusk, the caravan came to a great *kasbah,* set on the top of a steep hill, and surrounded by tall, massive walls of red Atlas stone.

There they untied him and led Falk through narrow, winding streets to a house, larger than the rest, that fronted on a square. Armed men stood outside, and the intricate carving of the great arched doorway was as old as Islam. The palace of a local Caid, apparently, and an important Caid, too, judging from the size of the town. Falk searched his memory, but failed to recall anything that suggested the identity of either the *kasbah* or his captors.

THEY marched him down a long, tiled corridor to an inside courtyard, where a fountain played, and a pair of young gazelles frisked about a group of stunted palms. In an alcove on the far side, a white-bearded old patriarch reclined on a pile of cushions behind a foot-high table made of cedar wood inlaid with silver and bits of burnished brass.

To Falk it seemed that there was something familiar about the old man's wrinkled face and the quizzical lift of his thin, graying eyebrows. Again he racked his memory. Then it came to him. This was the Caid Mulai Ben Ahmed, Shareef; Lord of the High Sous, and the *kasbah* was El Latef, his capital.

Old Mulai had aged since that day, early in 1915, when Falk had seen him bargaining for German gold at the parley of the dissident Caids with agents of the Kaiser, out in the hills behind Taroudant. His beard was whiter; his shoulders bent under the burden of warfare and intrigue that beset his little mountain kingdom. But his snapping black eyes had lost none of their fire, his voice, none of its cutting arrogance.

"Bring the dog closer," he snapped, and Falk was half-led, half-pushed to the alcove.

The old Caid reached into a drawer of the table before him, drew out a photograph the size of a postcard, and looked searchingly, first at the picture and then at Falk.

"It is he," Mulai said gravely. Then, handing the photo to a young man who stood near, "Ask him if he is not the one this picture represents."

The Berber passed the picture to Falk, who looked at it long and curiously. It was indeed himself—a good likeness, at that. He turned the picture over and smiled inwardly. On the back was written in Arabic:

"The Imperial German Government will pay one hundred thousand marks for the capture of this spy."

Below was an address in the Spanish

colony of Rio Del Oro, and another in the Wilhelmstrasse.

So that was it! An echo of the War. The price the Germans had put on his head was still hanging over him like a hate that burns long after the cause is forgotten. The picture was five years old; the reward dated even before that. The Imperial German Government was no more. The Reich would pay no gold to redeem the promises of a fight that was lost, and an ambition that had long since gone hurtling into the limbo. But how was old Mulai to know that—old Mulai to whom gold was gold, and a promise, a promise?

Falk handed back the picture, nodding slowly.

"It is my likeness, O Caid."

Mulai grunted. His black eyes sparkled.

"Allah is good," he said, grinning. "Again we shall have gold to buy rifles."

An amused gleam, lost to the Berber, appeared in Falk's eyes.

"Are you sure of that, O Caid?" he asked boldly.

The old man considered a moment, then spoke reflectively.

"Four years ago, when the rifles failed to arrive, this picture was sent to me by the fair haired *roumi* of the north. It was said that sometimes you wore a uniform like the French, and that at other times you posed as a true believer. Long have I waited. Then, with the traveling *souk,* came the Arab trader, who said he had seen you—that often you visited his brother's house in Marrakesh. For a few camel loads of rugs he agreed to deliver you into the hands of my men. And lo, he has kept his bargain. Allah is good."

Mulai's voice trailed off, then his eyes flashed suddenly.

"Ha!" he cried, shaking his head as if rousing himself from a reverie. "Why should they not pay the gold? They always paid before. And does not the *roumi* keep his word?"

It was a delicate question. Falk hesitated.

"The *Franzwari roumi* keep their word," he said finally, "but the *roumi* who sent *this picture*—that, O Caid, is a different tale. By the beard of the prophet, I swear that they will not pay the gold. For no longer do they seek me."

The old man eyed Falk shrewdly, then loosed a burst of shrill, derisive laughter.

"Think you to go free with such an old woman's tale?" he cackled. "I will send my own son to collect this gold. Until he returns, you will stay in the *kasbah.*"

Falk nodded curtly. "It is the will of Allah," he said, shrugging in Berber fashion.

The Caid warmed to this bit of stage play.

"You will live in the house of a sheik," he told Falk, "because you speak as we speak, and know our ways. Unless you try to run away, you will not be crippled. And unless, as you claim, the *roumi* refuse the price, you will not be killed. For in truth," he added with brutal frankness, "I doubt if they would pay so much gold for a dead man."

He waved his hand, and a tall Berber led Falk away to the house of the Sheik Si Yussef El Mansour. There he was given a new burnoose and shown a place in the courtyard where he could sleep. Two men of the household were set to watch him, and for two months he was never out of the sight of one or the other.

THE same afternoon, amid much shouting and waving of arms, one of the Caid's sons started northward, with a bodyguard, on his way to Berlin and the hundred thousand marks in gold old Mulai believed he would receive for delivering Falk over to the Germans.

The days passed slowly. Falk was allowed to roam freely, but never could he escape the vigilance of his guards. He explored the *kasbah* thoroughly. Escape, he decided, was impossible. And when the Caid's son returned empty handed, they would, in all probability, shoot him. The best he could hope for was slavery, and that only if he showed that he could make

himself useful. The thing to do, therefore, was to show his value—and do it in such a way as would not escape the notice of the Berbers.

Si Yussef El Mansour was a fat old scamp, good natured for a Berber, with an eye peeled to his own advantage. At him, Falk directed his subtle campaign of propaganda and suggestion.

The Sheik's barley patch was being cultivated by methods centuries old. Falk went down into the *whadi* when the slaves were at work and showed them how to improve their crude farm implements. When a wall of the Sheik's house crumbled, Falk rebuilt it, using tricks that were old in the Legion, but new to the Hillmen of the Anti Atlas. And when there was nothing else to be done, he busied himself teaching the *roumi* tongues to the various members of the Sheik's family.

The Berber is an imitator by nature. Once Falk had shown them the way, they followed his lead like so many monkeys. By the time the Caid's son returned from Berlin with the strange tale that the *roumi* of the north had no gold to give, he had made himself so valuable that he felt certain the wily Si Yussef would never allow him to be killed.

He was right. On the morning after the Caid's son returned, he was taken once more to the Caid's palace. Old Mulai's shoulders seemed even more bent than they had been on the occasion of Falk's first visit to the palm-shaded courtyard, and his eyes had lost some of their arrogant fire. He looked at Falk curiously as he stepped up to the alcove.

"Why do they not pay?" he asked.

Falk's eyes met the old man's searching stare. "They lost in battle with the *Franzwari,*" he said evenly. "They have no more gold."

"When did they lose their battle?" the Caid demanded.

"Two years ago the truce was signed. When I was brought here I told you. Remember, O Caid? I spoke but the truth."

Mulai nodded slowly and bowed his head in thought.

"I should kill you," he said finally, "but I find you have value. The Sheik Si Yussef El Mansour, with whom you have lived, has bought you for a thousand silver ducats. You will be his slave and do his bidding. Now go. And henceforth keep from under my feet. The sight of you brings evil memories."

LIFE as a slave was not so bad. Slaves in the Atlas are things of great value, and the Berber, in most cases treats them better than he does his own family, figuring—and wisely—that loyalty cannot be bought with the end of a whip. Few indeed, in Morocco, are the cases of slaves who run away from their masters.

Though Falk's status had changed in the house of Si Yussef, there was no outward indication. Even, he was allowed a greater degree of freedom than he had when, in the estimation of the Caid, he was worth a hundred thousand marks in German gold. The two guards no longer followed him about, save when he left the *kasbah* to go down into the *whadi,* and he could prowl alone to his heart's content inside the walls of the town. Getting past the walls was another matter. Patrolled day and night by armed hillmen, they offered a better chance of death than freedom.

That game, Falk decided, wasn't worth the candle. But he had another project under way that was infinitely less risky. At the north side of the *kasbah,* close under the battlements, he found a dilapidated old house, its walls crumbling, roof fallen in, and uninhabited save for the rats that nested in its cracks and crevices. There, in a room far removed from the street, he was laboriously hewing a small tunnel through the hard Atlas rock to a sheltered spot outside the wall.

A YEAR rolled by—two years. By the middle of the third, Falk had his tunnel almost completed. If all went smoothly and according to calculations, it

would come out at the base of a small boulder which would effectually conceal the exit until such time as he was ready to make his break for freedom.

The old Sheik's household, by this time, was running like a well oiled machine, and Si Yussef, delighted with his paragon of a slave, was pestering Falk with suggestions that he take a woman, and raise young *roumis* for the further enrichment of his estate. Then, suddenly, rumors began trickling in out of the *bled,* and the spectre of war cast its shadow over the Atlas peaks.

The French government was issuing a Moroccan franc to take the place of the Shareefian ducat that had been in vogue in the Atlas since the days of the sixth century Saadien sultans. Hard on the heels of the first announcement came shrewd money changers from the lowlands with the alarming tale that the hillmen's coin would no longer purchase so much as a pound of tea or a cone of *Franzwari* sugar. They had bought the ducats in for a fraction of their value, and gone home again to redeem them at their full worth in the banks of Marrakesh.

Old Mulai and his sheiks had sold their silver. Si Yussef, unknown to Falk, had traded his hoarded wealth for something less than the proverbial mess of pottage.

Then news of the swindle began filtering through the *kasbahs,* and in less than a week the whole *bled,* from Tangrout to Quezzan and from Agadir to Oujda, was a seething inferno of riot and revolution.

The revolt spread through the hills like wildfire. Each day, neighboring Caids rode in from their *kasbahs* to confer with old Mulai in the courtyard of his palace. In the *souks* they talked of nothing else. The men of the hills would, so the gossip ran, drive the French back to the seacoast, then storm Marrakesh, wipe out the Street of the Money Changers, and hang from the gibbet the men who had stripped them of their wealth.

FALK watched their preparations with an anxious eye. The Berbers might be weeks in organizing, but once started, such concerted action would sweep everything before it. The outposts, unsuspecting, would fall like tenpins. Relief groups would be swallowed up in that all-enveloping swarm. They would be down on Marrakesh almost before the news of their coming. If wholesale slaughter was to be averted, the Legion must be warned.

Falk went to work on his tunnel with renewed vigor. Two nights finished the job. On the third night he wormed his way through the narrow opening, pushed the little boulder back over the exit, and set out over the hills toward the caravan trail a dozen miles away.

At dawn he sighted the trail winding through a *whadi* below him. He was free at last. Free of the *kasbah* and of old Si Yussef El Mansour. Free to go back to the Legion and mingle once more with people of his own kind. Small chance that the Berbers would find him now. The Atlas was too full of places where a man could hide. Now if only a caravan would come along, his troubles would be over. There should still be a few on the trail that had left Timbuktoo or St. Louis, Senegal, before news of the Berber unrest stopped their moving northward.

Luck was with him. One came along at dusk—a great convoy of a thousand camels, moving slowly toward the coast. He fell into line and moved along with them until they halted for the night. Then he lay down in the shelter of a rock and watched the stars come out, one by one, in the blue vault of the African sky.

His brain was a welter of conflicting thoughts. His blood beat through his veins with the high spirit of self-satisfaction. Not only was he free. He was turning a trick that would go down in the history of espionage. In a way it was a break—these years of slavery. Many a master of the game would give, not a few years, but a whole decade out of his life, to be on the ground when such a tale was in the making.

Falk wondered who would bring the next warning out of old Mulai Ben Ahmed's *kasbah*. Nobody, probably. Old Mulai would deal out death to any Christians that fell into his hands after this.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright and pulled his burnoose close. Then he was on his feet, threading his way noiselessly down the line of smouldering fires. From under the head of a sleeping letter writer he filched a kit and ink bottle, and stole quietly away. In a moment, he was back again, pushing the kit gently under the sleeping Arab's head. Then he was off once more, moving swiftly in and out among the piles of goods stacked by the roadside. At length he found what he was looking for—a bale of rugs bound together with coarse, camel hair ropes. He read the destination from a tag and nodded slowly. Then he rose again and struck out through the *bled* in the direction from which he had come the night before.

He reached Mulai Ben Ahmed's *kasbah* just before daybreak, crawled into his little tunnel, and pulled the concealing boulder carefully back over its mouth.

THREE weeks to the day after Falk's return to the *kasbah*, a warehouseman, unpacking a bale of rugs in an importer's shop off the Rue du Rivoli, came across a sheet of paper covered with queer, meaningless characters. He carried it, as the French inscription at the top commanded, straight to the offices of the Minister of War. An hour later the code message had been translated, and the telegraph wires between Paris and Rabat were humming with an ominous bit of news.

In less time than it takes to tell, the word was being relayed throughout the length and breadth of Morocco. Telephone bells jangled. Radios sputtered. Helios winked their messages over the trackless *bled*. Troops poured out of the coast cities by rail and *camion*. Relief companies double-timed out of Marrakesh on their way to the farthest outposts. When the Berbers struck, they were met by an enemy that was warned and ready.

Even so, it was a grim and fearful struggle. Posts fell. Whole companies were slaughtered. For three days, French rule in the protectorate hung precariously in the balance. Then the Berbers were driven back, beaten and demoralized, to their rock-bound eyries in the Atlas.

All that was years ago—thirteen, since the date on Colonel Fornet's report to the Ministry in Paris. Now, all but a few have forgotten the tale of the man who vanished, and the Franc Revolt of 1923 is just another memory of the Legion of the Damned. But today in the Bureau of Customs in Marseilles, there is a *douanier* who is a mystery to his fellows. Though he wears the uniform, he draws no pay from the bureau, and year in, year out, he does nothing but inspect, very carefully, certain shipments from the seaports of the Moor. Four times, in the ten years he has been there, he has found messages hidden in the bales the caravans bring up from Senegal and the French Sudan. And four times the Berber has swept down out of the hills to find the Foreign Legion strangely ready for his blow.

And back in the Second Bureau, a record of dishonorable dismissal has vanished from the files. For a decade, the Legion has had a lieutenant that it knows only as a missing or dead private. And somewhere or other there are ten years pay rolled up, waiting for Falk to come in out of the *bled* and claim it. If he ever does, they will probably give him the red ribbon. The French are sentimental about things like that.

Adventurers All

THE LOST ISLAND

THREE times a week I, as Master of the mailboat *Chicago,* steer my way through the maze of canals and bayous of Lower Louisiana and across Barataria Bay to Grand Island in the Gulf of Mexico. And each time as the low lying island called "Cheniere Caminada" comes into view I recall for an instant that terrible storm of October 1, 1893, when a hurricane from the Gulf piled up the waters in gigantic waves, swept over the island with all its wrath, drowned 1,000 of its population of 1,600 and made driftwood and wreckage out of all but three or four houses.

I was a boy at the time of that storm but the stark terror of those mountainous waves sweeping all before them, the frightful procession of corpses being carried out to sea, the loss of my own home and some of my relatives, and the long and fear-stricken night I spent with other refugees from the storm cooped up in a trembling building we feared might be swept away at any instant, left an indelible impression on my memory. I will be able to tell my grandchildren of that night just as though it happened only yesterday.

Cheniere Caminada is one of that group of coastal islands in the Gulf of Mexico that figure dramatically in the colorful and picturesque career of Jean Lafitte, the most famous pirate that preyed on our southern seacoast. It is ten miles long, one and a half miles wide, and lies not more than three feet above the storm-tossed waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Settled originally by fishermen, oystermen and shrimpmen it later became the chief rendezvous of the fisher-folk of the coastal islands and bayous and, just before the storm, was the home of 1,600 people.

My father, Octave Dantin, was a man of the sea, as his father was before him, and all of my boyhood years were spent on Cheniere Caminada. On Saturday, October 1, my father and grandfather were in New Orleans on business connected with a new boat, and I was the man of the family. Showers fell during the day in a typical Gulf storm, but no one thought anything of it until, as the day wore on, the waves grew larger and larger and rolled over the low beach like the booming of cannons.

Towards evening the raging waters grew so furious that water began circling around the homes of those nearest the beach and a number of our relatives gathered at our house, which stood back farther, and sat around discussing the storm. Until then everyone considered it just a bad blow and I played with my cousins all unconscious of the tragedy ahead.

Suddenly everyone became aware of possible danger when water began seeping in on the floor. And our house, like all others on the island, was built on stilts several feet above ground level! In a few

minutes a man fought his way through the water, waist deep, to advise us all to move to Marc Piccola's store, a much larger and stauncher built building, for safety.

I remember distinctly that as Alex Ansomo carried me on his shoulders through the swirling white-capped water, joking with me so that I wouldn't be frightened, I saw that the land all around was seething with tumultuous waters and carrying the wreckage of houses, uprooted trees, and dead animals in its mad rush over the island toward the sea. On the last trip the men made—carrying my old grandmother—they could barely touch ground and one of them told me that three feet of water was running through our house.

Among the refugees, brought to Piccola's by my uncle and Ciprian Gomez in a pirogue, were my aunt and her baby born that morning as the storm began. When Gomez attempted to return to his own home to bring members of his own family to safety his pirogue was smashed by driftwood and he was drowned.

By midnight about 100 people had come by skiff, been carried, or struggled through the rising water, as refugees to Piccola's and were huddled about on the counters and cases as well as in the living quarters. Every box, crate or barrel had men, women, and children on it trying to escape the water I remember very distinctly seeing some of the men put several mattresses under my aunt and her baby as the water rose to the level of the bed on which they lay. Mother lifted me, my sister, Rosina, and my brother, Ludric, on a kitchen table. I can still picture myself, sobbing and crying, standing on that table and watching one man chop holes in the floor so that some of the water could escape.

BLOWING at a hundred miles an hour for hours throughout that dark night the hurricane had lashed the wild waters into constantly increasing fury and kept the men moving around, battening down doors and windows against a deluge of foaming water.

Suddenly, at midnight, the wind died down for ten minutes—just long enough for it to catch its breath for it quickly sprang up again from the northwest with a fury so intense that it tore the Piccolo kitchen away from the rest of the house and sent it careening seaward like a bobbing cork. The building itself shook under the continual bombardment of waves hurling themselves against it. The roaring wind drowned out the cries of the children. The women folks bowed their heads in prayer. The men anxiously patrolled the house, splashing around in the water on guard against the smashing of a weak place that would make our refuge a shambles.

With the shifting wind came more water until it almost reached the window-sill despite the fact that the house was built on stilts seven feet off the ground! No one slept. No one had a bite to eat. All prayed and waited for the storm to lose its fury, fearful that at the very next moment we, too, would join in that macabre procession seaward.

A night of dark, wind and water—screeching terror and then, just before dawn, we noticed that the wind had lost its hellish howl and that the water inside the house was slowly receding. The wind slacked off to dying gasps; spray no longer slapped against the windows, and the water dropped lower. I remember that Piccola himself leaned over by a window ledge and pointed out the lowering water-mark to reassure the fear-stricken women and children.

And then, with one last fearful gasp, the wind died down to a light breeze and the house stopped trembling and creaking and groaning in all its joints. When the last water had drained off the floor and we dared open the doors and windows we looked out on a scene of watery desolation. The land had been completely obliterated. Piccola's battered house was the only island of life as far as the eye

could see, and around us was piled the wreckage of other houses—including our own—overturned boats, great trunks of trees. Carcasses of dead animals slowly drifted in the ebbing tide. A few human corpses drifted by.

By 10 o'clock Sunday morning (October 2) the wall of water had poured off the island and left a sea of slime and mud covering everything. Lying in the water pools and muck close by around the house I counted the bodies of eight fishermen and their families. While they were being gathered for burial I went with several men to the house of an uncle a half-mile away. There, hanging by her long hair from the limbs of a live oak tree four feet above the ground, we found my aunt's body. At the home of another uncle we found that my aunt and her five children had been drowned. Other dead were everywhere about and for several days afterward it kept the menfolk busy burying them, four and five in a common grave. Altogether more than a thousand were drowned on the island or swept out to watery graves in the Gulf of Mexico.

After the storm all of the survivors—and not a family but had lost someone—moved to Jefferson, St. Mary's and Lafourche parishes with the exception of three or four families. In 1909 another storm swept the island and 11 of the population of nineteen left were drowned. Since then Cheniere Caminada has been deserted and now lies, desolate and forbidding, a wind and wave swept memory of one of the greatest tragedies of the seacoasts of America.

Captain Didier Dantin.

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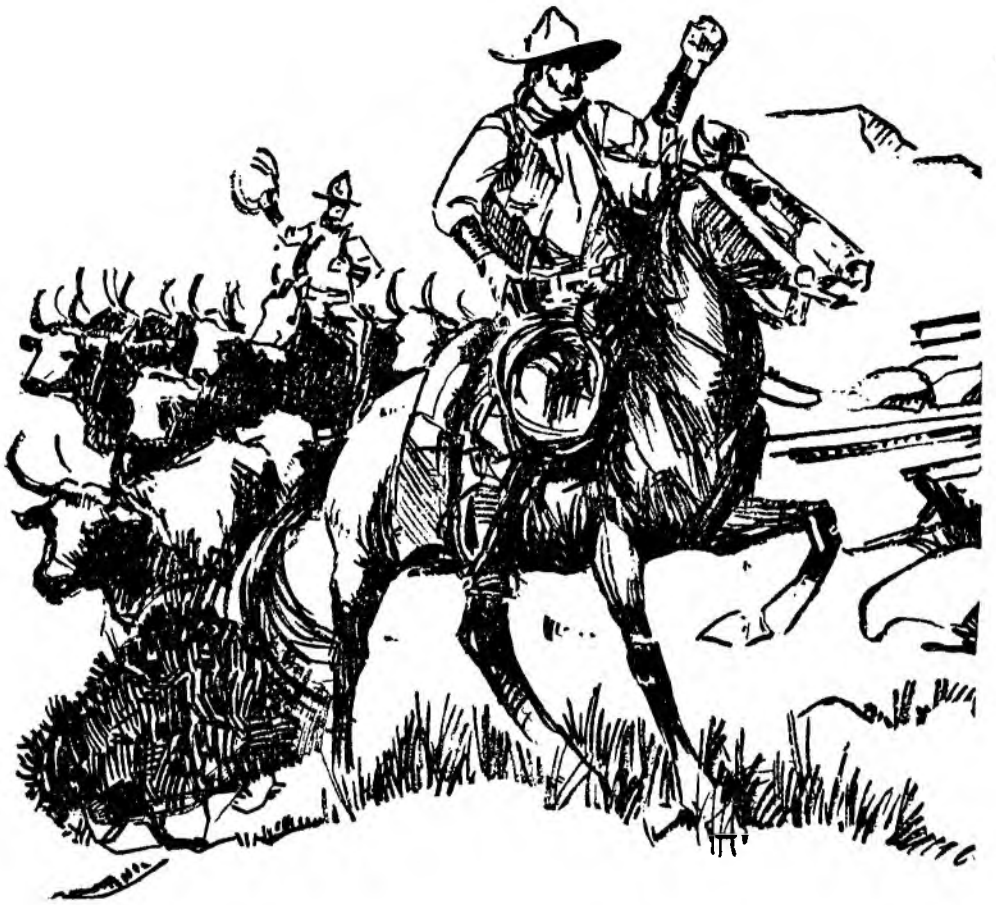


THE CATTLE KING OF LITTLE EGYPT

By RAYMOND A. BERRY

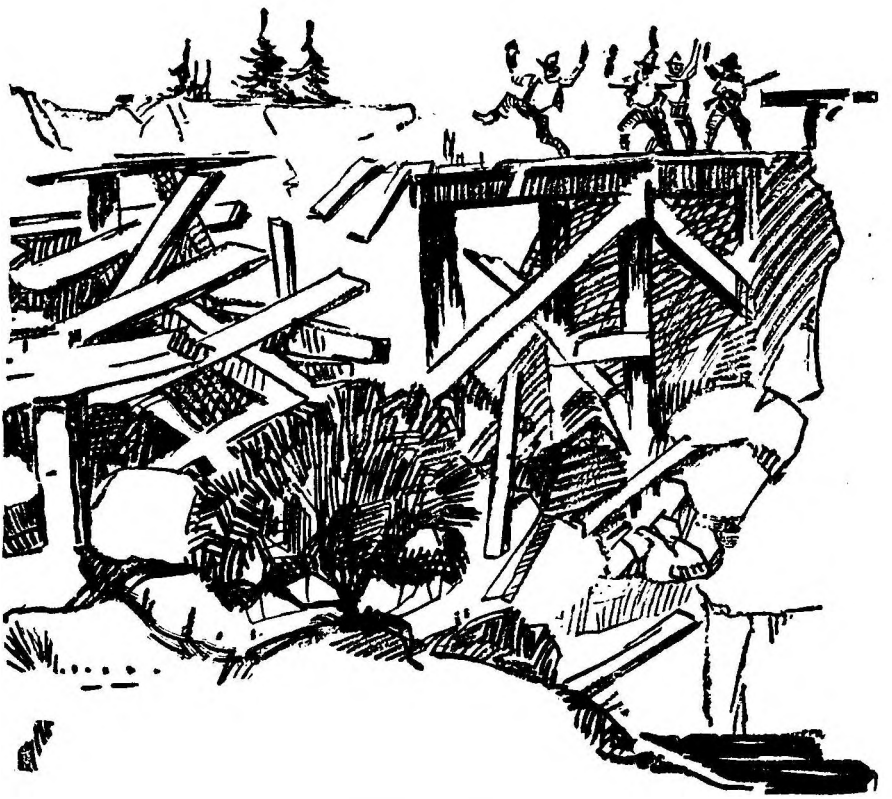
Author of "The Flyin' Pack-ass," "Square Riders of the Circle M," etc.

Part II

EMBATTLED RANCHERS

LITTLE EGYPT is the only range in its part of the country, outside of the National Forest, that has not been overgrazed to the point where floods and drought are prevalent, cattlemen have not been forced out of business, and towns have not been starved out of existence. The ranchers of Little Egypt are determined to keep their range green and productive, and their leader, Mark Harper, is a man well fitted to see that they are successful in doing so.

Arthur Bobson, banker of Richglen, who holds most of the mortgages on Little Egypt property, sees in the current low price of cattle, a chance to get hold of the



Mark Harper is the kind of a man who makes the impossible, possible!

range and put his own sheep on it. He plans to call in the mortgages on the cattle when they fall due, instead of letting them ride for a rise in prices as he is doing with the paper of the sheepmen.

Bobson has sent his secretary, Barbara Bently, into Little Egypt to scout out the land, to discover how many cattle are available, where they are, and what ranchers will cause trouble, and which, if any, can be bought off. Abe Hearn, owner of the place where Barbara is boarding, and the Buckners, a family of renegade hill people, are willing to talk; but before they can do any harm, Barbara is called back to Richglen by the impatient banker. Barbara's heart isn't in the job anyway. She keeps on working for Bobson merely because she has to pay hospital bills to save the life of a sick sister, and, at that, she doesn't realize the lengths to which Bobson will go to get what he wants. Besides, Mark Harper had shot a mountain lion that was frightening the girl when Harper came across her alone and lost in a storm in the mountains; and after that she found it doubly hard to work against him.

Harper was in Richglen to talk with the banker at the same time that Barbara was there. Bobson tried to persuade the rancher to get the other cowmen to clear out without a fight, even offered him twenty-five thousand dollars to do so, but Harper refused. Bobson's next move was to put a lawyer called Swensen into the field under the guise of a cattle inspector. He was to find out the number of cattle that the Little Egypt ranchers owned, and

to see that none of them were hidden or taken out of the country till foreclosure could be effected. Then he was to supervise driving them out.

Swensen rode back to Little Egypt with Barbara and Mark Harper. It was a tough ride into country that could be reached only ahorse. On the way in they saw a huge cottonwood tree across a canyon, and a slender black shaft at its foot marking a grave. Harper explained that several men who had done harm to the valley or its people had seen a great Indian chief's head that filled the entire top of the tree, the feathers of his head-dress filling the branches. Shortly after seeing this vision, each one of these men had died. The gravestone was the marker for the first. Later on, Swensen was to remember this tale to his sorrow.

As for his mission in Little Egypt, Swensen didn't get on with it very well. He went off into the hills with Harper's two best friends Tom Fitkin and Jim Coffee, but all sorts of strange things happened so that they couldn't find any cattle. Bobson was very angry at the delay, and sent word to Barbara Bently to find out where Swensen was, but she didn't have any luck, even when she asked Mark Harper. And she had no more when she tried to pump his young but enterprising brother, Ariel.

Chapter VIII

DOWN TO CASES

SMOKE trailed leisurely from the chimney of the Harper ranch cabin as Barbara Bently approached it before sunup on a cloudless autumn morning. Ariel's grizzled Airedale, Bounce, announced her arrival with a series of staccato barks, ending in a delighted yelp as he caught sight of a yellow cat half-way between the corrals and the house and far from any tree, pole or building on which she might take refuge. The dog dashed across the gravelly yard, mouthing canine invectives, and the girl trotted her horse to the cabin in time to be greeted by a sleepy-eyed, tousled-haired Ariel who smiled genially at the sight of his caller.

"Good morning, Miss Bently. Hop off your horse and come on in and eat breakfast with me. Coffee's about boiled, and the hot cake batter is all stirred up, ready to drop in the skillet."

"Thank you, Ariel. I think I shall. But you shouldn't be drinking coffee."

Ariel grinned delightedly at the opportunity for an argument. "A body's got to do something he hadn't ought to. That's what makes people pay attention to him. Nobody's interested in folks they can't correct. Go right in and sit down and I'll take your horse out to the corral and give it a bite of hay."

"I don't know that I can stay long enough to make that worth while. In fact, I'm pretty sure I couldn't. Ariel, doesn't your brother try to keep you from drinking coffee?"

"Oh, he's said once or twice that I hadn't ought to but he don't do nothin' about it when I do. I've drunk somethin' stronger than coffee once or twice. He didn't do anything then, but I'm not going to try it again."

"Why?"

"Well, Mark says it ain't so bad to do anything once or twice—just as long as you don't do it too much. But he says drinkin' is something most folks are pretty certain to overdo, once they get started. He won't stand for that sort of thing—I mean for folks makin' fools of themselves. Guess he'd pretty near beat me to death if I tried it. Here's a rocker you can sit in, if you don't lean too far back."

"Thank you," smiled the girl as she accepted the invitation. "Ariel, when did you see your brother last?"

"Four days ago. Same day he told you he'd go out to hunt for Swensen."

"And you haven't heard a thing from him since that?"

"No, ma'am."

"Did Mr. Harper tell you why he

thought Mr. Swensen had stayed away so long?"

"Nope. Mark don't tell me a lot about quite a few things."

Was there a sly twinkle of mirth in the boy's sparkling black eyes? Barbara suspected there was and decided to pursue her questioning from another angle.

"Ariel, why do you dislike Mr. Swensen so?"

"I never said nothing about not liking him."

"No, but you roweled his horse so that it might have tossed him over that cliff."

The boy squirmed, then said, "That was nothin'. Mr. Swensen said his horse was dead. How was I to know it would come to life that way?"

"You did it on purpose and hoped there would be exciting consequences," accused Barbara. "Now, please, tell me why."

The boy grinned. "You know how lonesome it gets out here? No excitement of any kind. It's fun to see how well people can ride."

"Did you tell your brother that you stuck your spur into Mr. Swensen's horse? You know he didn't see you."

"I don't always tell Mark things any more than he does me," was the noncommittal answer.

Barbara bit her lip. The boy was as aggravatingly baffling as his older brother. Absently her gaze roved about the disordered room as she searched her mind for a new angle of approach. Over beside the bed stood a round table on which rested a radio set. Beside the radio was a small fragment of what appeared to be bright red stone.

"What's that, Ariel?" she asked. "A piece of flint or petrified rock?"

As she spoke the girl moved over to the stand and picked up the fragment. It was red clay and rock fragments mixed. Moreover it was molded into a peculiar shape. Turning it over in her hand Barbara realized that it was mud that had stuck to the instep of a shoe. Next she noted that it was the right size to have fallen from the sole of the high-topped boots she was wearing. Lifting her right foot, she placed the fragment against her heel. It fitted.

RAISING her eyes she found Ariel watching her with great intentness. Why should there be a piece of dried mud from the heel of her shoe in the Harper house, and why should the boy be so interested in having her discover it? She voiced the first question aloud and Ariel wriggled before replying, "Reckon Mark thinks quite a lot of you, saving things that way."

But the girl was scarcely listening. Already her mind was off on another clue. When could she have picked up this red material? Now she had it. On the morning when Mark Harper had rescued her from the mesa. There was no other place she had been where there was such soil. And it could not have fallen off that drizzly morning and retained its shape. Patently this piece had been beneath her foot long enough to be thoroughly packed and hardened prior to dropping off.

"Oh!" The suddenness with which she remembered a past incident, almost too trivial to be noted at the time, was responsible for the exclamation.

While sitting in the hotel at Spanishville talking to Mr. Bobson, something had dropped. She had heard the faintest, tiniest of thuds and had vaguely wondered at the origin. Now she knew. It was the clay from her shoe. Harper had come in later and found it—and had deducted much from that small discovery. And, as a consequence, Mr. Swensen was slow in returning to the heart of Little Egypt. She flushed both at the knowledge that her real business in the town was known and at what Harper must be thinking of her.

TURNING her face so that Ariel might not witness her chagrin, she laid the tell-tale bit of mud back in its place. Hardly had she finished when there was another series of barks, followed by the

sound of masculine voices. Ariel, exhibiting remarkable poise for one so young, went to the door and flung it open. On the threshold stood Mr. Bobson.

"You travel early," stated the banker in an irritated voice, and started to step inside.

"Hold on a minute!" ordered Ariel. "I haven't invited you in yet. Until I do, you stay out!"

In one quick jump the boy had sprung to the wall and jerked down a rifle which was now poked at Bobson's middle with the hammer thumbed back to full cock.

The banker had stopped with a suddenness that shook the hat upon his head.

"It's all right, Ariel," called a second voice and a medium-statured man in worn clothing came in sight. "You can let Mr. Bobson in," this newcomer continued, "I'll vouch for him."

Ariel relaxed and some of the steelly glitter left his eyes.

"Hello, Sheriff Porter. I didn't know you was there. I guess if you say it's all right to let the thief inside, I'll have to do it."

Barbara Bently found herself bewildered by the change in Ariel. A little before he had been a smiling, soft-spoken boy. Now he had become a man, hard-faced and sure of himself.

BACKED by the presence of the officer, Bobson pushed past the lad, red-faced and choleric. Behind him strolled Sheriff Porter, a tired man, and thin—worn down by the vicissitudes of fifty years of strenuous existence in a hard land. The hair that still clung to the slopes of his high dome was gray, the skin upon his face shaded from dark oak along the ridges of the many folds and wrinkles to a pale cream in the protected hollows. His straggly mustache was brown at the tips as though seared by the hot winds that had blown across his face. The blue eyes were bleaching into a neutral shade, but from them looked a forceful mind, resolute and just.

"Ariel," the officer was saying as he sat down and hung his hat upon an angular knee, "there's no use in your exploding that way. Even supposing you are justified in feeling like you do, you only burn yourself up when you let go of your temper."

Ariel did not answer but stood at one side of the room, his hands still clutching the gun while he watched Bobson with repressed but virulent animosity.

The banker chose to ignore the youth entirely and addressed himself to the girl. "Heard from Mr. Swensen yet?"

"No."

"Why are you here at this house?" was the next chopped inquiry.

"Asking about Mr. Swensen and Mr. Harper," Barbara answered quietly.

"Asking about them? Heavens, girl! We want more than asking. It's time for action. I send you out here, and what do I learn from you? Nothing. I send Mr. Swensen out and what does he accomplish? Nothing. What's the matter? Too busy enjoying the mountain air and getting further along with your romance?"

Barbara Bently thought of the sister helpless in St. Mark's Hospital and held back the angry retort on the tip of her tongue. Bobson glowered at her as though he would like to bite.

When she failed to speak, he launched another question. "You said you'd been questioning this young bush colt——"

"Mister," Ariel broke out, "if you call me any more names here in mine and Mark's house, I'm going to put a hole in you—sheriff or no sheriff!"

THERE was no doubting the ring of fearless sincerity in the lad's voice.

Bobson whirled as though struck. "Sheriff, look after that—that boy. It's your business," he barked.

"Don't try to tell me my duty," Porter answered mildly. "I've been toting my badge too long to need instructing. I have no grounds for laying hands on young Harper. Of course, if he kills you for insulting him in his own house, I'll have to

arrest him for murder. But that won't do you a lot of good. I advise talking civil, if you are forced to address the boy."

Bobson switched back to the girl again. "What did you find out?" he snarled.

"Nothing," answered Barbara. "I've tried but I can't find out a thing."

"Do you think this boy knows?"

"If he does, he won't tell."

Bobson swung toward the youth. "Kid," he exclaimed, "we need badly to find your brother at once."

Ariel stared at the banker with impudent defiance. "Why are you stickin' around here then?"

Barbara could hear the disapproving whistle of wind in Bobson's throat. "You don't understand," he rumbled. "We're strangers and don't know the country."

"You came with the sheriff, didn't you? He knows it—knows it better than most anyone."

"Excepting your brother Mark," the officer observed mildly, "Mark probably understands these hills better than any three or four men living."

BOBSON'S voice took on a wheedling note as he continued the conversation. "Sure, Mr. Porter knows Little Egypt but that doesn't help so much in locating a man when you don't know what direction he's gone. Look here, Ariel—that's the name, I guess—you tell me where to find your brother, and you'll be doing him a big service."

"Would I?" inquired the youth, looking at the sheriff.

"I'm not in a position to answer that," replied the officer. "You'll have to make your decisions without help from me."

Bobson glanced at the sheriff with a sneer on his features. "A fine assistant you make! A lot you care about justice! Why don't you back a man up?"

"I'm too old to start telling anything but the truth," answered Porter. "Right now it's like I said. I don't know whether it would be better for Harper if he were to talk with you or not."

Bobson snorted his disgust. "If Mr. Porter doesn't know, I do," he assured the boy brusquely. "Look at this."

A roll of bills had appeared in the white-knuckled hand. The dish-faced custodian of the greenbacks flicked a note from the roll and the other three in the room plainly saw the "Fifty" printed on the crinkly paper as the banker held it up for the boy's inspection.

"That's yours," he said, "if you'll tell me where your brother is. And here's another like it if you'll lead me to Mr. Swensen. How about it? You're ready to go now, aren't you?" Bobson's smile was the essence of gracious condescension.

Ariel's face changed expression not one whit. The boyish form and downy, adolescent cheeks were still as statuary. His answer came slowly and insultingly. "What would be the good of taking money from you for anything? You'd want it back with interest inside of a week to help pay off the notes."

Bobson's face went black as bituminous smoke. He hadn't expected this.

"Sheriff," he bleated, "make this young w——"

The hammer on Ariel's gun clicked ominously. The banker backed up and said, "Tell young Harper that he's got to talk, Porter."

"Why has he got to talk?" demanded that gentleman. "Nobody's been accused of any crimes. No one's lined up for arrest. If they were, Ariel wouldn't have to talk unless he wanted to—not until placed on the witness stand."

Bobson's hands went up in a gesture of futile wrath. "But there are going to be people arrested, Porter. Before we leave

here there will be—and on justifiable grounds."

"And if there are I'll make the arrest or arrests," the sheriff assured him quietly. "But remember that what I am here for is to see that there is no violence connected with the check-up of the stock."

"Porter, I believe you're in sympathy with these law-breaking savages!"

THE sheriff's eyelids drooped, partly to conceal the resentment engendered by the banker's statement. Now he spoke slowly, icily.

"There is no law against sympathizing with folks who are getting a raw deal. My oath of office doesn't require that I have to think contrary to my conscience, even if sometimes I'm compelled to act that way. And folks out here are not savages nor law-breakers. Not yet they're not. But, Bobson, if you Richglen boys push them hard enough, they will become law-breakers, in which case it will be better for you and any of your helpers to be a long, long ways off."

"Bah!" snorted Bobson. "You and your whiskers both belong to a past generation. Men settle their disputes in court now."

"Some men may. But the men of Little Egypt won't—not when they know that the court will be bought in advance."

Bobson's face became suffused with anger. He seemed unable to speak for a moment, then burst out, "Porter, this is going to cost you dear!"

The sheriff nodded. "My job, I suppose. All right, take it. I'm getting tired of riding over these rocks anyhow."

"You can hand in your resignation any time!" snapped the banker.

"I could, but I won't. I'm anxious to see how this cattle fuss works out. Ariel, what's your dog barking at this time?"

The boy stepped quickly to the window. "It's the kind of noise he makes when there's a skunk around the place," stated the boy, "but all I can see is a fellow comin' up on foot. He kind of looks like the man you've been wantin' to see."

A great curiosity, coupled with apprehension, sent Barbara hurrying to a place beside Ariel. The evidence of her eyes was hard to believe, yet undoubtedly that slow-moving form limping up the path was Victor Swensen.

WHEN the sheriff and Bobson stepped out to meet him, Swensen showed but the mildest interest in their presence, and Barbara realized with twinges of compassion that the normally alert lawyer was practically dead on his feet.

"What's happened? Where you been?" barked the banker.

Swensen viewed his employer from between enflamed lids that veiled haggard, bloodshot eyes.

"Give me a drink," he stated wearily. "Maybe then I can talk."

"Better get him inside on a bed," suggested the sheriff. "He's ready to keel over. Catch hold of his arm, Bobson."

Swensen's feet stumbled on the step and he would have fallen had it not been for the support of the sheriff and the banker. Inside the cabin he dropped upon the bed with a sigh of relief.

"Where have you been, Swensen?" It was the banker again.

But Porter interrupted him. "Maybe you'd better let me do a little questioning, Mr. Bobson. This is a sort of unusual case. Men don't ordinarily come staggering in afoot in this country. More often, if they lose their horses, they don't come in at all. Where did you start from, Swensen?"

"Over east on a mesa where Harper's got some cattle."

"How come you'd been there so long?"

"Harper kidnapped me." Swensen's statement was matter-of-fact and devoid of all embellishment, yet it seemed to Barbara that the three words were freighted with a heavier burden of animosity than any she had ever heard.

"Kidnapped you, did he?" Bobson fairly chortled with delight. "I told you,

Sheriff, there would be grounds for arrests."

"Let's have all the facts before we get excited," answered Porter. "How come you was kidnapped? I understood you went away with Harper willing enough."

"Who told you that?"

"Mrs. Hearn at the hotel."

"Mrs. Hearn gets badly mixed up sometimes," commented Bobson. "I talked with Mr. Hearn just a minute before I left and he said that he was sure his wife had somehow got confused and said things she didn't mean. He stated that he felt certain she would admit she had been mistaken on that point."

PORTER glanced sharply at the banker. "And what is Mr. Hearn's and his wife's opinion now?"

"That Mr. Swensen was tricked into this."

"That's it! That's it exactly," broke in Swensen. "I was fooled into going out to look at some cattle supposed to be only a mile or so from the Hearn place."

"Have you any proof of that?" quizzed Porter. "A person needs a witness for an affair of this kind."

Swensen started to say, "The Hearns," but the banker stopped him with a sharp shake of the head. Swensen hesitated and glanced about him, when his eyes met Barbara's.

"Sure I've got a witness," he laughed. "Miss Bently heard him make the offer on the road from Spanishville.'

Barbara felt the eyes of everyone in the room boring into her. Bobson laughed throatily with a relieved note to his merriment.

"Of course Miss Bently's backing will be enough."

"Will you swear that Mr. Harper kidnapped Mr. Swensen, Miss Bently?" asked Porter.

"I can't," said Barbara. "I heard Mr. Harper offer to allow Mr. Swensen to go with him but that was all. And it was definitely understood at the time that the trip would take days. I'm afraid that Mr. Swensen's hardships have made him forget things."

Swensen half lifted himself from the bed in amazement. Bobson glared at his secretary in astonished incredulity. A low chuckle escaped the sheriff and the sound seemed to goad the banker like a sharp spur.

"Porter," he barked, "would it be possible for me to have a few minutes alone with Miss Bently and Mr. Swensen?"

"It's all right with me, providing Ariel don't mind."

"I don't care how much they talk to each other, Mr. Porter," answered the boy. "I'd rather be outside than in anyhow, if they're goin' to stay here."

Barbara flushed at the bald statement which seemed to place her in the same category as her confederates. Did Ariel actually feel this way about her even after she had stood out for Harper?

With a brusk motion of the hand the banker dismissed the sheriff and the boy. When the door was closed, he whirled toward the girl.

"Miss Bently," he clipped, "have you ever heard of such a thing as loyalty?"

"To what?" murmured the girl.

"To your employer," snapped the banker. "Why didn't you back me in this matter?" If you had, we could have landed Mr. Harper in a legal mess that would have prevented his doing further damage out here."

"But Mr. Harper did tell Victor that it would take days to make the trip, and still he was glad to accept."

"But just the same," said Swensen, "Harper, to all intents and purposes, kidnapped me. He had me taken out there after dark and refused to allow my return. Oh, he said I could go if I wanted to, but he knew that I couldn't find the trail. I did, finally, of course, but it was an accident and I had to walk forty miles in tight boots."

"So you see," observed Bobson, "you could have backed us up on the kidnapping

and still have done Harper no injustice. And you would have helped us a lot. Don't you value your job, Miss Bently?"

BOBSON had a way of expressing much that was not actually stated. His present inquiry included Barbara's responsibility to her invalid sister. It probed into the matter of her finances and what she would do without work. It implied that while a girl of her ability could doubtless get employment of some kind, it would be a miracle if the financial returns were half what she received at present. Now he was waiting for an answer—waiting in the mood which made him most dreaded. Cool, calculating and unhurried he stood there, the knuckles of one hand drumming upon the stand where Barbara had found the piece of clay that had fallen from her boot.

"I—of course I value my job," Barbara found herself saying, "and I've tried to be——"

"Now don't bother with that!" interrupted the banker. "You've been worth what I paid, or I shouldn't have given it. But there's another side to the picture. That's the matter of loyalty. An employee owes it to the employer, and your failure to give it this time was over mere technical points."

"Mr. Bobson," said the girl, "I don't consider that the truth is ever a mere technical point. As to what I owe, Mr. Harper also has a considerable debt charged against me. He saved my life."

"All right, all right!" barked the banker. "Have it your own way—only don't keep paying interest on this debt. From now on you are working for me—all the time!"

"You are moving me away, then?"

"I am not. I'm keeping you here."

"But there is nothing that I can do."

"You only surmise that. I want you, Miss Bently, to get on just as good terms with everyone as possible. I want you to find out all you can about the past of these men most concerned in fighting our efforts to clear up this cattle situation. That's a big order, and it includes Harper. If the cattlemen are going to use underhand methods, we'll reciprocate. And please remember that I'm insisting on results from now on. Do you understand?"

"I think I do."

"Fine. And now, if you will go out and join the sheriff and the Harper youngster, I've a little more to say to Swensen."

Alone Bobson looked long at his subordinate before his face wrinkled into a derisive, yes, sneering smile.

"Proud of yourself, I suppose," he observed. "Feel like you're a hero to have found your way out at all."

SWENSEN made no answer, and Bobson continued, "Victor, I'm disgusted with you. I've held you up to our directors as a man of guts and brains. You've come out here and let this man make a monkey of you and the Richglen Bank. Most men would fire you under these circumstances, but I won't. You, with the sheriff's assistance, are going to finish this count. After that it's going to be your job to get these cattle out of here. If you fail, the Lord help you. I've got it fixed so that I can break you wide open any day I see fit. And I'll do it, too, if you don't deliver the goods."

"Harper's a bad man to fight," said Swensen.

"Afraid of him?"

"No."

"If he gives you too much trouble, have him put out of the way. There's surely some one in here who dislikes him enough to put a bullet in him from a distance, if paid properly. Now don't go so white around the gills, man. This is war.

There are fortunes at stake on our getting possession of this country. Better lay one mischief-maker away than to have twenty good men killed."

"You mean that?"

"Absolutely."

Swensen rose from the bed as though new life had come to him with the statement. Swiftly he held out his hand to the banker. Silently they shook and as they did so, a satisfied smile showed on Swensen's broad features.

"I was afraid you wouldn't stand for anything that strong, chief."

"I won't—not until it's proved necessary. But before I'll fail in making these cattle foreclosures, I'll go any length. But remember—if you are forced to exterminate him—see that you handle the situation smoothly. The sheriff is a friend of Harper's. A slip on your part would have ugly consequences. Now then, I've got to get started for Spanishville. I'd like to stay out here and see this business through, but I have to make a trip to New York. When I return, I expect you to have matters here settled up the way we want them!"

Chapter IX

TWO KINDS OF FIGHTING

MARK HARPER observed the stir at Little Egypt's store with surprise. He had not expected that much of a crowd about the tiny, weatherbeaten emporium of trade and gossip. Usually when the men of the valley were busy with the fall roundup not more than one or two saddle horses were to be seen in front of the establishment. Now, however, there were rigs varying from dilapidated buggies to broken-down wagons ranged along the hitching rail or standing beneath the cottonwoods of the Hearn place. Between the vehicles there was a constantly shifting swarm of dogs, colts and ragged children—all of which signified that the degenerate, inbred Buckner-Carter clan from the head of the valley were in town on one of their infrequent shopping trips.

As Harper rode closer more intimate details of the backwoods delegation stood out in stark relief. Gaunt and, in many cases, crippled horses; dirty, vermin-infested quilts thrown over broken seats; baling wire festooned wheels with the tires threatening to fall from the broken, shrunken felloes; lank, slatternly women, devoid of hope; whimpering infants; stoop-shouldered, furtive men in patched overalls and denim shirts, who either lounged about the store front or took council with their wives while the juice of freshly purchased eating tobacco trickled from the corners of their mouths—all these inanimate and living examples bespoke the caliber of the clan.

Suddenly a door slammed at the Hearn house and Ariel's lithe young figure flew across the wooden porch with Mr. Hearn in pursuit. The youth went down the stairs three steps at a jump and, racing to the gate, vaulted it. On the other side he ran for his sleek buckskin saddler which was altogether out of keeping with the animals tied about it.

In looking back Ariel collided with a raw-boned boy, red of hair and mean of eye. Instantly the red-head, who was both larger and older than Ariel, hit the latter with his clenched fist. The blow glanced along the younger Harper's cheek. Ariel was taken by surprise but, on realizing what had happened, shook the black hair back from his forehead and rushed the red-head.

Dogs yelped, children screeched and the lounging Buckner men cursed delightedly as the combatants swept into the road, a compact, swiftly whirling human tornado. Mark Harper reined up his horse and watched the scene with appreciative eyes. The red-head was using fists, knees and teeth in his efforts to conquer his black-haired antagonist. Ariel, however, was restricting his efforts to results obtainable from a dazzlingly swift barrage of flying knuckles. Clear across the street they

fought without a single let-up in Ariel's offensive.

"Hit him, Hank!"

"Pull his hair out!"

"Gouge his glim!"

WITH such advice the Buckners urged their champion to yet greater efforts. The boy responded by bringing up a leg and kicking Ariel in the stomach. For a second the boy faltered. Then it was that Mark's voice reached him clear and strong.

"Go it, kid! No Harper ever let a little thing like that stop him!"

The color returned to the boy's face. The arms that had wrapped protectingly about his middle came up again and he sprang at the leering Hank like a catamount. This time they fell and rolled over in the dirt, while the dust rose in a choking cloud about them.

"Mr. Harper, you must stop this!"

Mark turned in the saddle to find Barbara Bently looking at him with excited face.

"Why?"

"You don't need to ask that question!" flashed the girl. "It's brutal and degrading!"

"Perhaps. But it's also educational," replied the man. "Ariel got into this and the only thing to do is to let him work it out for himself."

"But that big boy will half kill him!"

Harper shook his head. "You'd be surprised how tough that kid is. It's in the breed. Don't worry about Ariel."

"Hey, you! Get off there! Pull him loose, Zed!" A confusion of angry voices came from the ring about the fighters.

"Sorry," said Harper, "but I've got to horn in and see that Ariel gets fair play."

Touching the black with his reins, he urged the animal through the crowd about the combatants. As he did so a huge, brick-haired, furnace-featured man seized hold of Ariel's leg and was hauling him free of his blubbering opponent. Instantly the boy whirled and launched himself at the man, striking him in the face.

"Blast it! I'll learn you to hit me," bawled the man. "You think you can chaw up my boy and then eat me, hey? I'll lambast the life out o' ye, ye little devil!"

"No, you won't, Tate!" Harper broke in crisply. "Your kid started the fight. Leave Ariel alone!"

"The hell I will!" shouted Tate Buckner. "Come on, fellers! Let's clean 'em both! Mark here's the feller that accused us of stealin' cattle last winter. Grab him, boys!"

As he shouted Tate Buckner's big hands were clutching at Harper's clothing in an attempt to haul the rider from his seat. The owner of the Skillet Ranch bent forward in the saddle. One of his arms straightened out and the tightly balled bunch of knuckles at its end crashed against Buckner's jaw. The big fellow swayed backwards, then crumpled into the arms of a waiting kinsman.

A chorus of angry yells came from the Buckners who surged forward only to stop before the glittering menace of a revolver that had suddenly appeared in Harper's hand.

"Stand back!" ordered the rancher. "I like a joke as well as the next one, but this has gone a little too far. Ariel, get your horse. We'll be going. Make way for him, men!"

Muttered threats growled through the crowd but a pathway opened before the boy who walked swiftly to the buckskin, slipped the reins over its head and swung gracefully into the saddle Then he glanced inquiringly at his brother.

"Ride on slow," ordered Harper, "I'll catch you in a minute."

AS THE boy left the crowd the grumblings grew louder. Then, as Harper continued to sit stolidly among them, the gun still drawn, the protests died. For perhaps a minute longer the rancher remained motionless watching them; then when the circle about him had dispersed,

he slipped the weapon back into its holster and rode leisurely after the boy. In doing so he passed by Barbara Bently still standing in the road, white and startled.

To her, Harper tipped his hat and said, "I'm going to give my kid brother a lecture."

The girl flushed slightly. "You realize, then, that it's wrong?"

"Certainly. The boy should have understood that the odds were all against him."

"Oh!" The disappointment that she felt prompted a barbed rejoinder. "I suppose that grandstanding with your gun was all done to impress me, Mr. Harper."

"You're mistaken, Miss Bently," the rancher assured her gravely. "A man can never afford to pull a weapon on a crowd for effect."

"You mean that you would have shot if they had come on?"

"Of course. The instinct for self-preservation is exceptionally strong in us Harpers. Good-by. I want to keep track of Ariel."

"Kid," reproved Mark when he overtook his brother, "you ran big chances mixing in the middle of that whole Buckner gang."

Ariel grinned at him from between swollen lips. "Guess I did, Mark, but it made me so hoppin' mad that I didn't stop to think."

"I know," nodded Harper; "I got myself in the same kind of a jam a few times myself when I was your age—and there wasn't anyone around to haul me out. The maulings I took taught me a lot. But see here, kid, how comes it that you were running from the Hearn porch with Hearn after you? Playing some fool joke?"

"Nope."

"What was it then?"

"You'll be sore if I tell."

"I'll be sorer if you don't."

Ariel squirmed uneasily in the saddle. "All right, Mark; while I was in the store I heard Hearn step up to Miss Bently and shove his wizened little mug up close to her ear. Then he started that bass whisperin' of his. He said, Miss Bently there's a feller here now that can give you the low-down on most of the skullduggery in these parts. He knows a lot about Fitkin that Fitkin would give most anything to keep from having leak out."

"What was it he knew?"

"Give me time, Mark. Miss Bently asked who the man was and Hearn said, It's old Dan Buckner and I sent him over to the house to wait till you got there, Miss Bently turned and went over to Hearns, and pretty soon I sneaked round through them thick bushes at the back of the house and crawled under the high part of the side porch. The outside door was open and there was a board off so I could see and hear most anything. Old Dan seemed kind of nervous and hunched himself up like he was afraid of all them walrus-whiskered men in those pictures that's hanging on the wall. Miss Bently set just as far away from him as she could and asked what he had to tell. Say, Mark, are you sore?"

"Go on and finish your story!" snapped his brother.

FOR an instant the boy hesitated, then continued, "It was a funny thing but Miss Bently acted like she didn't want to hear what old Dan had in his craw, but still she come on over to listen. Women are sure funny that way!"

"They're funny a lot of ways! Go on. What did Dan tell her about Fitkin?"

"He told her that Fitkin had been in jail years ago for horse-stealin' and that he had jumped his jail sentence. Miss Bently asked if he was sure of it, and he said he was just as sure as he was that he was alive—that he knew where two other men were that would tell her the same thing."

"Is that all?"

"No, it ain't. Dan told her things about other people out here. None of it was as bad as that, though."

"I mean was there any more about Fitkin? Did Dan tell Miss Bently those names?"

"Sure. My gosh, Mark, but you look mad!"

"Why wouldn't I be?"

The boy eyed his older brother keenly. "I don't know why you should be so all-fired sore at me for listenin' to something you was so curious to hear about yourself!" he stated with some spirit. "You sure pumped it all out of me!"

Mark Harper's features relaxed slightly. "I am sore, kid, but not particularly so at you. Under ordinary circumstances it would be rotten to go sneaking around people's houses and listening to what they said. This time, though ——" he broke off and reined his horse up sharply.

"What you goin' to do?"

"I'm going back to talk to Miss Bently. You go on home and start supper. I'll be there as soon as I can."

THE black was sweating when the owner of the Skillet Ranch slid from his back at the Hearn gate and strode swiftly up the walk and on to the squeaking porch. The tattoo that his knuckles beat upon the door panel was at once a summons and a challenge.

For a time there was no answer. Then Barbara Bently opened it herself and stood smiling at him, her slim figure wrapped in a clinging, bright patterned dressing gown that somehow accentuated the soft fullness of her breast and throat. The sunlight streaming through a window on the west reflected upward from the wide red collar and tinted the small, partially concealed ears a delicate, shell pink. The wavy brown hair glowed with warm fire that reminded Harper of the way autumn woods sometimes gleamed when washed with sunlight, while beneath the fringe of her gown he could see the rosy tips of small, bare feet.

Barbara Bently smiled at him. "You wanted to see Mr. Hearn? Won't you please come in? I'll call him."

"I wanted to see you," stated Harper.

"Then why do you look so disappointed?"

"I'm—I'm not. Only you seem different than when I've seen you before. It's harder to talk to anyone who looks like you do now than it is to a woman in boots and riding breeches."

"I suppose you mean that I look more intelligent dressed that way. But, excuse me for a minute and I'll come back in real masculine attire."

"Don't bother, please. I would like to ask a few questions but they won't take long, Miss Bently, why are you spending your time digging into the private affairs of my personal friends?"

BARBARA sat down in one of the old plush rockers and rested her bare feet on the front round. Her whole attitude and appearance made Harper's task as difficult as possible.

Then, too, she smiled as she spoke. "There is no special reason why I should answer that question at all, Mr. Harper, but don't you think that, after all, the private side of people's lives is the most interesting?"

"And should be left strictly alone," retorted Harper.

"That is a debatable point," countered the girl. "First of all one must decide what is really one's own personal affair. So often, you know, our acts affect others."

"Miss Bently," exclaimed Harper hotly, "there is no use of our beating around the bush this way. You are a hired spy of Arthur Bobson's."

"Now please don't be so dramatic about it. You've known it ever since the day we rode into Spanishville together. If the

idea had seemed terrible, why were you so perfectly charming on the way out—and afterwards?"

"I didn't know that your activities included prying into people's characters."

"And I didn't know that your title of king was backed by such high-handed and lawless actions as kidnapping people. It seems we've both learned considerable this last while."

"We have been merely fighting for our rights."

"And that," said Barbara, "is exactly what Mr. Bobson claims he is doing."

"See here," Harper burst out, "what's the idea of gathering this mud?"

"I think you should ask that question of Mr. Bobson. As an employee I should be violating a business trust to confide in you, Mr. Harper. It wouldn't be either sporting or ethical, you know."

"Good Lord, do they apply such words as ethics to affairs like this?"

Barbara flushed. "You are trying to confuse my statements."

"All right, all right. We'll say nothing about that side of it. But will you answer two or three questions for me?"

"If I can decently. If not, I'll say so."

"First, then, do you intend to turn over this information about Fitkin to Bobson?"

"Certainly. I'll either do it myself or through Mr. Swensen."

"And what will Bobson do?"

"That is one of the things that I'm not at liberty to speculate on."

Harper nodded. "I was afraid you'd feel that way. Now I'm going to ask you something that hurts. But first I'm going to tell you a little about Fitkin myself—things that most people don't know or mention. Some people have it in for him because he seems a bit stiff and hard to get acquainted with. He can't help that. It's his nature, but once he does accept anyone as a friend, you couldn't find a more companionable man anywhere."

Barbara smiled. "I believe that, Mr. Harper, and I think he did what you might call accept me very soon. At least the first night he became loquacious and told some simply marvelous lies."

Harper grinned. "He's been known to do that. They are simply in the nature of entertainment, and Tom never intends that they be taken for anything else."

"I hope you will pardon me for being skeptical on that point, but go on with your story."

"This horse business," Harper stumbled on. "I'll admit that it is true he was sentenced for stealing one and also that he lit out and never completed his term. But also it's true that he really owned the horse he stole. It happened in Arizona. He paid a big rancher for the horse but neglected to get a bill of sale or to have witnesses to the transaction. Almost as soon as Fitkin got the mare it began to show signs of having real racing speed. Then this big shot rancher took the horse away from Fitkin—claimed he'd never bought it. Fitkin went back and tried to take the animal after dark. They caught him. That's how he landed in the pen."

"It's very interesting. How did you get these details?"

"Fitkin told me in all seriousness—and his word is good. Now then, Miss Bently, you mentioned believing that you owed me something. If you'll just forget this business, I'll always feel in debt to you."

BARBARA BENTLY turned and walked away to the window where she stared out at the country lane which was also the main street of the little six house town of Little Egypt. Behind her she could sense that Harper was excited, worried. What she wanted more than anything in the world at that moment was to reassure him. But when she closed her eyes she could see a hospital with a pale replica of herself reading a letter saying that there were no more funds forthcoming. That was what quitting Bobson meant and she could not play double with the man while in his pay.

"Well?" Harper inquired sharply.

Barbara turned to meet his gaze. "I'm sorry," she said with forced lightness, "awfully sorry. But there is really nothing that I can do about it. You see yours and Mr. Fitkin's attitudes toward law and order aggravate the situation. I'm afraid, Mr. Harper, that you'll have to take the consequences——"

The words trailed into nothingness before the fiery anger in Harper's face. He was striding toward her, his spur chains rattling. Now one of his strong hands gripped her by the arm.

"I'd have sworn when I first saw you that you were a thoroughbred. I was still willing to bet on you after I found you were connected with Bobson," he said. "And now—now I come to you, asking only for common decency—and you refuse!"

Barbara's face blanched. The grip upon her arm seemed about to crack the bones. She bit her lip to keep from crying out. Then abruptly the man shoved her from him as though she were something foul that nauseated him. Whirling on his heel he clumped from the room.

As the door closed, Barbara climbed wearily up the stairs toward her room. Harper was right. She was engaged in an unclean business. And the knowledge thereof sickened her—soul and body.

Chapter X

SMOKE?

"GONE!" Anger and disgust fought for supremacy in Swensen's voice.

"Yes, sir," observed the sheriff gently, "they're gone! We can tell by the signs that Coffey's cows were here yesterday but today they're not. If we could find the owner we would demand that he lead us to them, but we can't."

"Any use looking for them?"

"I doubt it, but suit yourself. We're not far from Death Hollow and there's a hundred places within five miles of here where they might be hid and we could hunt for a week before we found them."

"How am I to make the count then?" fumed the lawyer.

"It's goin' to be a proposition calling for strategy," answered the officer. "We can't let folks know where we're headed. If we do, the cows are going to be away visiting or something of the sort every time. We can surprise a bunch now and then and make the count, but it's going to be slow."

"What makes them buck us?" snarled Swensen. "They know we'll get through sooner or later."

"That's right," agreed Porter, "but the men of Little Egypt are noted for being a stubborn bunch. Always fight till the last ditch on every proposition that comes up. If they hadn't, I figure they'd never have made a go of it. What are you going to do the rest of the day?"

Swensen jerked his gold watch from its pocket and, opening the case, glanced at the dial. "Ten o'clock," he snapped, "I suppose the sensible thing to do would be to go back to Hearns, but I'm not going to do it. Think I'll prowl the hills and see what I can see."

"In which case I'll prowl with you," said the sheriff.

Swensen looked displeased. "You don't need to. I won't get lost. I'm no greenhorn, if I was kidnapped. Anywhere I go by daylight with my eyes open, I can find my way out."

"Likely," opined the sheriff, "and still, if you don't mind, I'll amble along with you. It's this way, Swensen. Your sudden change from a cattle inspector to an agent of Bobson's isn't sitting any too well with the folks out here. It's sort of unnatural and unpleasant in their eyes—like say if a trout fly was to turn into a hellgrammite instead of the other way round."

"Who cares whether they like it or not? It won't affect my sleep either way."

"Not unless a man got so peeved he drew down and shot you some time. There's a good many fellows out here that might do it. Old man Fox from Badger Flats, the Clayton brothers up Alder Creek, Storeteeth Joe, Big Ed Drung. Any

of 'em. It's not hard for me to imagine a man's wanting to."

Swensen's answering laugh was nasty. "I comprehend how you feel, sheriff, and it makes it that much more difficult to understand why you stick around. Why don't you let them shoot me? I believe I'd rather take the risk than to stand your company."

"You still don't get my view," observed the officer. "It's not what might happen to you that's worrying me—it's the effect it would have on the citizens of Little Egypt. Especially I'm thinking of Mark Harper. It would be a tragedy for him to suffer for your untimely demise. And Harper wouldn't pot anyone—no matter how he hated him. He'd use his wits in a fight, or his fists—maybe even his gun, but it would be a fair fight. Same about Coffey, Fitkin, Hal Brown or most of the younger men. It's these old-timers that have fought sheep men since early days that's most likely to put you away. They'd figure that it was just as fair as gettin' rid of you as of any other sort of pest. Anyhow Bobson asked that I help you. His desires and my own fit so perfect that you and me are the same as twins for a while."

FROM across the sandstone hills to the left came faint, far-off sounds of barking.

"What do you suppose that is?" asked the lawyer.

"Might be Dan Buckner out after wild cattle," replied the sheriff. "The dogs have got the right bass pitch to their bayin' for bein' his. There's quite a bunch of unbranded stuff over in the hills and some branded stuff that nobody really claims. If the Buckners always got their beef out of that region there never would be any trouble between them and the cattlemen."

"How far is it over to where the dogs are?"

"Mile and a half. Maybe two miles. Wind's right to carry the sound."

"I'd like to go and speak with this Dan Buckner. I've heard quite a bit about him and his hounds. He was in the store several days back talking to Miss Bently, but I didn't get to see him then!"

"All right, we'll hunt him up. Might not be a bad idea either. He could know where some of the ranchers' cows are hid. We'll likely have to walk some getting to him."

HALF an hour later the two horsemen came out in a little gashlike gorge in the sandstone. The noise of barking was nearer now but drifted down from an almost perpendicular mesa ahead.

"Roll off," directed the sheriff, "we use shank's ponies from here on. Keep your eyes peeled for things to grab hold of providin' you slip. It's straight up the rest of the way—maybe even leans out a little bit."

Breathless and amazed Swensen followed the older man up a rocky defile which called for the sort of physical gymnastics usually conceded either to the cat or the simian families. The sheriff leaped from rock to rock with all the nimbleness of a veteran mountain sheep, and the lawyer, his jaws set in dogged determination, followed at his heels. Several times he was compelled to grab at bushes to keep from rolling down the mountain side and, in most cases, found the available supply consisted of scrubby, sharp-thorned wild rose.

Suddenly the wall of rock ahead split and, squeezing through a narrow fissure, they emerged in a cedar dotted basin. Here the chorus of canine sounds rose to bedlam pitch. A cow bawled through the uproar.

A voice shouted, "Get down, Shag! Hold on, Grip, till I get the rope around its neck."

"Hurry," directed Porter. "You'll get to see a new kind of cattle catching if you do."

A minute more and Swensen glimpsed moving figures through the cedars. A few additional steps and he was in position to take in the details of the scene. In a tiny

clearing stood a trembling steer with its head almost to the ground. In front of the cow and crouched until its belly dragged the dirt was a large, heavy-jowled dog, short-haired, loose skinned, big-boned and savage-eyed. For an instant the lawyer wondered that the steer did not charge the hound then, with a shock, he perceived that the dog was holding the steer's nose, and that there was a dribble of blood on the soil between them.

FOR the first time the lawyer found occasion to note the man who was approaching the steer with a rope in his hands. With Swensen watching, the man slipped his hemp around the steer's neck and made it fast. While he worked a second big dog walked round and round the steer, whining eagerly.

"Be your turn next, Shag," chuckled the hunter. "You can't expect Grip to let you nose 'em all. There's slathers left to ketch. We'll just tie this critter up for the time bein'. She ain't overly fat."

"Hello, Dan," greeted Porter as soon as the steer had been safely anchored to the tree.

The hunter whirled as though he had been shot and stood looking at the two newcomers, his rifle held at full cock as he did so.

The officer held up a hand placatingly. "Don't get excited, Dan. I ain't objectin' to your catchin' branded stuff—not in here. It's an outlaw. Anyone can see that. Must be well nigh on to twelve years old. Meet Mr. Swensen. He wants to know if you can tell where he can find Coffey's cattle."

Dan Buckner came slowly forward and Swensen was given opportunity to note some of his physical peculiarities. First of all the man was dirty, dirtier than anyone with whom the lawyer had ever come in contact. Skin, hair and clothing all were streaked with a film of oil-saturated filth that bespoke its age. His finger nails were black and chipped. His mouth shut in a straight line and the twinkle in his light gray eyes appeared humorous until one learned from experience that it was malice which gave them their glint.

"Howdy do, folks! Nope, I can't tell you where Coffey's cows are. Coffey don't have no truck with common folks like me. He's a superior cuss. If I was to set foot on his ground he be likely 'nough to pump lead into me."

Swensen laughed. "I guess he wouldn't go that far. How would you like to look up some of the cattle herds for me down in these parts? I'd pay you well for it."

Buckner shook his head vigorously. "I wouldn't care to traffic with no such business a-tall. I'm not so old, mister. It's the way I've had to live that makes me look that way. And I ain't good enough so that I crave to be took off sudden. I leave the Coffeys, Harpers and such like alone."

"You think it pays to, then?"

Buckner studied the lawyer intently before answering. "Maybe not for folks comin' in with plenty of backin', but the Buckners ain't got no standin'. We ain't even got the consideration showed us that the grouse and deer has. They have closed seasons on them."

Sheriff Porter laughed. "Come on, Dan. You're stuffing, Mr. Swensen. Things aren't half as bad as you say. You get pretty fine treatment on the whole. I've known of Mark Harper's donatin' you folks several beef of a hard winter."

"Him and Fitkin accused me of stealin' cows last year," snapped Buckner, "and we ain't forgettin' it. I told Miss Bently an earful about Fitkin. I wish I knew as much about Harper."

"So do I," Swensen agreed fervently. "I'd like it, though, if you would tell me about Fitkin. You're safe in repeating to me whatever you told her."

BUCKNER nodded. "From what I've heard I guess that's all correct. All right. I don't mind tellin'!"

"I'll just step aside while you do your muck-rakin'," stated the sheriff. "There's something about it that turns my stomach."

"I'm afraid your digestive apparatus is too weak for your job," said the lawyer, "but we won't miss you."

Fifteen minutes later Porter returned. "Through?" he inquired.

"With our chat about Mr. Fitkin, yes," smiled Swensen, "but we're just beginning the day's sport. I'm going out with Mr. Buckner to see his dogs catch another beef or two. It's something new in the way of handling wild stuff. One dog grabs the animal by its nose and holds it while the other hound barks for help. That way, if the catch is made in a favorable location, Mr. Buckner can lead his beef out by its own power—with the dogs' help. Are you going to chaperone me on this trip?"

"I guess not," demurred the officer. "If anything should happen to you while in Buckner's company I wouldn't have a single regret. I'll stay back with the horses."

Victor Swensen listened to the mouthing of the dogs with a feeling of exhilaration. Enough adventures of this sort would tend to take something of the curse from his enforced stay in cliff-palisaded Little Egypt. When he separated from Dan Buckner the latter instructed him to follow the dogs if he heard them barking. Dan had gone to meet Tate Buckner who was also on a hunting trip.

Very well. He was going to follow the dogs and, gripping tightly the new long-barreled revolver that as yet he had scarcely used, he ran swiftly through the sand and bitterbrush. Soon he was crashing down a narrow, brush-filled draw with the tongueing of hounds just ahead. He heard an agonized bawling from the quarry, then a renewed crashing in the cedar and mahogany. Apparently the steer was putting up a stiff fight. He wanted to see the finish and dashed on.

Abruptly he was in the open once more and on a narrow rim of rock while the dogs were baying some distance to the left. Swensen halted and glared angrily about him. He felt cheated. The animal had no business holding out this way. His chances of being in at the end were growing smaller.

A dry branch snapped with a pistol-like report out on the edge of the cliff. Swensen stared and perceived movement behind a screen of cedars. The steer had outwitted the dogs or perhaps had given them such a trouncing that they were glad to let him go and run yapping down a fake trail. Swensen experienced a thrill. If he could get this steer—prove to Buckner that his dogs were not infallible—there would be a good joke in it. Anyhow he wanted to try his gun again. Why not throw some lead into the cedar? He might bring the beast down.

Cr-a-ack!

The report of the revolver reverberated along the cliff while from the cedars came a cry that froze the blood in Swensen's veins. That was no steer! He had played hob. Heavily he ran toward the trees, his smoking weapon in his hand.

At the very edge of the precipice a man was writhing in terrible agony, with huge, red-haired hands clamped across his gaunt stomach. At the sight of Swensen an inarticulate cry of pained fury escaped his lips—then a last convulsive kick took him over the rim.

Shaking with excitement the lawyer crept to the edge. Twenty feet below him the wounded man hung to a stump of broken cedar, partially supported by a foot-wide ledge of rock. Just below was a fifteen foot fall, ending in a deep, dark crevice. Once a man toppled into the crack, he would never be found—unless he still had strength to cry out.

THE man was badly hit. Blood was gushing from his head. One eye seemed to be gone and the red fountain sprayed downward on the mouth from which came horrible guttural sounds. The man was going to fall. But supposing some bush or mass of vines growing in the crevice should break his fall? Supposing he lived and made uproar enough to attract the attention of Dan Buckner?

Dan would look for him. This must be Tate Buckner that he had shot.

Swensen looked cautiously around him. There was neither sight nor sound of any living being. The barking of the dogs was now far to his left. He deliberated no longer. Quickly, yet with due attention to accuracy, he leveled his gun on the wretch below. Now he saw the broken, agonized face over the sights. Firmly he pressed the trigger. Smoke belched from the gun muzzle.

When it cleared, Buckner was gone.

For a time the lawyer squinted downward into the crack. He could see nothing, nor was there sound. Satisfied he drew back and, with a queer, mirthless chuckle, holstered his weapon. He had been hankering for excitement. Now he had had it. No danger of his being discovered. No chance that the body would be found.

Well, people were predicting that times were going to be plenty tough before this cattle deal was over. If they were right, this was the proper training and Swensen found himself wishing that it were Mark Harper lying in the crevice below.

IT WAS at this point that Swensen became curious as to his exact location and glanced downward into the gorge beneath. What he saw sent him staggering backward. He was looking into Death Hollow—looking at the very tree where Harper claimed the apparition had been seen, and now above the tree a great Indian head floated in the haze. The lawyer's teeth bared in a snarl—a whimper of dread escaped him. Then suddenly he laughed. A gust of wind tore the head to fragments. It had been smoke and his own imagination had supplied the details to make it real. He had better be getting away from this spot before Dan Buckner found him.

Accordingly he strode rapidly away, conscious as he walked of a queer conflict in his emotions. At times he felt a savage ecstasy—a certainty that he could triumph over any obstacle, but again he experienced a dread such as he had never known. That face with the eye shot away looking up at him—the blood bubbles about the twisting mouth——

"What's the matter? Hain't had a fit, have ye?"

Swensen, brought back into the realm of reality by the question, found Dan Buckner staring at him. The hunter was leaning on his rifle with a dog standing on either side.

The lawyer smiled foolishly and shook his head. "I'm all right. Got a bad tumble back aways. Lost track of the dogs. Did you get the steer?"

"You bet, but I ain't seen hide nor hair o' Tate. You ain't neither, have ye?"

Swensen shook his head.

"Guess he must have taken one o' his fits and started off for home," observed Buckner. "Well, I'll fix him. I'll leave the critters roped here, and he and some of the other boys can get 'em. I've done my share ketchin' the brutes."

Swensen nodded agreement. "Certainly you have but don't you want to look around for him a bit? I'll help you. He might still be here."

Buckner shook his head. "Naw, he ain't anywheres around. If he was, the yammerin' of the dogs would fetch him sure. He's gone."

Swensen breathed a deep breath of relief. Luck was with him. Later when Tate Buckner failed to return, Dan would remember his willingness to look for the missing one. Why not make his position still stronger?"

"I saw another fellow," he observed casually, "he was on horseback down close to where we left our horses."

"That so?" inquired Buckner indifferently, "Who do you reckon it was?"

"It looked quite a bit like Harper, but I'm not sure."

"Could be him easy enough," affirmed Buckner. "He's apt to be down this way any time. Visits Coffey every now and again. Got land down here, too. Well, let's get goin'."

Chapter XI

A HARD ONE TO SWALLOW

THE three black blurs on the Harper porch were the owner and his two friends, Fitkin and Coffey. The last named shifted position with a sigh.

"Seems like I'm all hip bones these days, Can't find a soft board nowhere any more. Reckon all that bear steak pushes me down a bit harder."

Through the open door, light from the quaking asp fire in the cook stove flickered rosily while the coffee pot which still simmered beside the stove pipe scented the chilly air with its spicy fragrance.

"Those steaks," Coffey continued, "was extra tender. A two-year-old brown bear that's fattened up on fish and berries is hard to beat. Grouse are going to be good, too, this fall. I know a pine where about fifty roost nights."

"Shut up, will you? A man can't even think for your continual gabbin'."

"You couldn't anyhow, Tom!" retorted Coffey. "What do you want it quiet for?"

"I like to listen to these little green devils chirpin' in the grass. Funny the little cusses can make such a noise. Sounds kind of melancholy to me."

"Why shouldn't they?" demanded Coffey. "Aren't they going to have the life frosted out of them the first cold night? Don't the idea of havin' the Richglen bunch tryin' to exterminate us financially have a melancholy effect?"

"Why bring that up?" asked Fitken. "Aren't we entitled to a pleasant evening now and then?"

Up the path from the corrals came Ariel, whistling. At the porch he slapped Coffey with his hat, jumped nimbly aside and reaching out a hand quick as a cat's paw, rumpled Fitkin's hair, after which he sat down between them. With his coming, silence descended upon the group.

In the shadows Ariel squirmed—exploded. "Look here, you old batches! No use of your sitting around like Indians whenever I come on the scene. From now on I intend takin' part in your pow-wows."

Coffey had located a mountain rat by noises in leaves beneath the chokecherry tree at the corner of the house. Now he played a brown spray of tobacco juice upon the prowler before answering.

"This here, Ariel, ain't one of these matrimonial discussions you accuse us of havin'. It's a council of war. The whites over in Richglen have sent a war party into our midst. It looks like we'd have to sock the old tomahawks into our war post. But never havin' taken a scalp, you're not eligible."

Ariel smiled into the darkness. "I'd have taken Hank Buckner's the other day if his dad hadn't interfered."

"I heard you got a mite hostile with him," Coffey admitted. "Mark kind of had to step in and help out a bit, didn't he?"

"Uh-huh. I couldn't lick the whole tribe."

"The Buckners was all pretty mad about it," Coffey continued reflectively. "Now they're goggle-eyed because Tate's not been around their camp since he went huntin' with old Dan three days back. Never seen such a change come over a country so quick. Month ago things was peaceable and now hell's boilin' over clean around the top. Them fool Buckners are even hintin' that we made way with Tate, Mark."

HARPER laughed. "Let them hint. No one that counts is going to pay any attention to it. But there's one thing that really is serious for us to think over tonight."

"What's that?"

"Dan Buckner told Miss Bently all about your case, Tom—the horse-stealing business. He's got the details about it down pat. Those that go against you, at least."

The silence from where Tom Fitkin sat became painful. Fitkin had a way of making silence more eloquent than speech.

"Did you talk to her about it?" queried Coffey.

"Yes. Maybe Tom will think I was sort of horning in on his affair but I wanted to stop the report if I could and I couldn't reach Tom at the time."

Still there was no word from Fitkin and again it was Coffey who queried, "What luck did you have?"

"None. That's the reason I sent for you boys. If Swensen gets hold of this—and he will—there's going to be trouble."

"Well, what can we do about it?" probed Coffey.

"It looks to me," answered Harper, "as though Tom had better disappear. You and I can look after his interests here for him. I could——"

"Hold on, Mark!" Fitkin's voice was low, controlled. "I know you mean well plannin' my future this way, but it so happens I've got things mapped different. If I took French leave like you're suggestin', I'd be movin' away from everything that's made life worth livin'. I'm not goin' to do that. I'm through runnin'. Neither am I goin' to be sent to jail. If they try to get me, I'll fight. If I have to I'll take to the hills here with my gun, but I won't be far enough away so that I can't help you when you mix with Bobson's gang."

FITKIN paused, drew a long breath, then continued. "You boys don't need to feel worried about me. You'll both be in just as bad, or worse pickle, before this thing is over. Bobson not only aims to get our land and our stock, but he aims to fix us so we can't squawk about it later on."

"Tom," quizzed Harper, "have you stopped to think that John Porter would have to make the arrest? If he found you, you'd either have to give yourself up or shoot it out with him."

"I know the sheriff's a stickler for his official duty," affirmed Fitkin, "but it so happens that I'm a stickler for my moral rights. I've come to a point where I'm goin' to act accordin' to my lights without being hindered by any man. Porter's a good friend of mine. I'd hate to shoot him, or be shot by him. But I'm standing up for myself and I won't be arrested."

Again the porch was still—so still that the munching of the horses in the corral carried to the ears of the men. Among the katydids new insects had joined the nocturnal chorus until it rose to a shrill, feverish pitch which seemed to cut into the brain with its throbbing premonition of coming disaster.

"That girl—she ain't done this country no good at all," ventured Coffey. "If she'd been a man we'd have found some way of dealin' with her. But what can you do with a woman, pretty as a doe and smart as a whip? I hope you told her what you thought of her, Mark. How did you handle her anyway?"

"That," Harper answered flatly, "is a matter I don't care to discuss."

A surprised whistle escaped Coffey.

"Hear that, Tom? Harper don't care to talk about Miss Bently. Which means that, added to all our other griefs, the king has fallen in love."

"You think that I won't fight just the same?"

"I'm sure you will. But you'll be pulling your heart out doing it. You know Fitkin ought to set up as an oracle. He's been prophesying coming misery and, within a minute after he gets through, you're admitting complications with the enemy's pretty spy."

"Someone's coming," said Fitkin before Harper had time to reply.

OUT at the corral a horse whinneyed and was answered from the gloom along the trail. Old Bounce, the dog, barked a resonant challenge and then a dim, swaying bulk of horse and rider came in sight and moved up to the porch.

"Good evening," the man called curtly. "Is Mr. Harper here?"

The voice was Swensen's, and almost instantly Coffey answered, "Yes, sir, he's here entertaining select company. Mark, was this polecat's name on your guest list tonight?"

"It wasn't," said Harper. "What's your business, Swensen?"

"I want to have a talk with you privately. Believe me, the matter's important."

"I'm willing to listen to what you have to say but I have no secrets from my friends and brother, here."

"Excepting them doing with the unfairer sex," added Coffey.

"All right," replied the lawyer. "If it takes the three of you to make one undersized brain, I'll not kick on the corporation. Would you mind lighting a lamp and talking inside? I always prefer seeing the men I discuss a matter with."

"Tom," observed Coffey as Harper rose to light the lamp, "Mr. Swensen hasn't said a word yet about how he liked our trip."

"Maybe he thinks it's one of those things too wonderful to talk about," opined Fitkin.

"And maybe some day you birds will take a tumble to just how small fry you are," rasped the lawyer. "Step inside now if you want to listen in."

In a moment more four men and a boy were seated about the cabin. Swensen had taken a chair by the table and now he stretched out his legs with an air of utmost nonchalance.

"First off the bat," he began, "now that I've got the three of you together, I want to state that I haven't forgotten about that dirty business you pulled on me a while back. Before I get through I intend to repay it all—together with a mighty high rate of interest."

"How would you like to have me bounce a fist off that underslung jaw of yours?" Coffey inquired indifferently.

SWENSEN smiled. "Nothing would please me more than to have you try. Frankly, before I'd let one of you lay hands on me, I'd shoot. I've heard a lot about you men's dangerous characters, and I've had a taste of your trickiness, but as for being afraid of you in a scrap, that's all bunk. There's just as much scrap in people outside of Little Egypt as in those inside and you can take that any way you like, mental or physical."

There was no doubting the honesty of Swensen's statement. He was not afraid and those who looked at him sensed his sincerity.

"Now then that I've got that point settled, I'll state why I'm here. I've come to tell you that you've got to quit interfering with this cattle count. It's getting late in the fall and I won't stand for any more foolishness."

"What makes you think we've got to let you do anything?" asked Coffey.

"Your friend, Mr. Fitkin, is the main reason," retorted Swensen. "I've got the dope necessary to send him back to the penitentiary for a nice long shift. Worked right it could total up another twenty years. The sheriff's already in Little Egypt. Unless I get your guarantee to help rather than hinder with the count, Porter starts on Fitkin's trail tomorrow. Personally my feeling for Fitkin is such that I'd almost prefer you refused me. Still it's my duty to see that every leverage is used in forcing you men into line."

SILENCE followed this announcement —a silence broken in the end by Fitkin's clearing his throat. "Mr. Swensen, probably like you say, it does take three of us to make an intelligent answer to one of your brain power. But it so happens there's something kind of individual in this

proposition of yours. I like running loose on the range, and I like John Porter. I like both things powerful well, but not enough so I'll let any man of your caliber use them as trading stock."

Swensen's smile was icy. "Suit yourself, Fitkin. Maybe living in a penitentiary would be the same as putting up at a fine hotel for anyone that's spent their time out here. Perhaps I'm going to do you a favor after all. We'll consider the matter closed, then, and Porter will start after you in the morning. I'll instruct him that you intend to resist. Probably he'll be willing to swear in deputies under the circumstances."

"Where would he get them?" demanded Coffey.

"From the Buckners, if nowhere else. They've got dogs that can be used to advantage."

Swensen's last statement brought Fitkin out of his chair. The small, acorn-shaped head shoved forward. The eyes that glared at the lawyer were delirious with hate.

"Just for that I'm going to kill you—you—you——" Fitkin was panting and there was death in his bloodless face.

Swensen laughed. "Can't you find the right word? Maybe Harper can think of one for you. They tell me he's good that way. You're not going to hurt anyone, Fitkin. Neither is Coffey nor Harper. You're all a bunch of bluffers."

Fitkin's hand flashed downward and came up with a gun. Swensen had reached for a weapon but had not even succeeded in drawing it. The fact that he was not killed was entirely due to Harper's flinging himself forward and shoving the muzzle of Fitkin's gun up so that the bullet was buried in the roof.

"You can't do that, Tom," he said, and with a quick, backward flip of Fitkin's wrist, wrenched the gun from his friend's grasp. Turning, he confronted Swensen.

"You had a close call right then," he stated grimly.

THE lawyer's laugh sounded uncertain. "He got his gun quicker than I expected," he answered. "I'd thank you for interfering only I know you did it because you were afraid to have me shot in your house. I think at that, though, that you made a mistake, for I'm going to give you plenty of trouble, Harper."

"There's no use talking about that till it comes," answered the rancher. "Swensen, is your word any good when given?"

The lawyer's face clouded. "My word," he said with dignity, "is never questioned by anyone who knows me."

"I think you're probably telling the truth," conceded Harper. "Most men engaged in shady careers cling to certain virtues. Probably to keep from shooting themselves. You made an offer a few minutes ago. If it's still open and you'll guarantee to stand behind your side of it, I'll promise to help you in any way that I can to make the count. I believe Coffey will, too."

"I certainly will," said Coffey earnestly. "Come on, Tom. Make it unanimous."

"Dogs!" muttered Fitkin. "He'd set dogs on me. Lord, I hate trailin' by dogs, but I won't make a bargain with the devil. And I'm not going to be responsible for your knuckling under to Bobson in any way."

"You're not looking at it right," answered Harper. "The worst that could happen to us out here would be to lose you, Tom. If you want to aid us, do the same as we're doing, agree to help Swensen with his check-up."

FITKIN stared morosely at first one friend, then the other. "You're just trying to get me out of a box," he growled, "and I won't let you do it. Wouldn't promise him anything if I was to be hung tomorrow."

"Swensen," asked Harper, "Coffey and I can give you all the help you need. If we get these cattle rounded up for you to count inside the next five days, will you leave Fitkin alone?"

Swensen rose to his feet and stood before them—his sandy face reddened by the firelight—a strong face and a ruthless one.

"I will," he stated crisply. "It's a sort of satisfaction to see even two of you backing water. But it's only the beginning of what I intend you shall do. The days are coming when you'll be willing to lick my boots if I say to."

Fitkin took two steps forward. "What's the matter with you?" he growled. "Are you so cussed ornery that you're tired of living and too chicken-hearted to commit suicide? Much more of your talk and I'll not be able to keep from shootin' you."

"Forget it, Tom!" said Harper.

SWENSEN laughed derisively. "Splendid team work. You take turns threatening what you're going to do and always one of the others steps in and holds him back. Harper, I need to get that count sent in as soon as possible. If you can't guarantee its completion within five days, all agreements are off."

"I can," said the rancher.

"Then I'll be going." The lawyer's neatly dressed figure passed outside.

With his departure Coffey made a grimace of distaste. "That," he stated, "was pretty hard medicine to swallow and call nice. But he had us. No getting round that. Well, there's a long ride ahead of me yet tonight. Guess I'd better be starting. I'll see that the fellows in my district are properly lined up for Mr. Swensen's visit. So long, Mark. Be good, Ariel."

Fitkin who was already standing, gave an impatient upward jerk to his trousers. "I've got to be shufflin' along, too. Sure appreciate the way you fellows stand back of me. I kind of hate leavin'! Got a feeling like there maybe won't be many more evenings like this. Maybe the katydids will last as long as we do. Mark, your sayin' you'll help with the count don't mean that you're givin' up the fight, does it?"

"No, but we've stalled on that just about as long as we could anyhow. There's a big storm due any day now. When it comes there'll be plenty of snow on the mountain. After that you know how we intend to handle the situation."

"You're right about the storm. That leg I got hurt when the horse fell on me aches like the toothache the last day or two. That's a sure sign the weather's changin'. Well, so long. And don't spend too much time big-brotherin' Ariel from now on. He's growing up fast under the forcing of this foreclosure business. Treat him like a man. He'll measure up with any of us."

The brothers followed their guest outside and waited there until the clop-clop of horses' hoofs had faded into nothingness down the trail. The katydids were shrilling louder than ever and, to escape their noise, Harper stepped through the door with Ariel close behind. Inside he dropped listlessly into a rocker while Ariel sat down across from him, straddle of a low-backed chair, his chin resting on its back.

"Tom's right about my growin up, Mark. Gosh, I like him. And I'm going to fight Bobson's gang to the last ditch."

AS THE boy spoke he gave a quick jerk of the head to toss the black hair back from his eyes—eyes that sparkled with an excited light.

Harper was slow in answering. When he did, it was to say, "Trouble with you, Ariel, is that you don't understand what ugly messes such things grow into. They can sometimes take all the joy out of living. I don't like to see you in it, kid."

"I'm all right, Mark. I kind of like it."

"And that's what I hate most about it," said his brother with some sharpness. "I wish I knew some way of keeping you clear of it. But watch your step and use your brains—all the time." He looked apprehensively at his younger brother.

"Gosh, Mark, but you were quick when you flipped Tom's gun. Why didn't you let him shoot Swensen? I would have."

"It would have been the worst thing that could have happened to any of us."

CHAPTER XII

STILL IN THE RING

THE October air tingled to the tang of frost. The big storm was over and the maples along the creek were a song of scarlet color. On the big mountain to the north the new snow glistened with cold grandeur. From the Hearn porch Barbara Bently surveyed this fresh beauty and realized that she should be uplifted instead of leaden hearted.

A bar of afternoon sunlight shining through the branches of the shedding cottonwoods splintered against the head and shoulders of a rider. It was Harper.

Barbara felt a quick impulse to shrink back into her room but she also experienced a wild desire to look into the face of the deposed cattle king of Little Egypt and tell him if she could how sorry she was for her part of his unthroning.

The latter urge was stronger and accordingly she moved swiftly down the walk and out into the street. If he did not stop she would pretend an errand to the store was the reason for her being there. Harper acted as if surprised at the sight of her, but her womanly intuition told her that he had expected to find her here—that it was because of her that he had come. Was it to accuse her of giving the information concerning Fitkin to Swensen? That appeared to be the threat which had completed their capitulation.

Harper took off his hat and swung easily from the saddle.

"How does it come that Bobson's secret service is still here after the details of the surrender are over?" he asked.

The girl flushed and, looking into his face found herself surprised that he showed no signs of worry. Was it possible that the king of Little Egypt was so weak a man that he could be triumphed over and still smile, sleep and forgive? The idea piqued her.

"How does it come, Mr. Harper, that you didn't hire out to Mr. Swensen the same as so many of the other cattlemen who said they would never give in?"

"You think that would have been the proper thing to do?"

"It would have been the practical view to take."

"See here," inquired the man, "I supposed you'd be rejoicing—satisfied that your work was well done. Instead you act as though you resented the fact that you had succeeded."

"It's not that which bothers me," the girl answered passionately. "I knew that it had to come—that you would be compelled to submit to the law, but I supposed after the show of fight that you made at first that you would really give more trouble. Even though I was on the other side, Mr. Harper, I was inclined to admire your spirit and that of Mr. Coffey and Mr. Fitkin. Oh, I know that you gave up to save a friend, still I never dreamed that men who appeared so strong would turn out so wishy-washy! I should have thought that you would at least have made Mr. Swensen bring his help in from the outside instead of your men hiring out to him! In the fields behind the Hearn house there is more of Little Egypt's stock waiting for their turn to be driven out and yet not one fence has been cut and not one single thing done to register resentment!"

"Seems to me," returned Harper, "that this is a queer way for you to be reacting? Anyhow, isn't your position fully as open to criticism as mine?"

"I'm not trying to defend my position, Mr. Harper!" the girl flared. "I can't altogether help it. But really you would have seemed more like men to me if you had tried! Mr. Swensen crowed to me about the way you all knuckled under. I had to admit that you had, but I did not tell him nor anyone else about Mr. Fitkin."

"Why would you object to telling Swensen anything? You are engaged to him. He told me that you were."

"And does one always agree with a man just because she's engaged to him?"

Harper paled slightly and twisted at her answer as though inwardly hurt and, see-

ing it, Barbara Bently was glad. There was a certain cruel satisfaction in making him suffer. He had not been too gentle with her when their paths had crossed—albeit she had to own to herself that she was the one who most often had brought about these meetings.

THEN she sensed that Harper was not paying attention to her. Instead he was staring down the road where a string of cows were rounding the bend. Weren't they the same animals which she had seen leave Little Egypt earlier in the morning? And the riders accompanying them were laughing and joking now! Something queer had happened. There was Swensen, and the sheriff! They caught sight of her and Harper and were riding swiftly toward them. The lawyer's face was livid with anger.

"Harper," he choked out as he came closer, "you've double-crossed me!"

"What's the matter?" inquired the rancher, "Did you lose the trail again?"

"Sheriff, arrest this man!" Swensen ordered.

"Arrest me for what?"

"For dynamiting the bridges across those three straight walled cuts," explained the sheriff. "That's what he wants me to do it for. Dynamiting bridges is serious work, Mark. Until they're fixed there's no getting the cattle through."

"That's unhandy, isn't it?" commiserated Harper. "Now you'll be compelled to use more hay, Swensen."

"For you it's going to prove worse than unhandy," said the lawyer.

"Some more evidence to go along with Tate Buckner's disappearance, I suppose," suggested Harper.

"Sheriff," interrupted Swensen, his voice husky with rage, "are you going to arrest this man?"

John Porter turned and looked squarely at the questioner, his gaze aloof, yet penetrating. "Whenever there's ground for making the arrest, I will. Not until," he said slowly.

"I'll have the county attorney swear out a warrant!" fumed the lawyer. "Harper has been spokesman and leader for this gang of outlaws from the very first. That fact alone justifies detaining and questioning him."

"I've no objection to answering any questions you want to ask now," answered Harper. "In fact I'd rather than to have you bother me when I'm busy."

"All right, then, I'll do it," shouted the lawyer. "Do you or don't you know who committed this outrage?"

"I do."

"Who was it?"

BARBARA BENTLY listened with her heart in her mouth. This was a dangerous position for the King of Little Egypt. Glancing at the sheriff she saw that he also was perturbed. Now he coughed and said, "Mark, I want to call your attention to the fact that anything you say is liable to come up in the testimony, providing there's a trial. The fact that I've always liked you wouldn't help much in a case of this kind."

"Thanks, Porter," smiled Harper. "Your heart always was in the right place."

"You said you were willing to answer questions," Swensen broke in. "Who was it then that dynamited the bridges? We're going to find out if every man in Little Egypt has to be questioned."

"I'm prepared to save you the trouble, Swensen. I dynamited the bridges."

The lawyer whirled. "Now, sheriff, what you waiting for?" he demanded.

Porter's face grew haggard, yet set. "Mark, I warned you. I——"

"Just a minute," begged the rancher, "why shouldn't I dynamite them? They're on my own ground, were built with my money and labor. I laid out the road, and now I'm not satisfied with it and I'm going to change it."

Swensen's face went blank. Barbara felt hers must be also.

"That's news to me, Mark," exclaimed the officer in a voice that rang with re-

newed hope. "I thought it belonged to a man named Sward who took it as a homestead."

"Sward only worked for me. I bought the land from the state years ago."

"All right, suppose you did," said Swensen. "You still can't deny people the right to get in and out of the valley!"

"I'm not denying them the right. I'm merely asking them to wait till I can fix the road. At present it wasn't safe. There's twenty-five men in Little Egypt that will swear to it."

Swensen's answering smile was bleak. "I fancy you'll find the state a trifle skeptical on that point, Harper."

"The state isn't concerned with this road. Neither is the county. There's no mail route over it. We simply rely on each other to bring it out. Not a dollar of help have we had on roads here in Little Egypt. When Arthur Bobson was county commissioner a few years back I tried to interest the commissioners in a road out here. They said we didn't need it, could build our own roads if we wanted any He was the one most against it. I feel quite grateful to him for it now, though I couldn't see it at the time."

"How long do you intend to hold up traffic with this repair work?" Swensen demanded.

Harper became noncommittal. "I couldn't say as to that. Of course I'll begin work at once."

Swensen's face grew black. "And work forever before you get anything done! I understand your game perfectly. But I'll fool you. I'll drive the animals over the mountain."

HARPER laughed. "That's a good one, Swensen. If you drive them over the mountain you'll have to put snowshoes on them. There's two feet on that divide if there's an inch. More than that, inside of two days it will be drifted till there's six feet in spots. You've got to think of something better than that."

"Bunk!" snorted the lawyer. "Pure bunk!" But there was that in his tones which showed plainly that he believed it. "And what if it isn't? I'll fix those crossings myself instead of waiting for you."

"Try it," invited Harper; "that would be something new. Having a hired man of Mr. Bobson's repairing bridges on my land. There's a laugh in that, Swensen."

Listening, Barbara wondered how she could ever have decided that Mark Harper was lacking in nerve. There was no mistaking the challenge in the answer that he gave to Swensen. He wanted the lawyer to trespass on his ground, yes, was even praying for it. And in that she sensed the principles of good generalship. Harper was eager for battle providing it was fought under favorable conditions.

As for Swensen the new turn of affairs had for the time completely robbed him of his aplomb. Savagely he threw himself from his saddle and wrapped the bridle reins about a hitching post.

"Barbara," he said without looking at the men, "I want to talk with you inside for a moment."

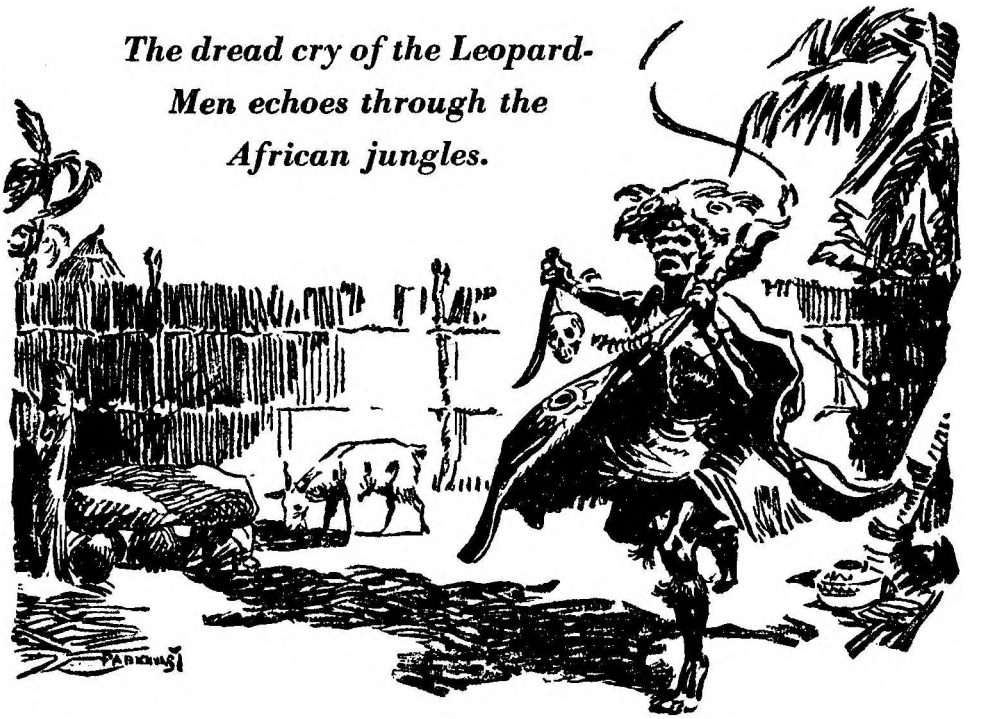
With that he turned away as though certain that she would follow. The girl's chin came up, and angry defiance blazed in her eyes. It was like Swensen to emphasize his connection with her by such a statement. No wonder Harper had believed them engaged. But this was one time when she would surprise both men.

Hardly had she made this resolution when she became aware that Harper was preparing to leave.

"Good-by, Miss Bently," he called. "I'll not be keeping you from your fiancé. You're both very fortunate in having each other."

Tears of rage dimmed Barbara's eyes. Her throat choked until she could not speak. That was a beastly way for a man to act. And yet—how had she herself performed but a few minutes before?

(*Part III in the next issue of* SHORT STORIES)



The dread cry of the Leopard-Men echoes through the African jungles.

THE CLAWS OF THE LEOPARD

By WALTER CLARE MARTIN

Author of "A Flyer in Rubber," etc.

IT WAS a disgruntled young entomologist who pushed the snout of his tub-like scow into the fern-fringed island. Kubwa, his thick-headed Man Friday, padlocked the chain to the stem of a huge twisted rattan and drew the boat into the shadows. A frightened black ibis squawked an alarm. A crocodile plopped into the river.

The young scientist stepped ashore scowling. His name on the books was Ted Thurman, though now he figured it ought to be Mud. His long, tan face and frankly curious eyes displayed no delight at the prospect. He growled as he hacked at a stubborn gum tree and drove a steel hook for his fly rope. He swore tersely as he set up his tent.

"Those Ituka niggers," he observed to the jungle in general and to Kubwa in particular, "they're a pack of dog-eating poltroons. Now I'll never find Flying Forest."

Kubwa, the loyal, rubber-lipped and muscled like a rhinoceros, hung his head apologetically, as if he shared all the sins of the Congo.

"Ituka fear Man-Leopard people," he explained. "Steal food to go back. No food, no go."

"It's no go for us, too, if we don't catch some meat." Ted jerked the .45 Colt's from his hip and examined it lovingly. This little ceremony had saved his life more than once. Like most boys born west of the Mississippi he knew what a six-gun could do. In Mexico he had tried it on Yaqui *bandidos*. These Man-Leopards could hardly be worse.

"No shoot meat," begged Kubwa anxiously, pointing across the deep waters of the Aruwimi towards the far-wooded

bank. "Bwabali over there. Many Man-Leopard. Steal slave for Arab. Sell strong; kill weak; eat fat. No good. Gun noise no good."

"An empty belly's no good, either," said Ted. "I'm going into this palmy mess and try to drop a fine monkey. Tomorrow we'll start back for supplies."

"No eat monkey!" Kubwa revealed his abhorrence. "Black man eat monkey, grow long tail!"

"Better a long tail than a short ration," Ted asserted. He felt better with the old .45 in his hand. He resolved to get through to the Flying Forest, in spite of all the Leopard sects in the Congo.

Advising Kubwa to rustle dry sticks for a fire, he ducked into the pungent green jungle.

THE island was a hundred yards wide. He crept and lunged through the yellow-green maze until he struck the opposite shore of the island; but never a sign of a supper. There was life in the feathery rattan tops, and life in the towering gums. He just couldn't see it; the overgrowth was too blinding. He fought his way back to find Kubwa.

Where Kubwa had been he found nothing. The loyal porter was gone; the tent; the axe. The fresh blown fire was scattered. The padlocked boat was still moored in the ferns, robbed of everything but the camera. The "evil-eye" protected itself.

Ted shoved the tub out to the end of its chain, for a look at the Aruwimi. The russet depths of the river had filled with blood, the tropic spasm of sunset. Far down the stream in the shimmering glare Ted thought he descried a canoe. The dark sliding form, whatever it was, vanished into dank growths on the opposite bank. A hippopotamus, maybe. Maybe a war canoe full of Man-Leopards. He felt sick as he thought of poor Kubwa.

The marooned entomologist inventoried his pockets and the capable pouch at his belt. Matches, knife, flashlight, medicine kit, and lavender oil to fight off mosquitoes. Best of all a bandolera of cartridges for the blue-barreled young cannon which could stop anything less than an elephant.

"Not so bad, Colonel," he addressed the gun. "We'll get along somehow, I reckon."

HE BUSIED himself preparing a smudge against swarms of feverish insects. The sky was pink when he bent to his job; when he struck the first match it was dark. A new world was around him, a new heaven above. A thousand sinister sounds, not familiar by day, shrilled and croaked from the unfathomable jungle. The mighty tropical moon was sailing down the weird stream. A night-lemur sang like a banshee.

A saturniid moth, with wings like brown sails, steered drunkenly through the thick smudge. Ted lay on his back and watched it. He smiled. He was satisfied now. A great country for insect hunters. He swore he would net the rarest butterfly in the world or leave his long bones in the Congo. Tomorrow he would head for Stanleyville, where the rest of his outfit was cached. He'd hire better porters—Hello!—could that be a shot?

Two shots! Three! Four in succession! Those came from an automatic. A white man! He bounced to his feet; unchained the boat; poled into the moon-splashed stream. With leaping heart he made for the lofty bank, crowned black with borassus and gumwood. It must be a white man, and he must be in trouble. Men don't shoot four times at mosquitoes.

The muddy current dragged him downstream. The channel deepened; the long pole lost bottom. Savagely he slashed at the mirrored moon, using the pole as an oar. He sweat fulsomely, washing off the lavender oil. Night pests began to roar round him. He laid the pole down at intervals to slap at the noisome rabble. Gasping, fatigued, and stinging all over, he bumped into the rattling Arundo grass that footed the gloomy bank.

He locked the boat to a mangrove root,

breathed briefly and began to ascend, helped up by the coiling lianas. When he got to the top he rested again, listening, wondering, doubting. Had he suffered a hallucination? On the desert men run to the mirages they see; in the jungle to the mirages they hear.

He stretched his senses, to hear, see, feel. Stillness. Abnormal stillness. That in itself had a meaning. Something had caused the night-lemur to hush, the striped frog to flatten down on his fern.

A LEOPARD-LIKE scream burst out of the gloom, a few hundred feet to his left. Leopard-like, but not exactly an animal voice. It was more maniacal, more utterly ghoulish. Ted felt his white skin creeping. Another yell. Another. The jungle howled with the unearthly chorus. Then other sounds—shorter yelps—calls—exhortations—a noise like a babble of coyotes. Many men were engaged in mad business of some kind. Ted clutched his Colt's in its harness. He had to find out what was doing. Those shots he had heard were no Congo illusion. He knew now they were real. They were real and a white man had fired them.

Recklessly he bulled through the underbrush until he came to a sudden clearing. He blinked and eased back into shadow. The moon lay, stark and spectral, upon a mad scene. Half a hundred black figures in animal masks were circling three tawny-backed tents. As they circled they howled and clawed the air, working themselves into a fury. Their left hands brandished a 4-pronged claw; their right, a 3-bladed dagger. Ted quivered. In those tents must be whites.

In the center of the clearing, beyond the three tents, a dozen panicky porters crouched beneath a thatched *banda,* terror shining from their big glassy eyes.

With a leopard-like scream, three of the masked creatures charged into one of the tents. Ted heard the crash of a pistol shot. One of the Leopards reeled out, clutching his belly. He collapsed in the trampled weeds. The two others emerged with a victorious yell, dragging a white man by the head. Ted aimed and fired twice. Both Leopards went down. The whole pack gave a yawp of dismay and whisked like ghosts into the jungle.

Silence settled over the clearing. The blacks in the *banda* sat quaking. The assaulted white man lay on his face—exhausted, dead or unconscious. Ted charged through the weeds, his gun in his hand, and carefully turned him over. The face was fine-featured, poetic. Blood spread from an injured cheek. His chest and arms were gashed badly. Ted nestled an ear to his heart.

"He lives!"

He shouted in Kiswahili, the common trade tongue of the Congo, "Here, you! Come over!" He beckoned to the blacks in the *banda.* Fearfully they crept through the moonlight.

"You act like old women! Get water!" Two or three mustered courage; loped off. They lugged up a big gourd from the river. Ted emptied his iodine vial into the gourd; washed the gashes; bandaged them snugly. To hasten the clot of seeping wounds, he injected small shots of adrenin.

II

BY MORNING the white man, Bart Gailliard, could talk. Striped and checkered with patches from head to foot, the victim of the Man-Leopards lay on a cheetah skin in the shade of his blood-splashed tent and tried to tell his story.

It began, months ago, in America. His father, he said, was British born, but had built up a business in Brooklyn. The mother was dead. Bart and Nina, his sister,

were clerks. They specialized mostly in diamonds. One day a strange fellow, named Kohl, drifted in, with a tale of a find in the Congo. He swore by all the gods in the book the place was fairly greasy with diamonds. He showed them his map and one splendid blue-white that set Nina afire with excitement.

Kohl wanted someone to finance him. His first expedition had come to grief. He bore a spear wound in his side. He was broke, except for the single stone which he kept to buttress his story.

The senior Gailliard kept cool while the blue-white flamed; but Nina and Bart got the fever. The more they talked, the wilder to go. In the end Nina pulled her dad over. He agreed to finance a new search for the mine and to give Kohl half the net proceeds. He put the office in charge of a vice-president, and the four of them sailed together.

The rude awakening came when they got to the Congo and began to ascend the dark river. Rumors of raids and red tales of rebellion trickled from the hot heart of the Congo. The farther up the river they pushed, the more their black boys whispered. At Stanleyville their porters quit, to a man. Not one would budge a step farther.

Then they met a man called Captain Soldat, the agent of one Colonel Hassan.

"I've heard of that Hassan enough," said Ted. "They call him King of the Congo."

"The title's well earned," Bart assured him. "There's not a black man from the lake to the coast who doesn't jump at the sound of his name. He'd break a nig's back for misplacing his boots; yet he throws gold around like confetti. He owns a huge palace somewhere on the Nile, while he rides bullock trains through the jungles."

SOLDAT took a great fancy to Nina, Bart said, and told her some wonderful yarns. He advised her to give up the search for the mine; said he doubted she'd get through alive. When she vowed she would stick with her father and Bart, he shrugged and said, "What a pity." He remarked that the region was mixed up with slave trade.

"Slave trade!" broke in Ted. "I thought they had it stamped out."

"Think again." Bart groaned. "It's awful. It goes on all the time under cover. Vicious sects, like the Leopards, make raids on their foes; eat some and sell the rest to the Arabs. We heard a few tales that would make your hair rise. Dad got quite wrought up about it. He took the thing straight to the Governor's desk. The Governor said he couldn't act without proof. So Dad set about getting plenty. At every village we passed, on our way to the mine, we inquired about raids and took notes."

"So that's what the man meant—it was no place for a girl?"

"He sure did. We ought to have listened. By the time we got near the infernal mine, our party was pretty well frazzled. A bunch of Arabs and niggers ambushed us. We lost nine blacks in one fight. Two died from snake bite, and six got bewitched. They ran away into the jungle. Ants ate up our luggage, including our boots. We had to creep back in bark sandals."

"You didn't get to the diamonds?" said Ted.

"Lord, no! We couldn't—with Nina. But Kohl got us out of there somehow. In a week he had reached a village. The natives were called Watembo. We hired guides from them and they steered us to a place where Hassan keeps one of his camps. A kind of outpost for ivory. The Colonel was there and Soldat, too. They fixed us up in fine style. But their blacks and ours didn't click very well, so we drifted on down to this clearing. Hassan's men are the dog-toothed Bwabali. Some of them are supposed to be Leopards. And believe me"—Bart shuddered—"after what happened last night——"

"Take it easy, old fellow," said Ted.

Bart rested, then finished his story.

THE Gailliard safari, he said, had been camped a week, organizing a new try at the diamonds. They had worked late to get off before sunrise. Bart and Kohl slept on mats in the open air. John Gailliard lay in his tent. That night a rock rolled from a bluff near the camp and broke Gailliard's legs near the ankles. All the party believed he would die. Kohl wove a grass litter, coralled a black crew, and set out for Stanleyville. Nina Gailliard went along with her father.

"We were camped over there—" Bart pointed, to show where his father was hurt.

"At the foot of that hill?" Ted queried.

"At the foot of that hill. The rock rolled from the top. A guard heard it and yelled. We jumped from our beds and ran like fury. Everybody but Dad. He couldn't."

"He couldn't!" Ted echoed.

"That's right. He seemed to be paralyzed. Something had stung or bitten him about two hours before. That may account for it. Anyway, poor Dad was smashed."

The entomologist leaped into Ted's eager eyes. "You mean you didn't know what bit him?"

"A spider, maybe," said Bart, "or a venomous snake."

"How did the bite look? Did it swell?"

"Not much. But I can't tell you anything definite. I didn't know about that until later."

"How long was he paralyzed?"

"About twenty minutes—before the rock fell. But the effect hung on after that."

"I'd like to look over that place," said Ted.

"Better let it alone," said Bart. "For all I know we may be spied on. You might get what I got, if you meddle."

"I'll risk it," said Ted. "I want to find out what stung your father."

"Well, I can't deny I'd like to know, too. Better take my interpreter, the one I call Little-Fat. He served in the Belgian patrol."

Ted left the young fellow and trudged through the weeds until he arrived at the *banda*. A dozen squatting Watembo were gambling. They rolled ivory balls from a hollow cane stalk, over circles scratched into the ground. If the ball stopped in your circle, you won. One man bet a wife against six brass rods, and appeared much relieved when he lost.

The open-faced jabbering instantly ceased as the white man appeared at the *banda*. A black who was built like a banana on stilts uprose with a Belgian salute.

"Bwana wish?" he said proudly. "Little-Fat tell. Little-Fat catch white talk, black talk, lion talk, elephant talk, cry like monkey and whistle like bird."

"How about Leopard talk?" said Ted.

THE Watembo recoiled as if slapped by a ghost. He shrank like punctured rubber. His marbled eyes stole towards Gailliard's tents and the horror-haunted jungle behind them. Then his martial pride rose and topped over his fear. He declared with a show of bravado:

"Like hell with Leopard!" He kicked one of the Watembo lustily on the rump to show what he would do to a Leopard. The other gamblers moved out of his reach.

"That's the spirit," said Ted. "Come on."

He struck a bee-line for the base of the hill. The gifted interpreter dogged him. Furtively Little-Fat raced his eyes along the moss-bearded face of the jungle. He realized, if a Leopard had heard his brag, he would roast on a spit before morning.

At his neck, in a pouch of gorilla skin, hung a charm of camwood powder. He

sprinkled it over his head and heart, executing queer signs, like a priest. Ted saw him do this, and asked him why.

"For magic," he said, "to scare Leopard."

"Why not a long spear or a gun?" said Ted.

The black replied craftily, "Bwana Bart had good gun. You see him."

Ted felt the full logic of Little-Fat's view, so he pressed the discussion no further. Together they surveyed the old camp. Little-Fat made it clear when each tent had been staked and where John Gailliard was sleeping. The rock that had fractured his paralyzed legs lay among some mashed cardamon bushes. The perfume of their bruises made Ted nearly sick; but he busied himself with his search.

He found blood on the fern-weed where Gailliard had lain. Fronds and stems had been crushed by the boulder. A tent-pin was splintered; a rope snapped in twain. The rock had bounced down at fierce speed.

Ted lifted each rumpled blade and leaf and studied them tenderly. He discovered no snake, bug or scorpion. Whatever had stung the old man in the night had escaped without leaving a spoor.

Disappointed, he motioned to Little-Fat. They sweated up the green smelly slope. Near the crest they espied a shallow bed in the earth from which the fatal boulder had tumbled.

"What started it going?" quizzed Ted.

The interpreter wagged his head, dubious:

"Bwana Bart say bad luck. Bwana Hassan say Leopard."

"And what do you say?"

"Say, better look out."

"That's not a bad answer. We'd better look out. Ted went to his knees to examine the ground. He saw lines in the dirt, like footprints. A whole month had run by since John Gailliard was hurt. It was futile to fly at conclusions. He straightened and slapped his hands on his pants.

"The whole thing looks leery to me," he said. "By the way, where is that fellow, Kohl?"

"Kohl gone," said the black. "Catch Bwana John doctor."

"So he has. I forgot. Well, I haven't learned much. Let's get back and see after Bart."

III

A TREMENDOUS storm burst in their camp that night. It whipped and battered the earth for two days. The galvanic sky split trees to the roots. A Watembo was killed in the clearing.

Bart's tents gave way and were beaten to rags. Drenched and helpless, he weltered in wreckage. Ted lugged him, through slush, to a hovel of grass occupied by a pair of scared natives. The two blacks found refuge in the *banda*.

The storm stopped as if heaven had shut off a valve. The sun thrust down his beams like red spears. Weeds steamed; frogs shrilled; hungry gnats mobbed the camp without mercy. The brown mossy beards of the jungle trees drooled and dripped like old men carousing.

Beast and bird fussed and fluttered in the hot joy of new sun; but no joy lit the soul of the white men. The Aruwimi had backed up to their clearing. Gorged ravines cut them off from Hassan's outpost, the only possible source of assistance. Kohl, if living, was hung up somewhere in backstream. He could not ride the hysterical river.

"If he reached the Aruwimi before the cloudburst," said Bart, "he was drowned like a bug in a gutter. If he didn't, he may be alive. The Congo River, in places, spreads out through the woods and gives a poor devil a chance."

"We're out of provisions," said Ted.

"In a week," replied Bart, "we might get men to Hassan's. The Colonel's not there, but Soldat might be. He could stake us, perhaps, a few days."

"Do they leave supplies there all the time?"

"Food, no. It's too tempting to hungry blacks."

"I'm going to Stanleyville."

"How? Swim or fly?"

"I have a boat yonder, if the chain hasn't snapped. I'll try to pack you, if you say so."

"Much obliged; but I'll stay. Kohl might come along. If I break camp, we'll never see diamonds."

"If the Leopards come calling?"

Bart felt for his gun.

"They won't buy me too cheap," he replied.

Ted nodded grim-faced approval. "We'll pay them off handsome some day," he declared, and busied himself with Bart's wrappings.

Making Bart clean and dry as their wrecked tackle permitted, Ted carried him into the *banda*. Little-Fat spread out a skin rug. They seated Bart gently, his back to a post. Two natives fanned off the hot gnats.

Ted organized his departure. He sent a strong swimmer to unmoor his boat and pole it to the shore of the clearing. Other natives he sent to the Watembo *shambas*—a five hour round trip, on the run. They fetched—the only rations the raided valley had left—raw manioc and a bag of bananas. They promised, however, to fish and hunt far and wide, so Bwana Bart would not die of starvation

Ted loaded a bagful of manioc cakes; quinine; lavender; head-net. His camera had cracked when his tent blew down, so he gave it to Little-Fat. His six-gun he strapped to his thigh.

HE POLED out alone from the muddy backwash, into the racing river. Two days later he burst into the Congo. A week later he floated along a mud flat and anchored near Stanleyville. He had spilled over once, and been snagged a few times. Otherwise, luck perched on his bowsprit.

In the long swift descent he had seen nothing of Kohl; nor hide nor hair of his porters. His first act, after bracing himself with good food, was to seek out the Gailliard cabin.

It was no great labor to find it—the only American household in town. Stanleyville was a splatter of ugly huts, full of surly, undisciplined natives. The Governor's house, on a palm-proud hill, was the single object of grandeur. A handful of Belgians made up the white spot, and a smaller handful of British.

Ted tramped to the Gailliard home. The cabin was native, of hardwood logs. A rubber-vine hugged it close, like a python. A side-porch, screened quaintly with Japanese web, differentiated it from its neighbors.

Ted thumped at the green wattled door. Nina Gailliard opened it promptly. Ted recognized Bart in her dark spirited eyes and the delicate cast of her features. Her face was decidedly Celtic.

"Good morning," she said, with the everyday grace of one who has never feared strangers.

"I've come from your brother," said Ted.

"Thank Heaven! Come in!" She held the door wide. Ted entered a room loaded with flowers. He wondered if he had bumped into a wedding. On the walls hung a number of hand-hammered plaques portraying Lincoln striking chains from the slaves. A wood-burning brazier stood on three legs in a fireplace beneath a slab mantel.

"Sit down," she urged. "I'll make tea."

"Thanks. And how's your father, Miss Gailliard?"

"Father—" She turned; choked up; staring mutely at the scented white flowers.

"Oh—they mean that!" He went dumb.

She concerned herself with the brazier.

After a moment she spoke. Her voice was soft now, and controlled.

"I'll tell you about it when you have told me of Bart."

That wasn't so easy—now. Ted made up his mind to hold the worst back. The Leopards, at least. He sipped his cup, thinking, stalling, choosing his words, when a dusty-brown insect circled the room and alighted on the young woman's blouse. She was bending over the brazier. His eye sparked.

"What an odd-looking rascal!"

"Who is?"

"That funny sawfly on your shoulder."

"Help yourself," she said, "I won't jump."

HE CREPT up like a cat stalking sparrows and struck for the insect. The feel of his hand sent the blood racing around the young woman's ears.

He cupped a glass over the captured fly and imprisoned it on the mantel.

"I suspected as much," she said.

"You suspected what?"

"That you were an entomologist. The way you watched gnats on those lilies—" Her voice broke abruptly. Ted Thurman was staring like a spectre at the fly walking around in the glass.

"What is it?"

"Look here!" He thrust the insect towards her. "See this vein in the wing here. Now note how it bends like a dog's leg before meeting that vein, the oblique one. This is a blood-sucking muscid, *Glossina palpalis*. He's a genuine tsetse fly."

"Good Heavens!"

"Right. It's no joke." Again he glassed the fly on the mantel. Fascinated she peered at it; puzzled; darkly perturbed. The gruesome conquests of these tiny assassins were familiar stories to her. Suddenly she exclaimed:

"Oh! Father!"

Ted felt his blood jumping queerly.

"My father died of Sleeping Sickness!"

"You think so, because——" He nodded towards the dusty-brown killer.

"Let me tell you. Father was doing nicely. His ankles were getting well. Then I discovered fever. The glands all over his body began to swell. He became nervous and trembly. Then sleepy and helpless. Then into a deathly coma—and never woke up."

"What did your doctor say?"

"He said infection got in. Dr. Thorne was just over from London. He wouldn't think of tsetses. This place is not infested, you know."

"But where could the beasts have come from? I say—do you have any potted mangrove plants?"

"No. Yes, we do! In the vivarium Colonel Hassan gave Dad."

"Vivarium?"

"Yes, he had it brought to us for Dad's amusement. The most wonderful gift imaginable. Dad kept it right there in his bedroom. I have it in the side porch now. Come, I'll show you."

Ted followed. She led through a large and lavender-lighted bedroom into a wickered sun porch sprouting palms. In the center loomed a huge glass vivarium.

Ted stopped like a knight enchanted.

"Why, it's Africa in a nutshell!"

"A pretty big nutshell, too. Eight feet long by six feet high, and nearly four feet wide. We all but wrecked the doorways getting it through."

"Look! Look! Under that black moss. Glowworms, tropical glowworms!"

"The eternal scientist!"

"Tiger-necked centipedes!" In his delirium he was beginning to point. The girl laughed; grief and menace forgotten. The flutter and flare of the vivarium, the color and blaze and fantasy of Congoland ran like quixotic poisons in her blood, bewitching her like blue diamonds.

Ted gazed at her transfigured features, flushed, alive, exciting. He felt a crazy impulse to throw a butterfly net over her, to keep her captive forever. Darting to the opposite side of the glass house, she stooped and wiggled her finger at a snail.

Around the gala exhibit they loitered; studying, peeping, marveling; absorbing the tropic fairyland realm by realm.

The lake, especially, charmed them. Narrow and long, patterned on lovely Lake Kivu, pebbled with beryl and coral and moonstone, peopled with blue baby dipnoids and purple-finned minnows that swarmed like showers of colored glass among the dwarf mangrove roots.

Shining shores of pulverized goldstone ran around the pool. An ivory island cut in one piece from an elephant's tusk, topped green with broken jasper, reared from the middle like an ogre's home—the ogre a pop-eyed toad.

Outside the lake deep soil and fertile gave birth to riotous overhead: pendulous orchillas, feathery acacia shrubs, chaotic mangroves that leaped to the apex of the glassy sky and rained down to reset themselves.

TED peered at these from high and low, searching for tsetse flies. He detected two young ones streaking into the porch from the roof of the vivarium. This roof was devised of two glass panes which sloped up from the sides until they met at the ridge. One pane overlapped the other without contact, resulting in a crack from gable to gable, a fissure nearly half an inch wide. The copper braces had been reset. He caught the escaped flies, exclaiming:

"You are losing your pets through this vent!"

"Only a few of the tiny folk. The butterflies and dragons can't make it."

Moodily Ted studied his captives. He realized he was frowning, and the girl was watching.

"What about that prospector, Kohl?" he asked.

"What about him? Nothing especially. He's a rough, morose German-American who has batted around all his life."

"He believes in that diamond mine?"

"Like a fetish. He would never have sold it, if he could have financed a new trip."

Ted fell into heavy thought. He began to grope around the vivarium, bending and peering, scrutinizing each root and lump.

"Can I help?" she offered.

"I have a hunch something is in there I haven't seen. Maybe a mouse of a water vole."

"How did you guess it?"

"Am I right?"

"Come here." She snapped a catch and opened one end of the glass prison, just enough to steal an arm in. She grubbed a handful of pebbles and tossed them into a tussock of swamp grass. Four quaintly streaked creatures flopped out.

"African swamp mice!"

"Yes," she delighted, "aren't they darling!"

"They are—in their place. Not here."

"But what made you suspect——?"

"There's something wrong here," he interrupted abruptly. "Let me study this thing for an hour."

"Certainly; but why?"

"Who else was informed of that diamond claim?"

"Nobody—except Captain Soldat."

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

"I've never seen him. He's part French, from Morocco. He was good to my father. Dad liked him."

"This prospector—Kohl—did he visit this house?"

"He helped bring the vivarium over."

"Where is he?"

"Can't say. Up the river somewhere." She met his eye frankly. "I know what you're getting at. It won't do. Kohl is crude, but trustworthy. The flies in the vivarium were just a pitiful accident. Let's forget it."

"I'm not so sure. First your father, then——" He choked himself off.

"Bart! Something's happened to Bart!"

TED nodded, ashamed that he had held back the news. "Don't be so alarmed. I'll tell you. He was hurt in a riot among the blacks. Not serious. A few gashes I helped to patch up. He was feeling tip-top when I left. He wants you to go back to the States."

"Mbunzi," she cried, "I want you!"

"Yes, Missy Nina, here Mbunzi!" A female face like a chocolate moon popped into the door of the sun porch.

"Go down to the huts and hire me some porters. Bart's hurt, and I'm going to find him."

"You mustn't go back there!" Ted pleaded.

"I must and I will."

"All right." To the negress, "You won't need to go. I'll look after our porters myself."

"Our porters?" Nina questioned. "You don't mean you're going?"

"Of course I'm going. It's right on my way. I came back after more tackle." He picked up his hat and edged towards the door. "I'll start the ball rolling," he said.

IV

IN FIVE canoes and a flatboat they headed upstream, towards the mouth of the unexplored Aruwimi. A procession of cameras, books, guns and supplies, poled along by twenty-three porters. At the Aruwimi ten porters deserted. The other porters stuck loyally until they reached the small isle where Ted had lost honest Kubwa. Here they went all to pieces and asked for their pay. Ted sensed it was futile to argue. The claw of the Leopard clutched deep in their souls. He paid them, and hired some Watembos.

They found Bart better, his hurts nearly well; but his father's death badly upset him. Kohl, also, had failed to return. The dark teeming heart of the Congo had throbbed, and another white man was marked "missing."

This put all their plans in a pickle. Nobody but Kohl could guide them. Besides the gloomy danger of getting lost was the lurking menace of ambush. Little-Fat said his porters were still unnerved by the recent raid of the Leopards. He, himself, was quite willing to go.

"Where's Hassan," asked Ted "—and Soldat?"

"I wish to Heaven I knew," said Bart. "We heard the Bwabali drums talking. Little-Fat knows the code. He listened. He said the Bwabali were spreading the word that Hassan had come to his camp. I sent a fast runner at once. I told him to ask Hassan for food and guns. Well—he never came back, and that's that."

"The Leopards, maybe," said Ted.

"Maybe. I couldn't afford to risk any more men. Their morale is half shot and they're jumpy. I decided to leave it to Kohl."

The party fell silent, brooding on Kohl. If the cloudburst had drowned him—well, death comes to all men. But if the Bwabali, incited by merciless Moslems——a sickening sensation passed through them.

They were standing, that instant, before the new tents, which the porters had raised in advance. Guns and baggage jumbled around them. Weary natives pulled things into shape. Their chatter seemed strangely subdued as they stealthily studied the whites.

THE end of the day was upon them, the hour when the Congo awakes. Little-Fat hustled torches, but Ted and Bart talked on through the thick-smelling dark, after Nina had gone to her tent.

"It's bad—with her here," said Ted.

"She must go back to Brooklyn," said Bart.

"She won't go without you."

"She must! Everything that we own is staked on those diamonds. If I don't bag them, we're out in the street. I'm going on, with Kohl or without him.

Nina's got to go back and tend store. That will keep her alive. This jungle's no place for a woman."

"Something's about to explode around here."

"Yes, something's about to explode. Just the way the Watembo behave. I'd give my right arm to know what it's about —who is trying to rub out the Gailliards."

"You'll know that, when you learn who started the rock that bumbled down hill on your father."

"That was just a plain accident."

"What about the tsetse flies in your father's vivarium?"

"They got in by chance."

"What about the striped mice? They'll stand some explaining. Without them the young tsetses would have been disease-free. It's the blood of such beasts that infects them."

"We can't make a case upon that."

"Maybe not," said Ted. "Tell me this. I examined the toad and found his tongue snipped. Do you see anything queer about that?"

"If his tongue were not snipped, he'd catch all the bugs. Somebody was thoughtful, that's all."

"Somebody was thoughtful—of tsetses."

"And you suspect Kohl?"

"I don't suspect Kohl. I merely said he had motives. He was mad after diamonds. He found them. He claimed them. He hated to split. He had no further need of your father."

"Why not accuse Hassan? After all he's the one who sent the vivarium to Dad."

"That's also a theory. But Hassan is rich. I figure Kohl's temptation is stronger."

"Why not blame the Leopards, or some murderous sheik? The brutes tried to get me—why not Dad?"

"That's possible, too. If we ever do learn who loosened that rock——"

"He'll never move another," said Bart.

He stretched on his mat and attempted to sleep. Ted posted a watch and dropped off. The last sound he heard as his tired bones relaxed was a noise like the scream of a leopard.

HE AWOKE from the depths of a terrible dream, a black hand fumbling his shoulder. He groped for his Colt, but a voice said, "Bwana! Bwana!" He recognized Little-Fat's whisper.

"Leopard cry all around," said the native.

"Why wake me for that?" said Ted.

"Four-leg leopard not talk so much."

Ted came to his feet like a scalded cat. Roughly he shook Bart alive.

"Surrounded, Bart! Here's your rifle!"

Bart jerked himself up with a gasp of pain. His old wounds still snarled when he forced them. With a gun in each hand he rushed to the tent where his sister, well guarded, was sleeping. He roused her and set a gun in her hands. She darted out, flushed as a wine-glass. Her eyes caught the stars, and her unbanded hair played around her like wisps of the darkness.

A shattering horror hit Ted in the heart. He slammed a slug into his rifle. Glaring around at the crouching jungle, he challenged:

"You damned dog-faces, come on!"

"Easy, man, they'll see us!" said Bart.

"Leopard see," said Little-Fat shortly. "Eyes like——" He pointed to the glittering sky. "Come soon—claw up ever'body."

"How soon?" Ted demanded.

"Soon white guns go sleep."

"These guns don't go sleep!" Ted savagely aimed at the pregnant wall of the jungle. He fired three shots in a row. The third blast awakened a human scream.

Silence, then, black, endless and awful.

The Watembo porters, stiffened with spears, stood huddled behind their Bwanas. They could fight anything but a Leopard. Fear painted their eyeballs big and white, and Ted saw they were fast going to pieces. Even Little-Fat sweated shining terror.

So the dread watch went on until morning. Each half hour or so the whites let off guns. Their only salvation was bluffing. They could only expect to be shredded alive, if the fiendish fraternity charged.

Light came, with fresh hope and new courage. The menacing moods of the grisly night paled like a coarse painting in sunlight. While Nina brewed coffee and Bart opened cans, Ted and Little-Fat scouted the jungle.

At the spot where Ted's bullet had brought forth the death shriek they found a dried puddle of blood. Near the blood they espied an iron claw. Four prongs, curving sharply, of hand-wrought ore, it crudely resembled a leopard's.

They hid the claw under a pile of moss to avoid exciting the porters. When Nina, at breakfast, asked what he had found, Ted replied:

"Four reasons for moving."

"Strong reasons?" asked Bart.

"Strong as iron."

"I see. You were wise to say nothing about it. We'd better pack up and pull out."

"Where to?" queried Nina.

"To Hassan's camp."

"Maybe he isn't there."

"He is due, anyway. If he's not there, we'll dig in till he comes. You remember his lodge, the big house of bamboo. We could halfway defend ourselves there."

"Let's consult Little-Fat," said Ted.

THEY summoned the black and asked his advice. The interpreter begged them not to go. He explained that the Leopards still lurked in the woods. Too many birds talking, he said. If the whites quit the clearing, they would be waylaid. In the dense sprawling vines and smothering fern the Leopards could tear them to pieces.

"We've got to get Nina away!" stormed Bart. "The brutes may be at us tonight!"

"No more of that!" Nina retorted. She hefted her gun with a show of assurance. "You don't need to worry about me."

"By God, I do worry! Remember, Dad said, if anything happened——"

"Bart, don't! Please——" Her hand flew to his shoulder, pleading.

"Wait a minute," said Ted. "I have a new hunch."

He beckoned Little-Fat to him. Briefly they conferred in low tones. When he rejoined Bart and Nina his sober eyes gleamed; his voice rang with guarded excitement.

"Little-Fat believes we might do it."

"I'll try anything," said Bart.

"I'll try anything," said Nina, "except leaving Bart here. Or you," she added quickly.

Her dark burning eyes met his own point blank. Hurriedly he unbottled his plan. Little-Fat was convinced all the Leopards thereabouts belonged to the dog-toothed Bwabali. Their village lay two hours to the north. A sly, swift, nervy Watembo chap could set their houses afire. Little-Fat knew two boys who could do it. He would send a fast runner by unused paths, with word to the Watembo chiefs. They would speed the boys out. The night sky would blaze up. The Bwabali, believing their village attacked, would gallop back to defend it. The jungle around would be safe. Bart's porters could jog to their homes in peace. The whites could set out for Hassan's.

Bart mulled the plan over, and said, "It's one hell of a journey to Hassan's. I could make it by day, but at night I'd be lost. The Leopards would soon run us down."

"Little-Fat will stick with us," said Ted.

"There's a hero for you!" said Nina.

"He's a trump," agreed Bart. "But even with him I doubt we'd get through in the dark."

"Of course we'll get through!" his sister cried, with feverish, forced optimism. "I believe in luck—don't you, Ted?"

"Like Dad's," Bart cut in bitterly.

"That wasn't mere luck," Ted said gently. "It was planned from beginning to end."

"A horrible thought," said Nina, "but I'm beginning to fear you are right."

"Would to God I could prove it!" Bart clinched his gun.

"Let's pack for the journey," urged Nina.

V

TED and Bart complied promptly, reproaching themselves for having hurt her with their talk. They sorted their stuff in two lots. One lot was light tackle to be carried along; the other, bulk goods to be hidden. Aware of the jungle's sleepless eyes, they pretended to make camp, not break it. They lopped off thorn bushes and dragged them away. They repaired the roof of the *banda*. Meanwhile. the secret precautions advanced. By sundown they were ready, over-ready to go.

The red sun sank like a blazing ship. Night splashed in black waves through the jungle. Nina fed Ted and Bart and sent food to the men, who were unaware of the rash business impending. Little-Fat was afraid to let the news round. Secrets often leaked out to the Leopards.

After supper they sat on canvas campstools, their rifles upon their laps, loaded. They talked to drown their hearts' pounding. Ted told of the legend of Flying Forest, full of fabulous moths as big as birds, somewhere in the dim Pygmy land. He meant to go there, if he lived.

"I wish I could see it," said Nina.

"I wish you could, too," said Ted.

The words sounded so flat in the vast humming night, the three of them shrank into silence. With death at their heels and blind horror ahead, it seemed imbecilic to wish.

A voice like a night bird's craked through the woods. Bart came to his feet, uncontrolled.

"We're fools to wait longer! The boys didn't make it. Those beasts are closing in on us. Let's hit out for Hassan's and shoot our way through. That's better than sitting here to be butchered."

"What do you say, Ted?" appealed Nina.

"Just how do we shoot our way through," said Ted, "when we can't see anything to shoot at?" He recalled how big Kubwa had vanished. And Kohl, with a full boat crew.

"I'll see Little-Fat," he suggested. He pegged through the weeds towards the *banda*. The blacks there were engaged in weird anecdote; working into a cold terror. Little-Fat was striving to buck them up by blowing about his past deeds. They failed to respond, and grew worse.

Little-Fat approached Ted with a swagger salute that was meant to deceive the Watembo.

"Mon Capitaine!" he said loudly.

"Can you hold your men down?" Ted asked him.

"For a little some more," said the black.

"Bart wants to bolt now. Are you willing?"

"All frog like jump into big snake mouth."

"So we haven't a chance?"

"Bwana! Hear!"

Far, far in the fathomless welter of green trembled a signal drum. Another drum caught it, like tuning forks, swelling a stronger tone. On and on the low droning thunder crawled, like a python of sound through the jungle. Up it coiled to the very skirts of their clearing.

Spellbound, white and black listened motionless, until Little-Fat touched Ted's arm:

"Look, look, bwana, look! See sky!"

Ted looked. "By the eternal gods!" he said. "Your wonderful fellows have done it!"

The horizon above the forest line showed pink like a healing scar. The pink heightened to red and the red to raw wrath, as if Heaven itself were enraged.

A moment they gazed, amazed, en-

thralled. The drumming suddenly ceased. Other sounds were at work in the jungle. Bird calls; monkey squeaks; the sinister imitation of leopards. Here and there a frond scraped a swift sliding form or a rubber-vine twitched in the gloom.

The Bwabali were fleeing—so Little-Fat said—hastening back to look after their village.

"Ready, Nina?" said Ted.

"All ready."

"Ready, Bart?"

"A thousand times ready!"

"Let's hide the loot, then, and be on our way before they discover the joker." Ted set down his gun and pitched in. The Gailliards fell to, and all the Watembo, under Little-Fat's scorpion tongue.

Beds, netting, tinned victuals and Ted's bug apparatus they stacked in a mess of lianas. Mossy fungus draped round like portieres. They had to leave, also, two goatskins of *mbamvu,* a violent, sour Congo beer. Little-Fat threatened death to the Watembo blacks, to prevent them from stealing this prize.

THE job was done up in sweating haste. Bart paid off his porters and praised them. They leaped up and down with the joy of release, then warily slunk from the clearing.

"They're glad to get loose," said Bart.

"What's that?" warned Nina.

The drum! The Bwabali were signaling again. The low running rumble of spectral sounds throbbed again in the womb of the forest. Little-Fat cocked his head, straining. In a moment he muttered:

"Must go!"

"The cat's out of the bag?" guessed Ted.

"Leopard cat," the interpreter nodded. He hoisted a stupendous iron-tipped spear and led the way from the clearing.

"Don't you want a good rifle?" asked Bart.

"Noisy hen make fat fox," said Little-Fat. He thrust his spear into the swarming green and forced a path into the jungle.

Fast as they could stumble and grovel and lunge along the benighted passage to Hassan's camp, not more than a fifth of the flight was done when they heard a faraway clamor.

"They've reached our camp, Ted!" Bart was panting.

"Say, you're wobbly"—Ted touched him—"and bleeding! Your old wounds must have busted. Give me your hand."

"I'll make it. Move on! Move on!"

They moved. The trail dipped into a thorny kloof, a bottomless bed of torture. To right and left of their murky path the venomous vegetation brawled away; no man could guess how far. Stinging creepers and blinding ferns, snags and spurs and rhino grass that cut like broken razors.

Ted had an inspiration. One man could battle a whole pack here—for a minute, ten minutes, or longer. He proposed to take his stand in the trail with his Colt, and his big game Mauser.

"I can join you all later," he said.

"I'll stop here if you do," said Nina.

A babble like frenzied joy possessed the jungle behind them. They quivered with the meaning of it. The Bwabali had plundered their goatskins. A Leopard orgy, lashed by drunkenness, was the maddest thing in the forest. No law, no logic, no threat of arms could appal them when they went "Congo."

"Hurry! Hurry!" pleaded Bart. "We have no time to argue." Ted and Nina obeyed. A peculiar quick current of mutual trust linked them like a thread in the darkness. Formality, like a discarded coat, fell off and was left by the trail. Ted gave Nina a

push, which was meant to be rough; punishment for her stubborn behavior. She merely smiled and moved faster.

Bart tripped in a tangle of poison thorn. Little-Fat pulled him to his feet. His hands were spotted with drops of blood; his face sick-white. He trembled.

"I'd better help you," said Ted.

"Help yourself!" flared Bart. "I'll keep going."

He made a fresh start as the Leopard pack yelled. They were in pursuit now, and seemed nearer. The grim race was on in dead earnest. Little-Fat dived so fast through the undergrowth that Nina, at times, had to call him.

THE trail twisted downward. They struck a damp vale. Big camwood boles loomed in their faces. They lurched among roots and blundered headlong into curtains of swinging mud moss. The darkness leaned against them like a wall. A tortuous trail by daylight; a torturing guess by night. They sputtered and tore at fresh spiderwebs that laced their ears like hair-nets. Beaked insects battled for turns to bite. "You devils!" exploded Ted.

"I thought you loved pests," said Nina.

"Some pests, perhaps. Move on." That closed the conversation.

VI

THREE times, in the long night's struggle, Bart wilted and had to rest. Once they paused long enough to eat some tinned beef which Ted had stuffed into his knapsack. Each time they halted they could hear afar the unleashed Leopards pursuing. Little-Fat oftentimes made cunning detours, to baffle the beasts on their track.

Panting, prickly, scratched, fagged, they burst into the cool buttercup meadow where Hassan maintained his camp. They had used a full night in their journey. Dawn was laying its light on the tropic world. Fire rolled on the roof of the jungle. Here and there hasty huts, like tousled beehives, humped in the sweet shelter of gum trees. Beyond, at the extreme expanse of the field, a beautiful bamboo lodge.

As they stood, concealed by a ferny clump, a man came out of the lodge. He seemed a portentous figure. His body was cast in colossal mold; he advanced like a redwood walking. His man-o'-war beard, iron black and aggressive, magnified the impression of force.

Bart would have called out, but Ted caught his wrist.

"Let's see what he does," he cautioned. "I don't like the feel of this place."

"Bwabali all gone," said Little-Fat, surveying the vacant huts.

"They're Leopards likely," said Ted, "and behind us." Bart declared, if they were, the Colonel would learn it. There'd be hell to pay for somebody.

The King of the Congo approached them, his puttees knocking dew from the grasses. His white helmet glared in the growing light. His pongee shirt rippled smoothly. His khaki pants followed the army cut. At his belt swung a gun and a huge brush knife. It was clear he intended a journey.

For no sure reason Ted hushed his group as the man stalked steadily towards them. Once or twice he slowed, as if listening. He advanced upon them, within thirty yards; then something arrested his eye. He halted beneath a young tree. Ted could see a brown splotch near the end of a limb—apparently a large caterpillar.

Hassan flared his huge knife and sliced off the limb; the blow of a guillotine. With the branch in his hand he swung himself round, as though to return to his dwelling.

Ted broke from the bushes and hailed him.

Hassan turned, with no show of surprise.

"Good morning," he said. His voice rumbled like drums.

"You know me?" asked Ted.

"You're Gailliard's friend. An entomologist."

"That's right. I take it"—Ted looked at the branch—"you are interested in insects, too."

"Sometimes." Hassan oriented his branch so that Ted could see the brown splotch. "Now, here's a curious fellow. Since you are an entomologist, perhaps you can name it for me."

Ted stiffened, electrified. What he saw was a sheen-green larva, segmented, about three inches long. Each segment bristled with a tuft of brown hairs, rich brown and sharper than needles.

His answer came with a rush:

"You're damned right, sir, I can name it! I can name you, too: the murderer of John Gailliard!"

He waited, tense as a steel trap. A searching look shot from Hassan's cragged brows like a bolt from a mountain head. He seemed calmly debating what action to take, when Nina ran out from the bushes.

Her brother and Little-Fat followed.

"Ted, Ted!" she protested. "You've made a mistake! You're all wrong! This man is Colonel Hassan, our friend."

"It's one on you, Ted, old scout," said Bart. "The jungle has got on your nerves."

Ted held his gun ready for instant use and answered desperately, "I know what I'm talking about. I know what stung your father. I know it didn't quit its natural food to crawl through a weedy clearing. It was placed there by human hands. That's a larva of the family Saturniidae. Its hairs are like rattlesnake's teeth."

Nina slightly recoiled.

"It's poisonous?"

"It's poisonous. Viciously poisonous. Put one in your bed at nine o'clock—by midnight you couldn't walk. That's what paralyzed your father. That's why he couldn't run from the rock."

"Could that do it?" Bart spoke as if dazed.

"It could, and it did. But the plot went askew. Your father survived. He died later from the bite of a tsetse fly presented to him by this same friend who likes to collect poison larvae. I charge this man with your father's death. You're blind if you don't realize it."

Bart gravely addressed Colonel Hassan.

"What do you have to say about this?"

Hassan casually tossed the branch into the weeds, as if its interest had passed.

"I say it makes little difference to you. The Leopards are on your trail."

"It makes a big difference to me," said Bart. "Do you admit killing my father?"

"I sent him the vivarium," said Hassan.

NINA groaned in her disillusionment. Ted jammed his gun against Hassan. Bart got Hassan's gun and the mammoth knife. He flung them into the meadow.

"Lead the way to the house," Ted commanded.

"With pleasure," said Hassan, bowing.

With a calm, mighty stride he walked towards the lodge. Bewildered, they traveled along. Little-Fat repeatedly peered at the woods. Nervously he muttered to Ted:

"Leopard no make howl. Mean hot. Get close."

Ted made no reply. He stuck right to Hassan until they pulled up at the lodge. Hassan stepped on the narrow veranda and promptly unlocked the hinged door.

"Accept my poor hospitality." He bowed with grave irony. Ted answered curtly "Get in."

The King of the Congo entered his house; the three whites dragging behind. Little-Fat squatted on the veranda. He had heard how a Bwabali who crossed Hassan's threshold fell dead from the baleful magic. Not all the military drill in the world could erase that tale from his mind.

When Ted and the Gailliards came into the lodge, the wealth of its furnishings stunned them. It spanned the world of

luxury. Rugs as rich as beaver pelts; Damascus draperies dyed in dragons' blood; books old and wise which would have fallen apart but for their golden bandages. And the paperweight on the teakwood desk—a Karnak scarab cut in amethyst! When Ted saw that, his heart was touched. He murmured impulsively:

"I could love the old dog if he didn't kill sheep!"

"What's that?" said Hassan.

"Nothing. Let's get down to business." Ted sat himself warily on a Turkish divan. Bart almost collapsed beside him. Nina sank into a vast velvet ottoman deep-scented with sandalwood. Ted cursed in his heart the sinister star that had brought her to this bitter well.

"Would you care for some wine?" proffered Hassan.

"Not in this house," said Bart.

"Colonel Hassan," said Nina, "I'm all in a maze—I can't comprehend—why did you kill my father?"

"He wanted your diamonds," said Ted.

HASSAN laughed in tremendous scorn.

"That does you small credit, Professor. Diamonds and nuggets and pieces of eight are stale playthings to me. I tired of them ages ago. I have seen savage days and have done savage things, but I never killed anybody for money. I had to dispose of John Gailliard. I'm willing to tell you why. You never will reach civilization. You insulted the gods of the Leopard priests and they'll stay on your trail till they drop. Since we have little time, I will be brief. Forty years ago your father and I and two other young chaps were part of a British research in Rhodesia. Your father was the lapidary; the other two, botanists. I was studying insect life. The flies and the fevers and everything else drove us out of our senses a bit. I quarreled with one fellow and killed him. Your father and the other chap, Willis, demanded that I give myself up. I did not fancy rotting my life out in jail, so I fled by night into the Congo.

"I took a new name, threw my razor away, and began to buy ivory from niggers. With the profits from this I began to export, though I seldom went back to the coast. I need not tell you I prospered. My name is known from Kivu to the coast and a thousand blacks call me master. I became very wealthy—and wretched.

"All the while I dreamed of white people. In tropic campfires I saw yellow-haired girls and gallant young men playing polo. While leopards screamed within pistol shot, I rode in aeroplanes over cities.

"Every night, through those forty years in the bush, I dreamed about civilization. Meanwhile my son had grown up——"

"Son!" three voices made the chorus.

"Yes, son. I have many children. They are scattered from Cape to Cairo. I care for them all and send them all money; but this boy is my boy. He is white. His mother was a lovely Egyptian. I wanted to give him good schooling. He had read of America and longed to go there. I longed to go with him and spend my last years. I thought America safer than England.

"One man alone stood in my way. Willis had died years ago. If ever I should be brought to task for my crime, only one man in the world could convict me."

"So that is why you killed my father!" The stabbing exclamation was Nina's.

"You look horror-stricken. Small wonder. I hardly can expect you to comprehend. After forty years in the Congo—forty years of fever and fetishes—forty years of blood and ambush—forty years of Moslem zealots and dog-toothed cannibals—I have come to the fatalistic notion that life is of little moment; that ideals cannot stand the crushing pressure of necessity;

that I, with my palace on the Nile, am as meaningless in the scheme of things as a gnat on a naked Watembo. I arrive at the end of my long and bloody safari with only one hope, one consolation: that my son may live in America all his life—civilized, clean, happy."

IMMEASURABLE longing was in his tone. Bart's query cut in like a sword:

"Was it all a part of your infernal scheme—getting Dad over here?"

"I brought him here," declared Hassan. "When Kohl found that mine, he knew and I knew it was sacred soil to the Leopards. They have a god there, with leopard-shaped head, that only their Ishumus may visit. The god is made of the very blue clay from the ground where Kohl picked up his big diamonds. They sacrifice human life there. It's the place their slave raids originated from. They can't afford to let it be desecrated. Through his uncanny cunning, Kohl escaped with his skin and came to me with his story.

"I wanted no fight with the Leopards. My business was trading with blacks. But instantly I thought of the only man in the world who stood between my son and his life. It occurred to me then that John Gailliard should have a chance to hunt for those dangerous diamonds. I recalled his address from the 'Importers' Digest.' I financed Kohl to go to see him. I warned Kohl only not to mention my name; saying Gailliard and I were not friendly."

"Kohl is innocent then?" said Bart.

"Absolutely. He willingly risked his own neck to guide you in there to the diamonds. You were attacked once, but it failed. When you got to my camp I intuitively felt that your father recognized me. All my old horror of detection revived and I tried to make away with him. Your friend here knows how I did it. If I had waited, the Leopards might have finished the job. No doubt they have done in poor Kohl."

"And we re the next victims!" said Nina.

"Perhaps," bowed Hassan. "I couldn't foresee he would bring all his kin to the jungle."

Bart's rankling fury boiled over.

"Little you care about that! You murdered my father to have your name——"

HASSAN thundered indignantly:

"For my son's sake, young man, not my own."

"We've no time to quibble about that," said Bart. "You planted the flies that killed him. You ought to hang for it, but you won't. We never could prove that you did it. I'll make you a proposition. If you won't play our game, I'll shoot you myself to pay you off for my father."

"Fair enough," said Hassan, "go on."

"You've committed a crime for the sake of your son. Now I'll commit one for my sister. You stall off the Leopards—you know their tongue—let us rest here until we are able to start—then we'll not report you at the Post."

"Nor anywhere else?"

"Nor anywhere else."

Before Hassan could answer, Little-Fat shrieked *"Aue,"* as he bounded alive on the porch. A black form plunged from the jungle. He raced towards the lodge in a panic. He carried no weapon, and as he streaked nearer they could see he was not a Bwabali.

"That's my Nubian scout," said Hassan.

The fellow came on like a runaway slave, and flattened himself at their feet. Hassan gave him a prod with the toe of his boot. He stood up and poured out his message. While he babbled, lungs pumping, a soul-shattering yell exploded nearby in the jungle.

Nina caught at Ted's arm, terror-stricken. Bart shifted his rifle towards Hassan.

"Damn you," he said, "do your stuff!"

Hassan turned from the Nubian, and said:

"This fellow tells me the blacks have

'gone Congo.' They had Kohl and they cut him to pieces. There will be no speechmaking now."

"You're bluffing," said Ted.

"Am I?"

The answer arose from the jungle itself. A hundred forms spilled from the leafage. They wore spotted belts and leopard-like tails. Their features were madly distraught.

Little-Fat and the Nubian hurled themselves from the porch and fled to the sheltering forest.

VII

THE space from the lodge to the jungle was four or five hundred yards. The Leopards did not pause to take breath. Brandishing hooks and three-pronged knives, they raged through the buttercup meadow. One man—an Ishumu—had his face grossly masked. Eight or ten of the leaders bore spears.

Nina's face changed to the face of a corpse. Ted and Bart clutched their big rifles. Hassan, alone, appeared unconcerned. He bulked in the door, surveying the scene, as calm as a jadestone Buddha.

"This is the end of the story," he said.

"Stop them! Talk to them!" Nina implored.

"You'll have to fight it out," said Hassan. "Nobody can talk to them now."

"Try! try! try! You can do it!"

"Very well." He bent quickly and grasped the spear that Little-Fat had dropped in his fright. He marched towards the charging Leopards. At sight of his dour and dreaded beard a few of them halted, appalled. Most of the mob made towards him. Their midnight orgies and Kohl's death had taught them white men could be killed. Religious mania and lust for revenge had drowned the last spark of respect.

Hassan roared commands in Bwabali. The echo was howls of hate. Some threw their spears running, grazing his head. Still he strode gigantically towards them.

As the mob met Hassan he shifted his spear, holding it like a long bar, horizontal. They hit it with terrific impact. Three or four somersaulted; necks broken, or stunned. The rest of them swarmed over Hassan.

Bart and Ted ran out towards the frenzied mass and began to empty their rifles. Leopard-men fell here and there at the fringe of the fight, but none could be diverted from Hassan. To them he personified the bloody reign of the whites. The hour of revenge was at hand.

Hassan clung to a club of his broken spear and knocked men rolling like apples. Other warriors ramped over their bodies. They leaped on his back and he flung them around like a bearded bull shaking off terriers. Iron claws hacked his clothing to shreds. Black arms twined his legs in a python-like grip. Bladed weapons chopped at his heart.

WHILE Hassan could keep himself on his feet he had a chance to fight free. But the tangle about his legs tripped him. Like a towering jungle tree, loaded with apes, he toppled among the Bwabali. With a shrill of unearthly triumph they drove in their three-bladed knives.

Ted and Bart advanced and blazed their guns point-blank at the milling assassins. The Leopards turned upon them. Ted and Bart ran back, pausing, firing, running again; striving to win to the lodge.

Their rifles burned empty; they pulled

their side-arms. Bart stumbled, and Ted had to help him. This mishap cost them much ground. Two Leopards rushed Ted and closed in so fast he was able to drop

only one. The other one grappled, his knife in his hand. Bart saw, but he dared not shoot.

Nina Gailliard, on the porch, raised her rifle. The terror had gone from her face. While Ted and the Leopard fought hand to hand, she shot at the black and killed him. He sagged to the grass at Ted's feet.

She fired again, stopping another. Ted and Bart kept up a running fire until they got back to the lodge. Nina gave Ted her rifle. She reloaded his. Bart banged a clip into his own. The front line of Leopards who stormed the porch met a blast like a levelling typhoon. Three rifles, repeating, cut such a death swath not even a Leopard could face it.

The Ishumu called his men back. He brought them together, far out in the field, to hold a council of war.

While the council was on, Ted lifted his sights, drew a bead on the powwow and fired. The Ishumu fell dead with a hole in his mask. All the Leopards took panic and fled.

THE three whites traipsed through the blood-tipped grass to care for the body of Hassan. He fairly bristled with knives. It took their last strength and numerous respites to carry him into the lodge.

They stretched his great frame on an arabesqued couch and covered him with a soft rug. Bart lifted it for a last look.

What manner of man was this? A being of such prodigious extremes no theory could harmonize him. Behind that rock forehead had hummed a dynamo so mighty it staggered its moral armature. An eagle—or a harpy—sired that nose. Black beard and hair, fretted with random darts of gray, would serve to frighten children; but Bart discerned a kind of cynical tenderness in the mouth.

"So you went out to meet them to save our lives?"

"To save his son's life, brother."

Nina's quiet comment electrified Bart.

"By the gods," he said, "I'll not disappoint him!"

"No more will I," agreed Ted.

Quietly Bart let the rug fall.

It was late the same day when they got Hassan buried. The Leopard-men they had to cremate. As Ted and Bart finished the unhappy task, a tall shadow stirred at the jungle. Ted was ready with his Colt in a hurry.

"Don't do it," said Bart, "that's Little-Fat—and Hassan's nigger behind him."

Sheepishly the blacks trotted up.

"Well, well," said Bart, "you're just in time to lead us out of the desert."

Ted eyed Little-Fat sternly and said, "What's the matter with you, big soldier? You told me if a Leopard came fooling around, you'd give him a kick in the pants."

"Too many pants," said the black.

Bart had the first laugh he had relished in months. The four of them walked to the lodge. Nina had food waiting, from Hassan's stock. She served it on the veranda. They sat in the tide of the tropic sunset, inhaling air powerful with perfume. They felt little fear of the Leopards. With half of their force and the Ishumu gone, the sect was thoroughly shattered. Little-Fat could finish Kohl's job.

The sun dropped violently out of their world. They found themselves blinking at fireflies. The fireflies recalled Ted to his mission in life. A restless emotion stirred him. He arose and passed into the meadow.

As he strolled through the shadows of star-pointed gums, a sudden discovery thrilled him.

Nina Gailliard was there at his side.

Without speaking, the two of them walked slowly on. Bart called out to them.

"Where you going?"

"To the Flying Forest," said Nina.

Too Dumb to Live

By CARL N. TAYLOR

Author of "Six Feet of Devil," etc.

Reward money—why, that's easy!

SIM LANDERS stood before the cashier's window in the Cattlemen's Bank of Tres Piedras, gazing hungrily at the greenbacks piled on the marble shelf just beyond his reach. Dimly, he heard the voice of Thorpe Hogrefe, cashier.

"It's no use, Landers," Hogrefe was saying acidly. "I've heard your story twice, and I can't do a thing for you." He glanced over Landers' shoulder and nodded to a cattle buyer who stood waiting. "Good morning, Mr. Bell. Be with you in a minute. Sorry to keep you waiting."

Thorpe Hogrefe had a way of refusing loans that sent most small fry shuffling from the bank, tail between legs. Its only effect on Sim Landers had been to bring a puzzled look to his face.

"But I got to have two thousand dollars," he insisted, hitching at the single 'gallus' of his faded bib overalls. "I jest got to——"

"Oh, Lord help us!" Hogrefe exclaimed feelingly. "Must I tell you a third time you can't get it here?"

"Because my wife, Molly, she's sick," Landers explained. "Doc says she'll die ef'n I take her back East. Onless I git two thousand dollars, Ed Trimble shore aims to foreclose on my place——"

"That's unfortunate," Hogrefe retorted coldly. "But if we bankers put out money to every man that has a sick wife, pretty soon there wouldn't be any banks." Hogrefe's heavy face was red; his voice hard, ugly. "Let me tell you something else! You wouldn't listen to this bank's advice when you came here. You were bound to put your money in a farm in the midst of cattle country. A bean farm, at that! If you've gone broke, you can't lay it to anything but your own dumbness!"

"I made money the first year," Landers argued. "I been tryin' to tell ye I'd make it agin ef'n you'd let me have two thousand dollars. All I need is rain——"

"That's all they need in Hell," Hogrefe cut in.

The cattle buyer snickered appreciatively.

Landers was about to speak again when the door opened. He saw Thorpe Hogrefe's jaw sag. He saw the red of anger fade from his features and give way to the paleness of fright. Sim Landers swung to face the door.

A powerful blue sedan stood at the curb, curtains drawn, motor idling. A masked man was crossing the threshold. Three other armed men in black masks were marching up the steps. A fifth sat at the

wheel of the blue sedan, toying with a sawed-off shotgun.

"What—what does this mean?" Hogrefe spluttered.

"Bank robbery," the leader grated. "Git 'em up!"

Sim Landers obeyed as though reaching for the ceiling was a habit. Thorpe Hogrefe did likewise. Charlie Bell, the cattle-buyer, made a motion toward his gun, thought better of it, and grudgingly raised his hands. At the same instant the door of the president's office opened and burly old Sam Grinnel, president of the bank, came barging out, a Colt Peacemaker in his hand.

All the bandits except the driver of the car were now within the bank. Disregarding their guns, Grinnel drew a bead on the head of the nearest one, a squat, bow-legged man in overalls and boots.

The Peacemaker's hammer clicked on a defective primer. The bandit's gun blazed. Grinnel pitched forward, clawing at his stomach.

"That was worth waitin' six years for," the killer said. "Ranch settled for in full."

The robbers surged forward. A gun was jabbed into Sim Landers' ribs. He smelled corn whisky and raised his hands until six inches of bony wrists stuck out of his ragged sleeves.

"What'll I do with this one?" The bandit indicated Landers with a prod of his gun.

"Turn his face to the wall and tell him to stand there," the leader rasped. "He's a dumb bean farmer. He won't bother us. Take that cattle buyer's gun away from him and git in the safe. Grab the coin! We got to hurry after this shootin'!"

"No hurry," drawled the bow-legged killer. "Blackie's in the car with his scattergun. He knows how to use it."

HIS face to the wall, hands above his head, Sim Landers shifted his weight from one foot to the other while the bank was looted. He heard the bandit leader's crisp command to Thorpe Hogrefe, "Git in the vault and shell out, pronto! Everything you got—bonds and all!" He grinned at Hogrefe's protesting squeals before they locked him in the vault. He nodded his head in agreement when one of the bandits prodded the small of his back with a gun and said, "Stand where y'are fer five minutes. Turn around and yuh gits a bullet—savvy?" He heard their clumping boots on the tiled floor as they filed out. A motor roared and a car shot away with clashing gears. A moment of silence, then a babble of excitement. Men rushed into the bank. Landers recognized Ham Frazer's booming voice.

"What's goin' on here?" Frazer demanded.

"The bank's been robbed," Landers answered, turning away from the wall to stare at the motionless form of Sam Grinnel. He added, "I guess they killed Sam'l Grinnel."

"You don't say!" The sheriff snorted. "I thought maybe they was havin' a pink tea or somethin'. Where's Hogrefe?"

"In the vault. They locked him in."

While members of the crowd carried Grinnel's body into his private office, Frazer directed an onslaught upon the locked inner door of the vault. The lock yielded to a few blows of a hammer. In a few seconds Thorpe Hogrefe was stammering out his version of the robbery between swigs from a bottle someone had handed him.

"They caught me unawares. Landers was at the window, begging for a loan. I was busy talking to him and didn't see the robbers in time, or I'd have shot it out with them."

"You seen 'em afore I did, Mr. Hogrefe," Landers corrected. "It was the scared look on your face that made me turn around."

Some of the onlookers tittered. Thorpe Hogrefe scowled.

"Nobody's askin' you what happened," the sheriff said brusquely. "You didn't do nothin' to stop 'em, did yuh?"

"No-o-o," Landers admitted. "My wife, Molly, she's sick, and——"

"The way they carried the thing off, they were old hands at the game," Hogrefe continued importantly. "No amateur would have shot Mr. Grinnel down in cold blood. It's my opinion we owe this outrage to the Joe Adams gang from the Four Corners country."

The Adams gang had been active for some time. They worked out of the bad lands of the lower San Juan, whence they occasionally sallied forth to carry on their depredations in Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico.

"I figgered it was the Adams gang the minute I stepped in the bank," the sheriff agreed. He rasped out orders to his deputies. "I want all roads leadin' outa this county blocked. Will Sarles, you phone all ranchers that has phones and git that 'tended to. Charlie Bell, Slim McGornihan, and Bronc Nevers each git a posse together and hit the dust. I'll stay here a while and look fer some more clues. Shake a leg, you buckaroos, and we'll have the gang in jail afore night!"

"I'd be right glad to go with the posses," Landers ventured, touching Frazer's arm, "only my wife, she's sick, and I got to be gittin' home——"

"Hustle right along home!" Frazer snapped. "That's where yuh belong. Reckon we c'n git along without yuh." The sheriff was a ponderous man, built on the lines of a toad. This was his first big case and he was conscious of a vast self importance.

"I'm goin' right away," Landers replied. "But I got somethin' to say first. Sheriff, I got a theory——"

"Oh, yuh have, have yuh?" Frazer glared at him. "Well, take it home and tell it to your wife! I'm too busy to listen to yuh."

"The Adams gang is cattle rustlers," Landers persisted. "Besides, the Four Corners country is three hundred miles away. I don't think they done this——"

"Hear! Hear!" Thorpe Hogrefe murmured sarcastically.

"I don't care a damn what yuh think," Frazer said roughly. "I guess cow thieves is jest natcherally above robbin' a bank, huh? And they couldn't possibly drive three hundred miles in that big blue car! Yeh—you're bright. Let me know when yuh git this case solved, will yuh?"

"I didn't git to finish what I started to say," Landers protested mildly.

A titter ran through the crowd of onlookers. The sheriff's face flushed angrily. He had a premonition of wise cracks the town wags would fashion at his expense. For Sim Landers had been the butt of rough humor ever since his arrival at Tres Piedras. He had come into the country to follow a plow where cows had run since the arrival of the first settler. This proved that he was little better than a half-wit. Besides, he looked so dumb that nothing from him would ever sound quite sensible. The sheriff's irritation was growing. Until the robbers were captured, hangers-on around his office would be continually ragging him: "How're yuh and Sim Landers gittin' along with the robbery case? Has Sim thought up any more theories fer yuh?" And other remarks of the same tenor. That kind of thing would be ruinous at election time. It would deflate his importance at any time.

"Don't want to hear any o' your damn' theories!" he thundered. "Don't want yuh messin' around destroyin' clues. Don't want nothin' a-tall from yuh. *Git out!*"

Sim Landers' pale green eyes flashed a spark of fire. Sim was pretty mad. He wanted to give Ham Frazer a good cussin', but there was a peculiar deficiency in Sim's inner make-up. The madder he

got, the milder he spoke. So today, though boiling inwardly, he merely said:

"All right, Sheriff, ef'n that's the way ye feel. I was only aimin' to tell ye what I figgered out while the rumpus was goin' on. Thought maybe it might he'p."

Amid the titters of the crowd, he made his way out of the bank, crossed the street to his team and wagon, and drove homeward.

Sheriff Ham Frazer wiped his florid face with a red bandana and began a thorough search for clues.

EIGHT miles from Tres Piedras Landers met Buck McQuale and Sepulchre Smith, his foreman. McQuale was a Kentuckian who ran a moderate sized cow outfit a few miles back in the hills from Landers' dry farm. Landers sometimes sold him beans and vegetables for his cookhouse, but they had scarcely more than a nodding acquaintance.

Today McQuale reined in his horse and motioned for Landers to stop. Both he and Sepulchre Smith were wearing guns.

"I hear the Cattlemen's Bank has been robbed," McQuale said. "Know anything about it?"

"I was in the bank when it happened," Landers said slowly. "Five men wearin' black masks done it. They shot Sam'l Grinnel deader'n a doornail."

"They plugged Grinnel, eh? Don't know as I'd complain much about that ef they hadn't cleaned the vault and took my money along with the rest," McQuale remarked. "We jest heerd about it a little while ago. Thought we'd ride down and he'p out the sheriff ef he needs us."

"We thought yuh might give us a description o' the gang," the foreman stated. "So's we'd know 'em ef'n we meets 'em."

"Didn't ketch sight of their faces, they bein' masked," Landers replied. "But ye might watch out fer a blue automobeel with the curtains all pulled down."

"Much obliged," McQuale responded, touching his horse's flank with his quirt. "Guess we'll be driftin'."

Landers clucked at his team and glanced over his shoulder at the departing horsemen.

"News shore travels fast anymore," he thought. "Makes it tough sleddin' fer bank robbers. Me, I'd ruther raise beans on a dry farm and git a crop once ever three year."

The wagon trundled over the rutted road. In the hazy distance a pile of white thunderheads lifted their crests above the black lava flows. Forgetful of the morning's swift events, Landers watched the clouds with a troubled eye.

"After gittin' no rain all summer," he muttered, "it'd jest be my luck to ketch a toad-strangler at harvest time." He shook his head mournfully. "Reckon I'd be sunk fer shore then."

He turned off the road and crossed a field to his lonely farm house. It was a sorry looking, two room affair of rough boards, weather beaten and unpainted. A corral and a cedar brush shelter for his team served for a barn. A few listless chickens wallowed in the dust. At their master's approach a noisy pack of dogs, of no particular breed, came loping to meet him. By the number and character of his dogs, a stranger might have guessed his nativity fairly accurately. Like his more prosperous neighbor, McQuale, he was a Kentuckian—a far-wanderer from the hills of Breathitt County.

LEAVING his team standing, he entered the kitchen, deposited a meagre basket of groceries on the table, and passed into the adjoining room where his wife lay sick in bed. She was a plain, sallow woman, her eyes fever bright. She probably had never been pretty. But to Sim Landers she was beautiful. She was one in whose presence he did not feel awkward; one who never thought him a simpleton, who never criticized, who never doubted his ability to raise crops in this sun-baked country where crops had never been grown before.

Today she greeted him with an eager

smile that made him wince. He knew what she was going to say before the words came. He had spent most of the long drive home thinking up an answer.

"Did they let you have the money, Simpson?"

"Didn't git it today, Molly," he began with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Bank robbers busted in and cleaned the place afore I had time to talk it over with Mister Hogrefe." The words had a bleak sound. He added, stumblingly, "I'll git it—afore we need it, Molly. Don't you worry none. I'll shore git it—ain't no doubt about it."

At his mention of the robbery his wife's eyes widened.

"They robbed the bank while you was there!" she exclaimed incredulously. "They might've killed ye, Simpson! Don't *you* worry none about not gittin' the money! We'll make out somehow. I'm only glad ye came back safe and sound!"

Awkwardly, he bent over the bed and planted a kiss on her forehead.

"Ef'n it hadn't been fer you," he said, "I guess I'd ha' fit 'em. But I thought I hadn't oughter."

A WEEK went by, during which Sim watched his ripening beans with one eye on the high piled cloud masses that marched, frowning, across the sky. Then disaster struck in the form of a cloudburst. It was followed by lashing hail. The storm lasted all night, and when the clouds broke the next morning there was no need for him to go out to survey the damage.

He went out, anyway, with an appearance of hope that he did not feel. For a long time he stood leaning against a fence post beside his ruined bean field, chewing the stem of a tumbleweed, striving to think.

He went into the house at last.

"It was a right smart rain, all right," he said cheerfully. "But it wasn't the rain what ruint the beans. It was the hail."

"Don't you worry, Simpson," his wife said. "The bank will let ye have the mortgage money ef'n ye tell 'em how things is. Maybe next year ye'll have good luck!"

"We've got half a ton o' prime pintos left over from last year," Sim answered. "Guess I'll load 'em up and haul 'em to town."

Sim noticed as he drove past the bank that it was open and doing business. He could see Thorpe Hogrefe behind the cashier's window.

"Robbers shorely didn't git all the money," he thought. "I'm a-mind to go in and tackle 'em fer that loan agin."

He left his team standing at the hitch rack and crossed the street. Before he reached the bank, however, he saw something which caused him to change his mind about entering. It was a poster in large black type.

NOTICE!

$500 REWARD $500

The State Bankers' Association will pay the sum of five hundred dollars ($500) each for the capture, dead or alive, of the bandits who, on September 1st., robbed the Cattlemen's Bank of Tres Piedras and murdered Samuel Grinnel, President. Persons having information bearing on the case should communicate with Sheriff Hamilton Frazer, of Tres Piedras County, or his deputies. Reward payable in cash upon conviction of guilty parties or presentation of their dead bodies with proof of guilt.

(Signed)

The State Bankers' Association.

Landers slowly spelled out the reward notice, moving his lips and pronouncing each word half audibly. Then he read it a second time.

"Five hunderd dollars, dead er alive!" he repeated. "That shore looks like easy money!"

Hitching at his overalls, he started toward the courthouse. He found Ham Frazer, Slim McGornihan, and Bronc Nevers sitting moodily in the sheriff's office. At his entrance, Nevers nudged McGornihan. Both cast side glances at Frazer. "Guess the chase is ended," Nevers whispered audibly. "Here comes Landers to collect the reward." McGornihan snickered. Frazer reddened and jerked erect in his chair.

LIFE had been no picnic for him after his failure to round up the bandits. He had seen his chances for re-election wane and vanish. Friends and enemies alike had subjected him to innumerable pointed and pointless jibes with reference to Sim Landers' "theory." Even his deputies had been kidding him about it. Now here was Landers again.

"Howdy," Landers said by way of announcing his presence.

"Take off your hat and squat a while," Bronc Nevers invited with excess cordiality. "We're shore glad to see yuh. Sheriff here was jest sayin' how he was honin' to talk with yuh and git your advice about capturin' these here bank robbers."

Frazer snorted. He knew he was in for it now unless he could think of some way to turn the incident to his advantage. And that looked pretty hopeless.

"I see they got a big reward on the bandits," Landers drawled.

"Shore! Five hundred dollars per each," Nevers said, nudging McGornihan again. "Didn't come to c'llect it, did yuh?"

Landers shook his head.

"N-o, but it shore looks like easy money."

"Hell!" Frazer exploded.

Nevers and McGornihan burst into storms of laughter. They were having their fun. Nevers, a practical joker by nature, had no intention of letting it stop just yet.

"Say, Landers," he remarked gravely, "What's th' matter—yuh ain't wearin' your star today?"

"What star?"

"The one yuh got with your correspondence course. Someone was sayin' you was a regular correspondence school detective."

Frazer sat up so suddenly that his chair groaned. He prided himself on quick decisions in times of emergency. Jerking open a desk drawer, he fumbled among odds and ends and brought out a tarnished deputy's star.

"Landers," he began impressively, "I'm makin' yuh a depity sheriff! I want yuh to git busy and solve this case. As long as yuh wear this star yuh got the same right to conduct investigations and make arrests as any my other depities."

Landers gazed at him vacantly.

"Ye mean I'm a regular deputy sheriff?"

"Yuh shore are! Any other questions yuh want to ask afore yuh starts your duties?"

"Reckon not," Landers said, fingering the star. "I'm shore much obliged to yuh, Sheriff. Guess I'll be moseyin'."

Nevers and McGornihan gazed at each other blankly. Frazer grinned like a Cheshire cat. Leaning back in his chair, he lighted a cigar, blew a series of smoke rings, and winked at Nevers.

"Thank yuh kindly, Bronc," he said with a smirk. "Fer a while yuh had me where the hair was short. Now I'll laugh. That remark o' yours about his star showed me the way out. Sim Landers is goin' to be so danged funny as a depity that nobody's ever goin' to kid me about him again. Fellers, I admit your joke was good ontil yuh over-played it, but it's gone plumb stale now."

AS LANDERS strolled down the street it was in his mind to treat himself to a drink by way of celebrating his good luck. He came to the Oasis poolroom and blind tiger, paused, and stepped through the doorway. If he had been the ghost of Billy the Kid entering the place with cocked six-shooters, his appearance would have caused no more excitement.

Tonopah Stillwell, the barkeep, put down the glass he was polishing and yelped his amazement

"Sufferin' snakes!"

Buck McQuale, sitting in a card game, dropped a royal flush face up on the table. As he turned to face the door, his right hand fell automatically to the butt of his gun. Then he saw Landers and let out a bellow of laughter. A row of thirsty cowboys turned their backs to the bar and snickered or stared incredulously.

"Where'd yuh git the star?" the waddies chorused.

"Bless me if it ain't Detectif Landers." Tonopah shouted. "Hope yuh didn't come to raid me! Step up and have a drink." He made a sweeping gesture. "Come on, yuh waddies. This is on the house!"

McQuale held up a restraining hand. "Wait—the occasion demands somethin' better than your rot-gut, Tonopah. I got some real likker in my car outside. *I'm* settin' 'em up." He spoke to Sepulchre Smith. "Toddle outside, Sepulchre, and bring us in a couple o' quarts."

Buck McQuale's black eyes were twinkling. He was a big man, an old-timer, noted as a drinker, reserved and silent most of the time, and rated a hard man. He had ill-fitting false teeth that gave him a macabre expression when he smiled. Today, as he waited for Sepulchre Smith to return with the whisky, his smile came and went like a winking heliograph.

Sepulchre Smith came back with two quart bottles. Glasses were filled the length of the bar.

"Before we ups our likker," McQuale suggested, "let's have confirmation from Officer Landers of what our eyes tells us is true." He turned to Sim. "Has the sheriff woke up at last and recognized your talent? Did he make yuh a depity regular and accordin' to law?"

Landers squirmed in embarrassment. Apparently unaware that he was being made the butt of boisterous fun, he replied without a trace of expression on his homely countenance.

"Reckon it's regular, all right. I jest come from the sheriff's office. I told him I 'lowed I could make me some easy money collectin' bounties on the bank robbers, and he right away appinted me a deputy."

Just then Ham Frazer bustled in with Nevers and McGornihan at his heels. With a broad wink at the crowd, he confirmed Landers' statement. Tonopah Stillwell assumed a poker expression and industriously wiped the bar. Various cowboys exchanged sly grins. All regarded Ham Frazer with puzzlement. There was fun in the air, but they couldn't quite make out his game.

Glasses were lifted. Liquor slid down dusty throats.

"That's shore prime likker," Landers said, wiping his lips with a frayed shirt sleeve. "Regular corn! Ain't tasted none like it since I left Ole Breathitt County, Kaintuck!"

"Bet your life you ain't," McQuail agreed with another of his macabre smiles. "Ain't none other like it in this neck o' the woods. I got a feller workin' fer me that run a still on the headwaters o' the Little Bloody ontil he shot a Revenoor and had to come out West."

"It's shore got the old time taste," Sim reiterated.

"Have another'n?" McQuale said.

The two quarts disappeared like water

on a desert sand dune. Sepulchre Smith brought in two more bottles, and after an interval, departed in his car, to return later with a gunny sack, the contents of which tinkled not unmusically. Buck McQuale had sent him back to the ranch for more of the marvelous nectar.

"Yuh c'n drink her down like water," he was explaining. "Sour mash whisky never hurt no man—did it, Depity?"

"Not ef'n she's made the old fashioned way, with sprouted corn malt," Sim agreed, waggling his head.

"That's the way this was made."

"Shore—ye c'n tell that both by the smell and taste!"

AS THE afternoon slipped by, Sim became the center of a convivial crowd grouped around McQuale's table. After the twentieth drink, conversation turned to the subject of bank robbers.

"I heerd yuh got a theory all doped out and know jest where to nab 'em," McQuale said, replenishing his glass.

"I got a theory," Landers admitted. "I think p'raps she's goin' to bring me some easy money."

"Tell yuh what I'll do," McQuale suggested. "Yuh say yuh like my likker. All right—ef'n yuh nabs 'em within a week, I got a bar'l that's yourn."

"That's shore a temptation," Landers mused. "Yep, it shore is. I'll be takin' ye up on that, Mister McQuale."

The crowd applauded.

Landers had had a lot of drinks. They were getting under his skin and making him a trifle reckless in his next words:

"Now *I'm* makin' an offer. I been admirin' that ring on your little finger, Mister McQuale. I'd shore like to give that ring to my wife, Molly. She's sick, and I guess she'd like a few pretties. Most womenfolks does. Tell ye what I'll do—I'll bet my farm agin that ring that I have the whole kit'n'boodle on 'em c'r-alled and delivered to the jail, dead er alive, by this time tomorrer night!"

Buck McQuale stiffened and flashed his false teeth in another of his disturbing smiles. Removing the ring from his finger, he gazed at it fondly.

"My daddy took that ring off'n a damned Yankee captain at Lookout Mountain," he said softly. "It's never been off'n my finger since Pappy died. I set a heap o' store by it, and I reckon your bean farm wouldn't be wuth half to me what that ring is. But I don't know any man—" he broke off suddenly and swept the crowd with challenging eyes—"I don't know any man that ever seen Buck McQuale back down on a fair bet. I'm takin' yuh up!"

Sheriff Frazer and Tonopah Stillwell were appointed stake holders. Buck McQuale gave them his prized ring, and Landers a written agreement to assign complete title to his place.

McQuale splashed another round of drinks into the empty glasses. Landers drained his and rose to his feet a trifle unsteadily. Making his way to the street, he climbed into his wagon and drove home.

On his arrival he said to his wife:

"I want ye to git a good night's sleep. I'm goin' to git the mortgage money tomorrer. P'rhaps they'll be some left. I'm goin' to use it to git ye a pretty. Ye've allus wanted a ring, ain't ye?"

"Yes, Simpson, I reckon I've wanted one nigh onto as long as I c'n remember," she said wistfully. "But ye've been drinkin' a mite too much. Ye'd better git in bed."

SIM drove up before McQuale's hitch rack at sundown, left his team standing, and walked toward the bunkhouse.

McQuale, sitting on the doorstep, flashed his false teeth in a smile. Deftly, he fashioned a brown paper cigarette.

"There comes Landers, Bob. Reckon he's got over his drunk and comin' to beg out'n our bet."

Bob McQuale, his nephew and partner, grinned sourly. He was a heavy-set, thick-necked man in his late twenties, with a dark, surly face.

"Don't pay no heed to him, ef'n that's what he wants. Yuh got him sewed up legal."

"Don't worry," McQuale grunted. "I c'n use his land, and I got the good hard cash to pay off the mortgage on it."

Bob grinned understandingly.

"Yeh—we made plenty last time."

"I'm quittin', too, pretty soon. Soon's I'm heeled." Raising his voice, Buck called out a bluff greeting. "Howdy, Landers. Glad to see yuh! Comin' to c'llect your bar'l o' likker, I reckon?"

Landers nodded. "I fetched my team and wagon to haul her home."

McQuale's eyes narrowed. "Got the bandits in jail accordin' to contract, eh?"

He was smiling like a corpse stricken in the midst of mirth. His voice was chill. His nephew shifted his position and eyed Landers scornfully.

"Reckon they're jest the same as in jail," Landers remarked without concern. "I been workin' on a theory——"

Buck McQuale rasped.

"Our bet didn't say anything about theories!"

There was a moment of tense silence. Bob McQuale shot his uncle a quick glance. Sepulchre Smith appeared in the bunkhouse doorway. Two hard-faced cowpunchers looked out over his shoulder. Sim Landers, glancing at them with elaborate unconcern, put them down as Texans. Bad men, judging by the killers he had known back there.

"Howdy." His glance and greeting included the two punchers as well as the foreman. Smith nodded bleakly; the Texans merely stared.

"Depity Landers has come to tell us about his theory," Buck McQuale said. There was steel in his voice.

"An' to c'llect a bar'l o' prime likker," Sim reminded. "Don't be fergittin' that!"

Buck and his nephew came to their feet. Sepulchre Smith and the two punchers stepped outside.

"Jest what in hell d'yuh mean by that?" Buck McQuale demanded.

"They's several things to explain about my theory," Sim drawled. "In the fust place, five men robbed the Cattlemen's Bank. They had been drinkin' sprouted corn likker—the fust I'd sniffed since I left Ole Kaintuck. As I told ye yesterday, Mister McQuale, I'd recognize the smell er taste o' prime Kentucky moonshine anywhere I run acrost it. They's five o' y'all, and——"

"Meanin'?" Bob McQuale cut in.

"When ye and Sepulchre Smith rode down to jine the posses, ye stopped me to see ef'n I recognized any o' the bandits," Landers continued, eyeing Buck McQuale. "When I said I didn't, ye rode on. Surprisin', ain't it, how quick ye heerd about the robbery, away out here with no telephone?"

Suddenly Buck McQuale laughed harshly, his face livid.

"Got it all figgered out, ain't yuh? An' now yuh've come to c'llect your bar'l o' likker!"

"*And* your ring—after I git back to town," Landers reminded. "Ye was wearin' it when ye stuck up the bank, Mr. McQuale—when ye called me a dumb bean farmer was when I seen it. And ye was wearin' it when ye stopped me on the road, I noticed. Kinda keerless, I thought."

"Yuh ain't goin' to git back to town," McQuale bellowed. "Yuh seen too damn' much, Mr. Smart Depity! Go on—speak your piece. Tell us what else yuh seen!"

As yet, Sim had made no move to draw the Peacemaker nestling under his left arm. His voice betrayed no excitement as he continued.

"In the bank I *heerd* the short feller say," nodding at Bob McQuale, " 'that was wuth waitin' six year fer. Ranch settled

fer in full.' That was when ye killed Sam'l Grinnel. I ain't been in this country six year, but I found out that the bank foreclosed on your ranch six year ago. *They didn't foreclose on no other ranch that year!*"

Bob McQuale went into the killer's stance. His left hand streaked to the gun in the open holster low on his thigh.

"None o' that—yet!" There was an ominous threat, even in the bellow that forestalled gunplay. To Sim Landers, Buck growled, "What else?"

Sim's eyes shifted to one of the Texans, a lean, hawk-faced man whose dark features showed more than a trace of Mexican blood.

"Not much else. In the bank I heerd Bob caution y'all not to hurry, because Blackie was outside in the car with his scattergun. I don't know what this feller's name is," he waggled his head at the man with the dark face, "but if it ain't Blackie, it shore ought to be. I fergot to tell ye, in case ye might be thinkin' o' killin' me, that what I've been tellin' ye—and some more besides—is down on paper, in black and white, subscribed and swore to, as the legal fellers says. I got warrants fer the passel o' ye, and I've come to git ye!"

There are moments so dramatic and full of action that no man may say what happened, or how, except that it happened. Sim never knew who flashed the first gun. Instinct sent his own hand snaking inside his shirt where the two upper buttons were missing. It came out with a fistful of Colt barely in time to save his own life.

He shot Bob McQuale between the eyes, and the killer pitched forward, plowing up the ground with lead, even as life went out of his fingers. His next shot caught Buck McQuale in the stomach. Sepulchre Smith and the two *Tejanos* were lined up along the bunkhouse wall, slinging lead. Landers crumpled with a bullet in his thigh, and did the rest of his shooting from the ground. Sepulchre Smith pitched forward, dug his fingers into the dirt, and tried to crawl away. Sim's last three bullets showered Blackie with dirt from the 'dobe wall. With a frightened yelp, Blackie dropped his gun. The other Texan raised his hands at the same time, after Sim's gun was empty.

Supporting himself dizzily on one knee, Sim tossed a pair of handcuffs to Blackie and covered him with the harmless Peacemaker while he locked himself to the other Texan.

It was over—the gun play, that was. Buck McQuale, hard hit but not as near death as he thought, was calling for a pencil and paper.

"I'm done in. I'm goin' to die. I want to write out my confession afore I pass over!"

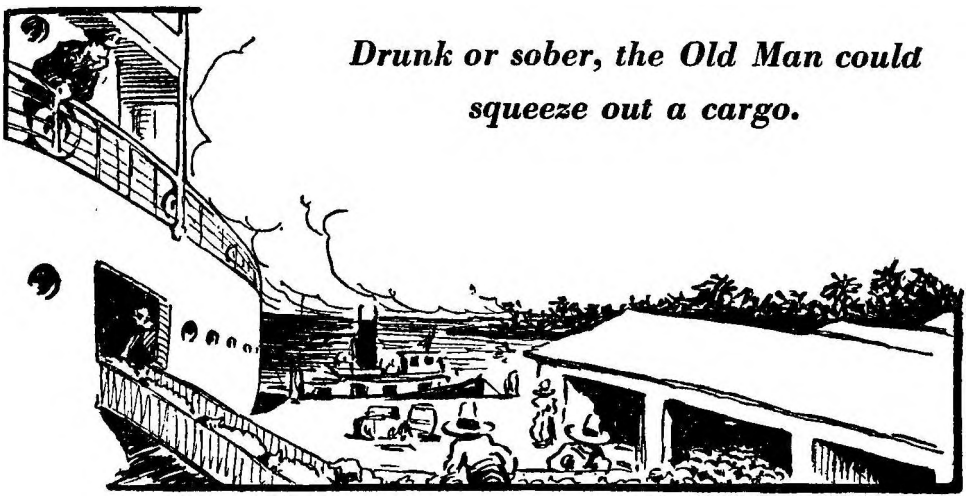
SIM LANDERS stood before the cashier's window in the Cattlemen's Bank of Tres Piedras. Thorpe Hogrefe was smiling through the bars in the manner he usually reserved for the bank's best customers.

"Of course, Mr. Landers," he was saying. "Naturally, this bank will be glad to lend you what you need, pending payment of rewards. Just sign the note."

As Sim painfully scrawled his signature, Hogrefe continued:

"The directors are preparing resolutions of congratulation. In the meantime, I am speaking for everyone concerned when I say that this bank is fully appreciative of your splendid detective work and heroic capture of the bandits. Personally, I don't mean to criticize, but I thought all the time that the sheriff should have paid more attention to what you tried to tell him after the robbery. His attitude made me sore!"

"I don't know what all the fuss is about," Sim replied, shoving the signed note through the bars. "I didn't do no detective work. Don't know nothin' about it. But it was shore easy money. Them fellers needn't ha' been caught, except they was too dumb to live."



Drunk or sober, the Old Man could squeeze out a cargo.

LOUD MOUTH

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Author of "The Trade Lanes," "Heroes Don't Fit," etc.

THE anchor chain of the *Benjamin F. H. White* was straight up and down. The last lighter had left the side of the dingy little freighter and put back to the steaming island of Dominica. But the *Benjy's* windlass did not snort and quiver suddenly in its efforts to break out the hook.

Ted Tolliver, the second mate, built like a lath and known as Loud Mouth from Nassau down the line of the West Indies to Trinidad, leaned on the sun baked rail of the saloon deck and examined uneasily the slatternly town of Roseau. Although the ship lay in the roads not a hundred and fifty yards off shore he could see no sign of Captain Tom Parke on the pier.

"Mark my words, Mr. Spurling," Loud Mouth prophesied to the huge, square-shouldered mate, "the skipper's off on another bender. He couldn't pick up half a cargo in an unlikely hole like this without hoistin' a few to celebrate."

Mr. Spurling, who had just come aboard, nodded stiffly in response to this observation. Unlike Tolliver, who wore a pair of dirty khaki trousers and a collarless blue shirt, the big mate was dressed like a liner's officer. His spotless white ducks were in blinding contrast to the dirty paintwork and tarnished metal of the island tramper.

Loud Mouth Tolliver ran a worried hand through his overlong mop of half bleached red hair. "Look there," he said to the silent mate. "A canoe coming now, but the old man's not in it."

He jerked a hand to indicate a dugout that was being rowed toward the rusty side of the ship. A white man who bore all the marks of hard years on the beach sprawled in the sternsheets while a negro with a soot black skin swung the oars. The white man, panting, pulled himself up the ladder hanging from the *Benjy's* side. The negro, after making fast the canoe with a frayed bit of rope, followed him lithely.

Both mates advanced to meet the uninvited visitors.

The white man took the initiative instantly.

"For two bucks or ten shillings we'll

take you right to where your skipper's lapping them up," he said with insolent confidence. "Without us you won't find him in a week. And he won't come to for a week, either. Not if he quit pouring rum into himself right now, which he don't intend to do."

Mr. Tolliver jerked an imperative finger toward the canoe.

"Over side or overboard!" he commanded in a roar that confirmed his nickname.

The white man, scowling, stood his ground. "We got him tucked away—I mean he's tucked himself away where——"

With a bellow of rage Loud Mouth rushed at him. He gripped the beachcomber by the middle and as the fellow flailed at him with both fists, lifted him clean off the deck. With a grunt he swung him over the side.

The negro, cursing, struck out at the mate's red head but not in time to prevent Tolliver from heaving his friend overboard. The white man missed the canoe by a hair and smashed a hole in the deep blue water of the roadstead.

"Next!" bellowed Loud Mouth and turned to the negro. The black, however, eluded his rush and dived cleanly over the side.

Grinning, Tolliver leaned on the rail and watched and listened as the two climbed into the canoe.

"Come aboard again and I'll throw you ashore," he roared. "It ain't far." Then, rubbing his hands together briskly, he turned to meet the cold, disinterested eye of his spruce superior.

"It might have been worth our while in saving the ship time if we had paid them," Mr. Spurling said.

"They'd ha' got us for our fifty next time he got soused here," the second objected.

"You'll have to go ashore and find him, Mr. Tolliver," the mate decided. "I don't intend to go chasing through that filthy hell hole again today."

"Sure! Sure!" Loud Mouth agreed cheerily. "I'll drag him out. But I better take the third, in case we have to carry him."

Mr. Spurling nodded curt agreement and turned away.

TOLLIVER, inspecting his torn shirt, headed toward his room. There as he shifted to dirty ducks, he grinned in secret satisfaction at the countenance reflected in his shaving glass.

"And you got away with that little fracas, too," he informed the mirror softly and chuckled deep down in his throat. "Rarin', tearin' Loud Mouth! That's you —every time! A hell-bending, quick-triggered bucko! You're doin' fine!"

His toilet for the shore was soon made. He left the room with a swagger, swinging his shoulders and making a swift feint at the rubicund nose of the rum-sodden, startled chief engineer.

At the rail the third mate, a perpetually sun-blistered very young man whose ticket in steam was still white and crackling, awaited him. A recent graduate of a nautical school ship, Jim Gresham appeared always engaged in an inward struggle to reconcile what he had learned from his sea-going professors with the rough and ready, not to say free and easy, methods on the *Benjy*.

Together the two mates dropped into the nearest of a dozen clamoring shore boats. Mr. Spurling regarded them silently from the bridge, not returning Tolliver's cheery wave.

"I know it isn't down in the books but if the old man gets argumentative about this, sock him on the chin," Loud Mouth advised the third amiably. "Tom Parke is a great guy. He can squeeze cargo out of a place where you or I couldn't find enough stuff to fill your pants pocket. But he's got a glass jaw. It's his one failing."

"I should think too much rum might be considered a failing," Jim Gresham said in plain disapproval.

"Not compared to a glass jaw—in these parts," Tolliver replied. He flung a hand

toward the towering rugged mountains that hung over the roadstead.

"Look at these islands," he said. "They've all got governors in tail coats an' striped pants sent to 'em by the States, England, France or Holland but what are they? Savage islands smashed by hurricanes, earthquakes and volcanoes, jammed so full of the descendants of slaves that making a living is a harder scrap than getting along in Whitechapel or in an East Side slum. There's white men beached on the Windward an' Leeward isles that would make hard guys elsewhere look like something on the way to Sunday School. Hell, yes; I'll say a glass jaw's a failing."

"I can't see why a drunkard should command a ship," said the young third.

"Matter o' business," the second mate explained. "We mates run the ship; he gets the cargoes. Drunk or sober he can get 'em. They like him down here; so do I. If it wasn't for Tom Parke the *Benjy'd* be rust, and you and I would be on the beach."

ON THE pier a phalanx of beggars, the inevitable skirmish line of the islands, assailed them, but Loud Mouth pushed through the yelling, half threatening mob without ceremony. He walked on into the town and up the desolate, torrid main street. Towering, stupendous palms and the meanest of shacks. That was Roseau. There was a liner in the road and most of the beggars, lured by thoughts of easier, bewildered tourists, rapidly deserted them. Only one, a diminutive, startlingly black boy of nine or ten, hung on, unwearyingly demanding a dime for a writin' book. His ink-black eyes were alight with intelligence and cunning.

Loud Mouth put a corner between them and the diminishing trail of suppliants and then tapped the boy on his woolly head.

"You win," he said. "Take us to the fat, drunk captain who's somewhere about town and you'll get your dime."

The boy's eyes and teeth gleamed.

"It's worth a quartah, boss," he protested. At a trot he led them along the blazing street of flimsy, close-shuttered houses with galvanized roofs and around another corner into an even narrower way. Here he stopped in front of a paintless, one-story structure that bore no sign. It differed from its neighbors in that the few steps leading up to it were five feet broad, like the steps to a veranda.

"Give me the quartah, boss," said the boy.

Tolliver gave him a dime and raised his formidable voice in a shout. "Skipper!" Again he roared. "Skipper! Tom Parke!"

There came no reply, but two men suddenly appeared at the top of the steps leading to the house. They were the white man and the black man who had visited the *Benjy*. Their clothes were still damp. The white beachcomber grinned with satisfaction, but the negro showed his teeth in a savage snarl and slipped a quick hand into his trouser pocket.

"This here is a private house," stated the white man. "But you can come in for five bucks a head. Pay up now or sheer off before we clean you."

"The hell you say!" Loud Mouth snapped. With his big shoe he kicked loose the heavy board forming the lowest step. Wrenching it away, he brandished it, nails and all.

"Don't shoot these rats unless I give the word!" he said to the petrified, staring Jim Gresham. "It makes the governor sore."

He licked his lips briefly. Then with a whoop he took the first three steps in a leap. The white man and black man vanished precipitately into the house. The door slammed in his face. Loud Mouth

knocked the rotting door loose from its hinges with a combined kick and swing of his stair tread. Then, venting another yell, he pushed it aside. Swinging the board ahead of him he charged into the house.

A knife swished down at him in the dimness of the shuttered room. He parried the thrust with the board and then hit the vaguely seen wielder of the blade a smashing blow.

For ninety seconds confused, riotous chaos prevailed in the shack. Loud Mouth, voicing his rage, fought his enemies at a distance. He whirled and struck like a steam engine with pistons broken loose from restraint. It was too dark to get in any but chance blows, and chance for some time did not favor the second mate.

A hurtling bit of metal creased his scalp and his bleached red hair took on a deeper shade. A poker, thrust between his legs, sent him sprawling and it was touch and go to get up and get his board into action again before a man could fasten on his back. He grunted as that same poker came down on his right arm. Furiously he kicked out and a howl of agony answered the thud of his foot. He slashed with his board. Then, suddenly, the room was empty of enemies. The stamp of retreating feet came from a rear room.

Loud Mouth whirled around and let light into the place by jabbing at the closed shutters. As his blows splintered these he saw Jim Gresham standing motionless in the doorway. Gresham was breathing hard, but not from physical exertion. His clothes and his knuckles were both unblemished.

"You might ha' lent a hand when they got me down," Loud Mouth said curtly, with a keen glance at the youngster.

Jim Gresham went red under his blisters. "I—I——" he began, and chewed his lip.

"Not ladylike—hey?" Tolliver interpreted. He leaned on his board for an instant and with unwavering blue eyes inspected the young third mate. Gresham took off his cap with a jerky hand and rubbed his wet forehead with a handkerchief.

"Come on," Tolliver said abruptly; "we've got to dig out the skipper."

THERE was no trouble about that. Captain Tom Parke, plump as a full sack and round faced as a full moon was ensconced in a decrepit armchair in the next room. The enemy had left by the back door. There was a wine bottle half full of rum at Parke's fleshy elbow and he raised a tumbler to his lips with a shaky hand as he saw his second mate. He drank hastily, without pleasure.

"Noisy!" he mumbled and shook his white head with heavy disapproval. "Too damn noisy as usual, Loud Mouth."

"Time to go, skipper," his second mate assured him, dropping a heavy hand on his shoulder. "You've had a lovely time but the chief is waiting in that hot engine room for his jingle."

"You exceed your 'thority, Mr. Tolliver."

"Damn right. I got a swell crack on the forearm for doing it, too," Loud Mouth said nursing that member. Suddenly he clenched his left fist. His voice was crisply business-like. "I guess we'd better carry him, Jim."

"Wait!" Captain Parke objected soberly enough. He heaved himself out of the chair with a supreme effort, clutching his delicate jaw protectingly. "I obshect to your violence. Demoralizing to junior officers."

"Him—he's demoralized already," Loud Mouth said with a disgusted glance at the third officer.

"Look here—I—I didn't——" Jim Gresham said unhappily but Loud Mouth paid no heed.

"That certainly was a swell wallop I got," the second mate declared again. "I thought I felt something snap. It's swelling, too. Come on, Tom; I think your second officer's got a busted bone here."

"I am perfectly capable—taking care of my own affairsh," Captain Thomas Parke protested thickly, but nevertheless he followed Loud Mouth out of the house.

IN THE street their shrill guide walked with them toward the front demanding a quarter. Near the pier Loud Mouth halted. His face twitched.

"Blast this arm!" he said violently. "It's cracked, sure. There's a white doctor somewhere in town. You take the skipper aboard, Jim, and I'll be along as soon as I can get this thing set."

He looked sharply at the glum third mate, who had said not a word since they had left the house. "Don't let him get away from you or pull any command stuff," he warned. "He may look reasonably sober to you but he's wild for a skinful."

Captain Thomas Parke, his round cask of a body wavering on his stocky legs, shook his white head at them.

"Let's talk this over," he protested. "Now I'm a reashonable man——"

"Just sock him on the jaw—or I will," Loud Mouth said briskly. "Tom never holds a grievance, anyhow."

Without another word Captain Parke dropped into a boat. He sat stiffly erect in the sternsheets. Jim Gresham, tight-lipped, completely immersed in his private thoughts, followed him. Loud Mouth, watching them, waited until they were fifty yards on their way toward the *Benjy*. Then he pushed through the African multitude, again piloted by the boy.

"Maybe I didn't get by with that fight!" he muttered approvingly to himself as he tramped along the cobbles.

FORTY minutes later Loud Mouth Tolliver, with his right arm swathed in a sheath of splints and his head bandaged, came out of the doctor's house and headed once more for the pier. He had been right about the bone being broken.

Half way to the waterfront he encountered Jim Gresham hurrying toward him under the guidance of the loquacious colored boy. Jim Gresham's sun-blistered face was more perplexed than usual.

"Captain Parke's ashore again, sir," he burst out. "Mr. Spurling let him go. I didn't know till he was in a shore boat. The mate told me to mind my own business."

"Huh!" muttered Tolliver. He massaged his red head gingerly, with regard for the bandage. "Why did the mate let him go?"

"Mr. Spurling said the captain wished to go ashore."

"Something's up!" Loud Mouth declared emphatically. "Come on."

At redoubled speed he headed toward the baking waterfront. Suddenly he crossed the street with swift purpose and laid hold of an elderly seaman who revolved helplessly in the midst of a clamorous crowd of shorefront parasites. He had an envelope clutched in one moist hand.

"What are you doing ashore, Higgins?" Tolliver demanded.

The old sailor gave a grunt of relief at the sight of the officer.

"The mate sent me to file this 'ere radio, sir. An' give a copy to the cons'lar agent. But these birds." His eyes swept the ring of shouting black faces around him—"they won't let a man alone."

Loud Mouth Tolliver took the envelope from his hands. It was addressed to the owners of the *Benjy*, a firm of tropic-softened Americans with headquarters at Havana.

"Something's up," Tolliver assured Jim Gresham. With his teeth and good hand he ripped open the envelope. He stared long and hard at the communication within.

CAPTAIN PARKE CAME ABOARD IN DRUNKEN CONDITION STOP HAS ORDERED ME TO DELAY SAILING ALTHOUGH SHIP IS LADEN AND CLEARED STOP HAS NOW RETURNED TO SHORE STOP FEAR LONG DELAY STOP REQUEST INSTRUCTIONS

SPURLING

"Why, the sneakin' sea skunk!" roared Loud Mouth. "Look a' that!"

Somewhat doubtfully Jim Gresham took the message; then read it. "Well, it's true, isn't it?" he asked.

"Sure, it's true but this would cost Tom his job. The owners couldn't overlook a bleat like that on account o' the insurance. If the *Benjy* piled up they'd never get a cent. The skunk o' the sea, that's what I call Mr. Spurling!"

Jim Gresham wiped his forehead in desperate bewilderment.

"If a master is incompetent and intemperate——" he began not too assuredly, but Tolliver dispelled his words with a blare of wrath.

"I tell you us mates run the ship an' run her right! But it's Tom Parke that gets us the freight! Get wise! It's the old rummy that keeps the *Benjy* out o' the boneyard."

With teeth and fingers he tore up the radio message and the copy for the consular agent and planted an angry foot on the scraps.

The leather-faced old seaman, who had managed to cast a rheumy eye on the message while Gresham held it, waggled a scandalized head.

"It was the mate that started the old man on this binge, sir," he declared. "I see 'im dragging the skipper—though 'e didn't need much dragging—into a grog shop around the corner this morning. I 'appened to be in there myself with the mail bag."

"Shut up!" blared the second mate. "Don't gossip about officers, you old rip! So it was Spurling that started him lushing, eh?"

"Aye, sir," said Higgins.

LOUD MOUTH glared at the startled Jim Gresham. "Keep following in that sea snake's pipe-clayed footsteps and you'll be stabbing your own skipper in the back for a command one of these days," he assured the youngster. "Now dust off the gold band on your cap and come along!"

Tolliver took two impulsive strides, with some damage to the suppliant mob around them, and then halted to pluck the black boy out of the milling throng.

"Scout!" he bellowed in the quivering ear of the small guide. "Look for the fat drunk captain! That quarter you've been dreaming about is yours when you find where he went."

He dropped the boy back into the mob and whirled on the old seaman.

"Scatter, you old wart!" he commanded. "Round up the skipper!"

"How about——" The seaman looked down with plain forebodings at the torn scraps of the radio message.

Loud Mouth aroused him from his fears of retribution with a forceful shove. Higgins scurried away.

"What shall I do?" asked Gresham.

"Ransack some o' these joints!" Tolliver instructed. "Blast you, Gresham, this is a real jam for Tom Parke. We got to be pushing off. Search! If you run into that black an' white kidnapping outfit just holler for me."

Jim Gresham fingered his chin.

"About that fight," he said, glancing down at Loud Mouth's sling, "I'm sorry I didn't get into act——"

"I'll save you your share of the next scrap," the second mate promised him. "Now——"

SHRILL shrieks like those emitted by the black boy in argument for an increase in compensation pierced their ears. The cries, although they were down an alleyway, reached the two mates easily through the lower clamor of the beggars. Loud Mouth bounded toward the narrow way.

Captain Parke, endeavoring with dignity to detach a clinging black obstruction which had wound itself around his right leg, was in no condition to avoid a meeting with his second mate. There was a broken bottle on the cobblestones beside his feet..

A gleam of satisfaction lighted up the errant master mariner's cloudy eye at the sight of the mate's bandaged arm.

"Told you you'd hit somebody too hard on the jaw one o' these days, Mr. Tolliver," he said with quiet dignity.

"I still got lots of kick left in the other arm," Loud Mouth assured his commander significantly. "Were you thinking of going back to the ship, Tom? She's ready to shove off."

"You exceed your 'thority, Mr. Tolliver."

"Sometimes I wish I didn't," Loud Mouth retorted.

"I am perfectly capable of taking care my own affairs," Captain Parke protested.

"Now that we've got that ceremony over, are you coming aboard?" demanded Tolliver. He beckoned grimly to Jim Gresham.

The master of the *Benjy* sighed. "Less talk this over," he said persuasively. "Now I'm a reashonable——"

He gave it up as Tolliver shifted his thin body into position for a left arm jab.

"Detash thish boy from my leg," he instructed with marked severity. "I am returning to my ship."

"Aye, aye, sir," Loud Mouth responded. By displaying a quarter he uncurled the boy.

WITH a mate on either side of him Captain Thomas Parke proceeded down the dusty street toward the waterfront. On the way Higgins joined them unobtrusively. There was little conversation during the pull out to the *Benjy*. Tolliver dusted off the skipper's cap with his sleeve and straightened his straggly necktie. Then he sat back and examined the third mate at length.

Alongside the *Benjy* Captain Parke led the way up the ladder. Mr. Spurling met them at the top. The big mate's countenance was impassive but his keen eyes had an angry gleam in them at the sight of the captain.

"Get under way, Mr. Spurling," the master commanded and strode almost steadily toward his room.

Mr. Spurling did not repeat the command. He looked hard at the abashed old seaman but the wily Higgins scuttled hastily into the fo'c'sle. Mr. Spurling did not pursue him. He ascended the bridge ladder and stood staring toward the town.

"Now then," said Tolliver to Jim Gresham. "How's that for insubordination on the part o' the mate? You heard the old man's order. Come forrard."

"Wait!" the mate called and hurried toward the bridge companion.

"He's your meat," Tolliver assured Gresham with abrupt decision as Spurling clattered down the ladder. "I've got a wing here that puts me out of active service. Slap him endways."

"Me!" exclaimed Jim Gresham. His eyes were horrified. "You want me to strike a superior officer?"

"I want you to mash him into shark meat," Loud Mouth snapped. "He's disobeying the skipper's orders, isn't he? You know what's in the books about duty, don't you?"

"But——"

The third officer stared with stricken eyes at the spruce, broad-shouldered mate as he approached.

Mr. Spurling, who had paused to glance into the master's room, was smiling confidentially at them.

"The old sot's asleep already," he said with a conspiratorial air that contrasted strangely with his usual stiff formality. "We're not going to heave up the hook. Before Parke wakes up I may have word by radio of a promotion for both you fellows. How does 'Chief Mate Tolliver' sound to you?"

"It's your move," Loud Mouth informed Jim Gresham coldly.

The sun-blistered youth hesitated, staring glassily at the big, broadly smiling man in white uniform. "You heard the master's order," Gresham said.

"To hell with his order!" the first mate answered. "In a couple of hours I'll be master here."

"By a double cross!" retorted Gresham. Uncertainly he hit Mr. Spurling on the lips.

The first mate staggered backward but it was from astonishment alone. His eyes gleamed frostily. Then, after a quick glance at Loud Mouth's splinted arm, he charged at the hesitating third mate.

One of Mr. Spurling's swinging fists smacked like a hurled brick on Gresham's blistered nose; the other thudded into his solar plexus.

Jim Gresham doubled up. Blood gushed from his ill-used nose down onto his white trousers. In the agony of paralysis induced by that blow to his middle he sank on to the deck.

For an instant Mr. Spurling stood over him, immaculate, unruffled, dominant. Then he strolled across the deck and leaned back against the rail, with his well-kept hands between the rusty metal and his white jacket.

LOUD MOUTH knelt beside the gasping third mate. "Now listen!" he said urgently. "You ain't got what I call spontaneous guts. By the time you decide to fight it's all over. Get up and slough him."

"I can't," muttered the young officer. "I can't. He's too big."

"I'm not asking you to lick him now," Tolliver said softly. "Just get up and take what he gives you—but take it."

"I can't do it, I tell you!" Jim Gresham's voice was a thin wail. His eyes turned aimlessly in his head like those of a panicky horse.

"Get up an' slap him! I tell you you ain't scared of him," Loud Mouth insisted fiercely. "You ain't! It's something else. I dunno what. It's all different—all cockeyed—not what they tell you in school."

"I'm not afraid of him!" Gresham insisted shakily. "It isn't that!"

"Sure, it isn't!" Loud Mouth agreed. With his uninjured arm he was trying to drag Gresham to his feet. "It's just some damn thing that stuns you, like. But I tell you if you don't get up and let him half kill you—if you don't take it while you're conscious—you'll never get over it."

Desperately he licked his lips; the soft spoken words tumbled out of his mouth in a flood. "I know, kid—I let a guy whale hell out o' me on a Halifax dock once without putting a fist on him. Get up an' take it! Maybe he'll kill you! Is that why you're stalling? Let him kill you!"

JIM GRESHAM stood up. His eyes were not so bewildered but they were still wondering. "Let him kill me!" he repeated.

"It could be worse, kid," Loud Mouth's voice was grim. "You know how you feel now about stayin' out o' that other scrap."

Jim Gresham went suddenly across the deck in a blundering rush. Spurling straightened up alertly. He moved warily toward the charging youngster, eyes coldly searching and big fists tightened to rock-like hardness.

Jim Gresham fared ill in that first assault. But he was not knocked out. He kept boring in, with some vague hints of in-fighting ability, and on that small obstructed deck Mr. Spurling could not get far enough away from him to launch a haymaker. But he cut Gresham's face to ribbons and pounded his body with hammer-like blows.

Loud Mouth stood still, unmoved by the ruthless slaughter. "Take it!" he muttered.

Around the deck, with Spurling sidestepping and Jim Gresham following, they shuffled and twisted. Gresham's first wild impetuosity was gone but a more useful coolness had taken its place. There was nothing in Spurling's hard fists that he feared. He faced what came to him.

Spurling, dodging again as Gresham's infire got too hot, caught his foot on a ring in the deck and went sprawling. Gresham fell with him and they rolled on the deck. With a crash they brought up against the rail and the first mate, with knee and elbow, broke away from Gresham's grip. He crawled to his knees; then leaped to his feet and backed away. As Gresham, half blinded by blood, got up Spurling saw his chance. His right fist shot out and contacted just below Gresham's ear. The third mate went crashing into the unyielding rail and then crumpled up on deck. He was out—thoroughly out.

SPURLING whirled upon Loud Mouth. "Damn you, you put him up to this!" he raged. He leaped toward Tolliver and his right fist licked out like a tongue of flame. Loud Mouth caught the blow skillfully on the elbow end of the splints. He grinned at the snarl of pain on Mr. Spurling's face.

"Never sock a cripple!" he reproved. As Spurling, clutching his broken knuckles, swore at him Loud Mouth rushed in. He hit the panting chief officer hard on the jaw. Mr. Spurling jerked his head in time to save his senses from eclipse. But as he stepped back he fell over Jim Gresham's outstretched leg. When he got up it was to face uncertainly, still snarling, the rushes of the agile cripple.

"Get your gun!" Tolliver taunted. "I spiked your radio squawk an' I know who started Tom on his toot. It's guns an' spikes between you an' me, you snake!"

"I'll get you!" Spurling raged but there was no conviction in his voice.

"If you kill me you swing for a mutineer! Gi' me an excuse an' I'll rate a medal for crackin' your skull! Interfering when I'm obeying the skipper's order!"

Spurling, roaring threats, clattered down the ladder to the main deck. Tolliver did not pursue, though he slung a chipping hammer after the mate. Then he yelled for a bucket of water and revived Jim Gresham. Faintly to his ears came the sound of a slamming door as the mate shut up his rage and impotence in his room.

"You done fine," Loud Mouth assured the battered third mate. "They ain't spontaneous but you've got the guts."

Jim Gresham was trying to struggle to his feet.

"I'm no coward!" he raged. "I can ——"

Tolliver pulled him down. "Spurling's gone an' he won't stay long in the *Benjy*," he predicted. "Of course you're no coward. I'm telling you a secret, kid; I ain't got the nerve of a rabbit myself. But I got the brains of a fox. It ain't like they have it down in the books. As long as you know nothin' can hurt you worse than doing nothin' you can sail into action with your heart doing loops in your stomach."

"No nerve?" muttered Jim Gresham wide-eyed. "Why you've got——"

Loud Mouth laughed softly and winked most craftily at the younger mate. "Make noise enough and you get by!" he declared. "I've been fooling the world for years, Jim—I've got 'em all bunked. But for Pete's sake don't give me away!"

Jim Gresham stared at the red-headed mate with as keen suspicion as Tolliver had stared at him but it was plain that Loud Mouth believed what he said. His pride in his deep cunning gleamed in his eyes. The self-confessed rabbit drew a breath and then his voice burst forth in a bellow.

"Carp! Where's that blasted carpenter? Send him forrard an' get this anchor up! Ain't there no discipline on this ship?"

"A* corpus delicti *is a useful piece of evidence if you've got it—but it ain't no good on the hoof."

CONVICTED

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of "Raw Gold," and other exciting novels of the North. Creator of Corporal Downey, Black John Smith and the men of Halfaday Creek.

"A HORSE on you," said Black John Smith, as he gathered the dice from the bar, rattled them vigorously in the leather box, and rolled them out again. "An' three fives to beat. I'm leavin' 'em in one."

Old Cush swept the cubes into the box and cast them with a professional flourish. "Three treys," he announced lugubriously. "Them bones has be'n runnin' agin me fer a week. It's owin' to that douse with the chipped corner."

"Die," corrected Black John, "is fer one of dice."

Picking the offending cube up, Old Cush examined it minutely. "It looks," he said, "like it had be'n gnawed by a mie."

"By a what?"

"It looks," repeated the sombre faced proprietor of Cushing's Fort, "like a mie had got in some night an' gnawed the edge."

"What the hell's a mie?" asked Black John, eyeing the other dubiously.

"It must be one fer mice, ain't it—accordin' to your way of claimin'?"

Black John chuckled. "Cripes, you can't go nothin' on that! Listen—one geese is a goose, ain't it?"

"If not a gander," admitted Cush.

"But if someone shot him a couple of mooses, an' come in here an' claimed he'd killed two meese, you'd think he was crazy."

"Not no crazier'n what a man is that claims one dice is a die an' not a douse," replied Cush, his keen gray eyes twinkling above the drooping yellow mustache that concealed his unsmiling lips. It was characteristic—this petty bickering between these two cronies who guided the destiny of Halfaday Creek, that little community of outlawed men that nestled close against the Yukon-Alaska boundary line.

"Gi' me a seegar," ordered Black John. "My pipe's plugged an' I ain't got my wire."

Old Cush set out a box, and the other selected a cigar, spat the end onto the floor,

applied a match, and puffed lustily for several seconds. "These is a hell of a seegar to pay fifty cents fer," opined Black John, holding the weed in his fingers and scowling at it in disgust. "They pull hard, an' they don't burn even."

"You got it fer nothin'," reminded Old Cush.

"Yeah—but if I'd lost, it would of cost me a dollar—an' that would of be'n twict as bad."

"If a dollar is twict nothin'," propounded Cush, "what would fifty cents be?"

"The profits on one of these seegars," retorted Black John with a grin.

"The pullin' hard, an' not burnin' even ain't their fault," explained Cush. "It's owin' to the Siwashes droppin' 'em in the river fetchin' 'em up."

"It's too bad they recovered 'em," opined the other.

A SHADOW darkened the bar and the two occupants eyed the stranger who stood framed in the doorway. He was of medium height, rather heavy of frame, with a stubby, untrimmed beard. "Hello, folks!" he greeted, with an obvious effort at heartiness. "How's everything?"

"Middlin'," admitted Old Cush, "fer the shape they're in."

"Is this Cushin's Fort?"

"So called."

"Well—I got here, all right," announced the man, as though imparting important information.

"Was you supposed to be expected?" asked Black John, eyeing the man steadily.

"No. But, I—you see, I heard about this place down on the Yukon."

"Yeah?"

"Step up," invited Old Cush. "The house is buyin' one."

"My name," imparted the stranger, stepping to the bar, "is Amos Applegate."

"It's a mouthful," stated Cush, shoving the bottle and glasses toward him.

"His's Lyme Cushing," imparted the huge black bearded man, filling his own glass, "an' mine's John Smith—Black John, in case folks wouldn't know what color my whiskers is."

"I come from the States," said Applegate.

"Quite a few does," admitted Black John, "fer one reason er another."

"I come to try an' dig me some gold," explained Applegate.

"The Klondike diggin's is well spoke of," suggested Old Cush, pointedly.

The man swallowed his liquor, and laid a bill on the bar. It was a brand new bill —fresh and crackly. "Fill 'em up ag'in'," he ordered. "I was headed fer the Klondike, till I heard of here. I'll tell you, boys—I believe in bein' open an' above board. I'm suspected of an express robbery down in the States, an' ruther than stay an' fight the case, I come away from there. You can't never tell what a jury will do. Down on the Yukon I heard of here, an' how you boys was located right clost to the line where it's handy gittin' back an' forth, an' how the police don't bother you none. They claimed there was plenty of gold up here—an' that everything goes." The man paused and eyed Black John. "I heard about you, too. They told how you stuck up a company of soldiers over in Alasky, somewheres, an' lifted a hundred thousan' dollar payroll." The man thrust out his hand. "Put 'er there, pardner! That was some haul!"

BLACK JOHN ignored the hand. "You've be'n misinformed," he stated coldly. "It was a major, an' three common soldiers, an' the amount was forty thousan'. Likewise, the information that everything goes, up here, was not only faulty, but plumb slanderous. What a man done before he come to Halfaday ain't none of our business. What he does after he gits here, is everyman's business. The

reason the police don't bother us none, is because we don't give 'em no provocation to bother us. There ain't no crime on Halfaday. A man convicted by miners' meetin' of murder, robbery, theft, claim-jumpin', er general skulduggery is rewarded by gittin' hisself hung. What you might say—minor infringements, like gittin' drunk, fightin', an' whistlin' on Sunday, is winked at, not to say encouraged, if a man's so minded. As to gold—there's plenty on Halfaday. But it's got to be come by by diggin', pannin', an' sluicin'—an' not by robbery, theft, er skulduggery. Onct a man gits them few primal rules fixed in his mind, an' goes accordin' to 'em, he gits along fine amongst us. But if he don't, his luck kind of goes back on him."

"I never dug no gold," said the man. "I wouldn't know how to go at it."

"Idleness," suggested Old Cush irrelevantly, "comes under the head of skulduggery."

"I can learn!" said the man hurriedly. "But hell—I wouldn't know a claim if I seen one!"

"Claims," explained Black John, "is included between stakes. The rest of the world ain't. I'm payin' an ounce a day, an' grub fer labor. It might pay you to hire out till you git the hang of it. A smart man should ort to learn all he needs to know in a month."

"I'll take you up," said Applegate.

"Jest throw yer stuff in my shack then, an' we'll go down to the claim."

An hour later Black John strolled again into the barroom. Old Cush closed his well thumbed account book, returned it to the back bar, shoved the steel rimmed spectacles from nose to forehead, and set out the bottle and glasses. "Did you set Mr. Applecart to work?" he asked.

"Applegate," corrected Black John, filling his glass.

"What the hell's a Applegate?"

"Search me. Jest a name, I guess. Hell—names don't have to mean nothin'."

"Yeah," admitted Cush, "but they're likely to. You buy one now, an' we'll shake fer the odd one. What do you think of yer new hand?"

"Well," considered the other, "takin' Amos, by an' large, as the feller says, I ain't holdin' out no hopes, one way er the other. He's a prevaricator, as a lawyer would say, if not actually a damn liar. Hirn claimin' to be open an' above board, like he done—an' then tellin' us he was *suspected* of a express robbery—after layin' down a bill that was so damn new it hadn't never even got to the bank it was shipped to. Hell—he's in Canadian territory! Why couldn't he come out like a man an' say he done it! Claimed he couldn't tell what a jury would do! He know'd damn well what they'd do! That's why he come away. Barrin' this here moral blemish, as a preacher would say, he looks like he's well set up an' should ort to be able to gopher out considerable dust, if diligent. If not, an' he should revert, as a perfessor would say, to his lawless type—well, you know as well as I do, Cush—them thick necked ones hangs hard."

II

"A-down the road, an' gun in hand,
Come Whiskey Bill, mad Whiskey Bill.
A-lookin' fer some place to land,
Come Whiskey Bill.
An' everybody tried to be
Ten mile away an' up a tree
When on his wild-eyed jamboree
Come Whiskey Bill. Mad Whiskey Bill."

"Who's our songful friend?" asked Amos Applegate, as he edged in next to Black John at the bar one evening nearly a month later when a goodly number of the men of Halfaday had foregathered in Cush's saloon.

"That's Whiskey Bill," explained Black John. "So called not only on account of his delectitude fer whiskey, but an' also, on account that he favors that there partic'lar song. He don't know no others, but he sure is obligin' with that one. There's

more verses. We'll be gittin' another when he gets his whistle wet."

Sure enough, Whiskey Bill drained his glass, and launched forth into a bellowing wail:

"The shuriff ventured down the street
A-walkin' wide on toe-in feet
A-wonderin' when he's goin' to meet
With Whiskey Bill. Mad Whiskey Bill.
But times has changed since you made love,
Ol' Whiskey Bill.
The sun shines down from up above
On Whiskey Bill.
The shuriff up an' got his stride,
Bill's soul went skiddin' down the slide.
Oh, how's things on the Great Divide,
Whiskey Bill?"

The song ended in a doleful wail, and the singer bellowed loudly for all and sundry to join him in a drink.

"It's a nice song," admitted Applegate, "an' he seems to be liberal hearted with his dust. I ain't seen him before."

"No, he don't come down only onct in so often. Has him a good drunk, an' then hits back. He's got him a claim away to hell an' gone up a side crick. Must be a good claim, too. He's always got plenty of dust."

Later, Black John sat in a poker game, and from time to time during the night, he noted that Whiskey Bill was roaring out his song, with his arm thrown familiarly

about the broad shoulders of Amos Applegate.

Next morning Applegate did not report for work, and for two days he and Whiskey Bill continued their spree. On the morning of the third day, he approached Black John at the bar. "I'm quittin'," he explained. "It ain't that I don't like to work fer you. But I figure I've learnt enough to hit out fer myself."

"Fair enough," answered Black John. "I wouldn't stand in the road of no man's betterin' hisself. You've put in twenty-four days. Cush'll weigh you out the dust."

"Whiskey Bill says there had ort to be good prospects up his gulch. He claims it's lonesome up there, an' he'd admire to have a neighbor," explained the man.

"A man's luck ain't no better than the neighbors he picks," opined Black John. "When you pullin' out?"

"Quick as I get me an outfit bought. We're goin' on up in his canoe."

IT WAS well toward noon before the two pulled out with the canoe heavily loaded with supplies. Shoving up Halfaday with its numerous shallows and bars was slow and tedious work with paddle, pole, and track line for the two men, suffering as they were with their hangovers. The following day it was not so bad, and on the third day, caching the canoe at the head of navigation, they packed the outfit to Whiskey Bill's shack, a tiny affair of mud and poles snugly built in a grove of spruce at a bend of a gulch.

"A man," philosophized Whiskey Bill, when the task was completed, and the two had finished their supper, "is a damn fool stayin' out here in the hills diggin' fer gold."

"A man's got to do somethin'," objected Applegate. "An' I guess the way it is with most of us, the hills is the best place we could be in."

Whiskey Bill nodded. "I could go back to the States, right now," he stated after a long silence. "An', damn me, if I ain't got a notion to!"

"They say you've got a good thing here?" suggested the other.

"Yeah—I've got me a good stake cached away. But what the hell good does it

do me? I live up this gulch like a damn wolf in his den most of the time, an' four, five times a year I go down to Cush's fer a jamboree. It ain't no way fer a man to live. I was fetched up to farmin', not livin' like this."

"A man couldn't farm in this country."

"No—but he kin in Missouri, where I come from. An' I've got enough dust right now to buy the best damn farm in the county. An' no reason why I shouldn't. The man I skipped out fer killin' made a living of it an' don't bear no grudge. I got a letter."

"Why don't you go back, then?"

"I've be'n studyin' about it, an' damn if I kin figger a way. Trouble is, I've got too much dust. There's right around thirty-two hundred ounces in my cache—an' that's a couple of hundred pound—better'n fifty thousan' dollars. How in hell am I goin' to git it outside? From here to the Yukon, with the stuff in my canoe, I could manage, an' on up to White Horse. Then what? A couple of hundred pound, on top of my trail outfit, an' the canoe, would mean doublin' back an' forth over them long portages, leavin' the dust at one end an' the other—an' the country so damn thick with chechakos you got to keep elbowin' 'em off the trails.

"There's the White Horse portage, an' Box Canyon, an' between the lakes, an' then the long one over the pass to Dyea or Skagway. Every damn chechako that seen me would spot what was in my pack. When they seen it was heavy, an' little of bulk, they'd know damn well it was dust, an' they'd grab it off when I went back fer my outfit. I'd have to keep leavin' it at one end an' the other."

WHY not hire someone to help with the packin'?" suggested Applegate.

"Who in hell would I hire? Everyone I know is workin' their own claim, besides not carin' to show up along the rivers. An' them I don't know, I couldn't trust. If I tried hirin' anyone, not only I'd lose my dust, but I'd git knocked on the head to boot—fifty thousan' is a lot of money."

"That's right," admitted Applegate, regarding the man speculatively. "How much would it be worth to you if you had this here wealth, say in Skagway? How much an ounce?"

"You mean, you'd take a packin' job?" asked Whiskey Bill, eyeing Applegate shrewdly.

"No, not exactly," replied the other. "But I've got a hunch me an' you can do business."

"Meanin'?"

"Like this," explained Applegate. "You've got a little better'n fifty thousan' dollars in dust which you wish was in Skagway—an' no way to git it there. I've got forty-five thousan' dollars in cash—bills, that is easy packed, an' no one the wiser. S'pose we trade? You'd git to Skagway with the forty-five thousan', no hard work on the portages—an' no worry."

For several moments Whiskey Bill remained silent, pondering the offer. "The dust figgers fifty-one thousan', two hundred dollars," he announced. "You'd be makin' sixty-one hundred on the deal—damn near two dollars an ounce."

"That's right," admitted Applegate, "an' I don't deny but what it's a good profit."

"Make it forty-eight thousan'," said Whiskey Bill, "an' I'll take you. That leaves you a big profit."

Applegate shook his head. "Nope. I couldn't do it if I wanted to. I ain't got but forty-five. It's that er nothin'."

"How about the claim?" asked the other. "There's plenty of gold left in the gravel."

Applegate grinned. "It's your claim, an' your worry," he stated succinctly. "Bein' as you can't take it along, I guess you'll have to leave it."

"An' have you file on it as soon as it reverts!"

Applegate shrugged. "Me, er someone else—what's the difference?"

"I might sell it to some of the boys around Cush's," speculated Whiskey Bill. "But if I did—an' I was to go broke back in the States, I'd wisht I hadn't. I'd want

to come back. But by that time someone else would have it, an' the way the country's fillin' up with chechakos, the chances is, all the other good locations would be staked."

"Tell you what I'll do," offered the other. "You take the forty-five thousan' an' give me the dust, an' I'll stay here on the claim an' hold it down fer you, in case you come back. My pay will be what dust I git out of it. No one else can't file it, as long as I'm holdin' it down, an' if you never come back, I'll keep on workin' it."

Whiskey Bill nodded slowly. "She's a deal," he said. "I'm pullin' out in the mornin'."

III

NEARLY two months later Amos Applegate appeared one day at Cushing's Fort. Old Cush was alone at the time, drinks were had, and the man ordered a list of supplies for which he paid in dust, flashing as he did so two heavy pouches. "Ain't you goin' to lay over an' put in a night with the boys?" asked Cush in surprise, as the man started to pack his stuff to the canoe.

"Nope. Not this trip. Everyone says you're close mouthed. But if the rest of 'em seen me spendin' dust, they'd come stampedin' in on me."

"Ain't you recordin' no location?"

"Not me. Records is public property. I might as well tell 'em where I'm at as to file a location."

The man departed, and Old Cush watched from the doorway with puckered brow as he pushed on upstream.

Toward evening Black John Smith sauntered in. "Anything doin'?" he asked casually. "I be'n out gittin' me a moose. It's got so a man's got to go quite a ways back fer the pick of 'em."

"Nothin' excitin'," answered Cush, as he set out bottle and glasses.

"I got me a prime yearlin'," said Black John. "I fetched you over a chunk. I give it to the Siwash."

"It'll go good," admitted Cush. "The one I be'n gnawin' on must of be'n his gran'daddy. Applegate was in this forenoon, an' done some tradin'."

"Applegate? Where's he at?"

"I couldn't say."

"You mean, he pulled out without stoppin' over? Where's Whiskey Bill?"

"That," replied Old Cush lugubriously, "is what I was wonderin'."

"Funny he didn't show up. It's about time fer another one of his sprees. What did Amos say about him?"

"Nothin'. He didn't even file a location."

"Prob'ly ain't run onto nothin'."

"Mebbe not. But he was packin' a heft of dust. Had a couple of sacks that would go eighty er a hundred ounces apiece."

"The hell he did! That's damn funny—an' him a chechako!"

"An' not filin' no location."

"An' not layin' over to whoop 'er up with the boys tonight. He was pretty good at that."

OLD CUSH downed his liquor and wangled the corner from a plug of tobacco. "An' Whiskey Bill not bein' along," he added. "He had Bill's canoe."

"An' not sayin' nothin' about him. D'ye know, Cush, I believe somethin' stinks in Denmark."

"It's prob'ly that hind quarter I've got hangin'. Seein' you fetched in some fresh, I'll have the Siwash throw it out. It's tough anyhow, an' I thought this noon it was gittin' a mite high."

Black John laughed. "Yer too literal minded, as a lawyer would say. I was merely alludin' to the classics."

"What's that, an' stinkin' moosemeat got to do with it?" asked Old Cush sourly. "We was speakin' of Whiskey Bill."

"Jest so. What I was gettin' at, is that me an' you might do a little investigatin'—up the crick."

"You took a hell of a way to git at it. Sometimes, John, the way you talk, folks would think you ain't got no more sense than a tick. You figger, then, that there's

somethin' wrong up to Whiskey Bill's."

"It wouldn't do no harm to find out. If Whiskey Bill has met up with hard luck it's our dooty to investigate. If any neighbors he might have has feloniously knocked him off, it's likewise our dooty to call a miners' meetin' an' hang him, if guilty. Or, if he's up an' died natural, then it's our dooty to locate an' administrate his cache to the best of our knowledge an' belief—him not havin' no heirs that could be located, on account of Whiskey not bein' no bony-fido front name, nor yet, Bill a hind one."

"That would make it mean in tracin' out heirs," admitted Old Cush. "It might be we'd have to take over that cache, ourself. But, dooty's dooty, John, no matter along what trails she leads. I'll git one armed John Smith to run the place till we git back. He's twict as trustworthy as anyone else—havin' only one hand to steal with."

IV

ON THE morning following the consummation of their deal, Whiskey Bill had taken leave of Amos Applegate at the door of the little cabin in the gulch near the headwaters of Halfaday. "The shaft's down into pretty good gravel, Amos," he had said. "She's good fer anywheres from two to four ounces a day, stidy—an' that's a damn sight better than the run of claims. Don't abandon 'er an' go kihootin' off on a new prospect. You'd lose money. An' remember you can't sell 'er—she's recorded in my name."

"I ain't goin' to sell her, nor yet to try my luck nowheres else, Bill. You can rest easy on that. An' if you run onto bad luck an' come back I'll turn her over to you agin'—don't worry."

"I won't," answered Whiskey Bill, with a significant glance at the rifle he held in his hand. "So long."

Where the little creek that trickled through the gulch emptied into Halfaday, he swung onto the faint trail that led downstream to the foot of the rapid where his canoe was cached.

"A-down the road an' gun in hand
Come Whiskey Bill. Mad Whiskey Bill.
A-lookin' fer some place to land
Come Whiskey Bill,"

sang the man, as he hoofed it down the rough trail. The words trailed into silence, and the man nodded his head. "That's me—a-lookin' fer some place to land. That'll be Cush's—an' then what?" He reached the foot of the rapids and drew the canoe from its place of concealment. "Why then—a wild-eyed jamboree—jest like the song says," he muttered, staring down at the canoe. "An' I'd start in throwin' them nice new bills around like they was common paper. I might even take a notion to go on to Dawson—an' I'd have all them bills blow'd in a month. Then I'd have to come sneakin' back to the claim—an' I'd be right where I was at before—except that Amos would have my dust, an' I'd have to start all over." For a long time he stood, his eyes on the far reaches of the creek. Then suddenly he slapped his thigh with an open palm. "Nussir!" he exclaimed aloud. "By gosh, I'm goin' to farmin'! Hogs an' mules an' cornfields along a good pike, an' a good steppin' hoss an' red wheeled buggy, an' money in the bank!" The man's brows drew into a pucker. "If I could git by Cush's, I'd hit back fer old Missouri, hell a-tearin'. But—there's the boys—when they find out I'm a-goin' outside, there'll be a hell of a jamboree—an' no mistake. An' I couldn't slip past without them seein' me—there's too many claims along the crick."

The man's eyes suddenly brightened, and once again an open palm smote his thigh. "The Dalton Trail! Hell, I could leave the canoe where it's at, an' hit acrost to the White, an' go out on the Dalton Trail a-foot, an' wouldn't need to go nowheres near Cush's! I'd want a considrible big house, not too fer back from the

pike, so I could see folks go past—white painted would look purty—with blue doors an' winders—er mebbe yaller. To hell with Cush's! I could have me a hired man, er two—an' three, four span of mules."

Resolutely the man stooped and thrust the canoe back into the spruce thicket, and resolutely he turned his back on Halfaday, and struck off into the hills to the southward.

AND so, day after day, the virtuous Whiskey Bill had plodded southward, and in the evenings, beside his little supper-fires, he planned his farm and builded air castles which he peopled with a Mrs. Whiskey Bill, and numerous little Whiskey Bills. And at night he dreamed of boundless fields of waving corn, thousands of hogs, and a never-ending procession of mules.

In Skagway he stepped into the saloon of one, Soapy Smith. Nothin' like a good drink er two of licker when a man is jest in off a long trail. A brand new bill won the attention of the bartender, who gladly bought a return drink, and another and another. Mighty friendly folks—these—back on the American side. It made a man feel good to know that his two feet were planted once again on the soil of the good old U. S. A. Other brand new bills followed the first across Soapy Smith's bar. The proprietor himself took a personal interest in Whiskey Bill. He bought drinks like a long lost friend, and vociferously applauded the vocal efforts of the man from Halfaday. He promised that after supper he'd take Bill personally out back to look at the eagles.

But Soapy Smith's eagles were not for Whiskey Bill. Late in the afternoon as that gentleman stood at the bar roaring forth his song for the delectation of all and sundry, but especially of certain hangers-on whose shifty eyes dwelt gloatingly upon Whiskey Bill's fat bulging pockets, a lean, purposeful man, with hard steel-gray eyes stepped up and laid a hand on Whiskey Bill's arm.

"Come along with me," he said in a low brittle voice.

The song ceased abruptly, and Whiskey Bill blinked owlishly into the steel-gray eyes. "Huh?"

"Come with me," repeated the man. "I want to have a talk with you."

"I don't know you," argued Whiskey Bill, "an' besides, you ain't got no business to butt in when a man's singin' him a song. Now I've got to start all over."

"No you don't," answered the other. "Not right now——"

Soapy Smith stepped forward belligerently, interrupting the speaker with a frown. Ostentatiously his shifty-eyed minions edged closer. "Leave this man alone!" he snarled. "He's a friend of mine. Git to hell out of here! Who do you think you are?"

The steel-gray eyes bored coldly into the blazing eyes of the proprietor, and the man's thin lips twisted into a sneering smile. "Any interference from you, and down you go," he rasped. "Newton's my name—United States Secret Service. This man's under arrest. You got any objections?"

"Hell!" cried Soapy, his mind instantly reverting to the numerous crisp new bills that had found their way into his till. "Is that money queer?"

"Plenty queer," replied the other. "And plenty hot." He turned to Whiskey Bill who was staring at him, jaws agape. "Come on," he ordered curtly. "We'll step down the street a piece."

WHISKEY BILL'S befogged brain rapidly cleared, as the man steered him down the street and into a low frame building above which floated the American

flag. In a small room the man placed a chair for his prisoner close beside a flat-topped desk, behind which he seated himself. During several long moments of silence he fixed Whiskey Bill with an unwinking stare.

"You were a damn fool to double back," he snapped. "What did you kill that fellow for?"

"Cripes! He was comin' at me with a shotgun! An' I didn't kill him, nohow. He come alive agin. I got a letter."

The officer's lip curled. "Shotgun—hell! He didn't have a weapon of any kind. And his helper, the fellow that got away, says he didn't offer any resistance. He described how you slipped out from beneath the depot platform, struck the agent with an ax, and grabbed the package. Then, with the poor devil lying there on the ground begging you, for his children's sake, not to kill him, you stood there and beat his brains out. Hanging's too good for a damned gorilla like you!"

Whiskey Bill, his slightly woozy wits in a hopeless scramble at the man's words, stared in stupid astonishment. "Depot platform. Agent. Helper. Ax. Package. Beatin' brains out." He repeated the words slowly, in bewildered amazement. His wavering eyes concentrated on the man's face. "Be you drunk?" he asked. "Er jest plain crazy?"

"I'm not drunk," snapped the officer. "And you'll find out how crazy I am when I get you back to Illinois. The jury will give you the rope without even leaving the box."

"Illinois! Cripes, I never be'n in Illinois in my life! Look-a-here, feller—you've got the wrong man!"

The other laughed shortly. "Wrong man, eh? Dump that money out on the desk, there—and I'll give you the number of every one of the bills. Signed 'em yourself, eh—and a damned clumsy job you made of it!"

"What d'ye mean—signed 'em?" asked Whiskey Bill, as he proceeded to lay package after package of new bills on the desk.

PICKING up a bill, the officer pointed to the signatures purporting to be those of the president and the cashier of an Illinois bank. "Didn't even take the trouble to find out the names of the officials, did you? Figured no one ever looks at the signature on a bill, anyhow—and you'd get away with it. Well, from the time you began shoving them out in Seattle, you certainly left a blazed trail! They're forgeries—and damned clumsy ones."

A great light suddenly broke upon the brain of Whiskey Bill. "Feller!" he cried, half rising from his chair. "D'ye mean them there bills was stole in Illinois from some feller which his head was beat in with an ax?"

"Yes," sneered the man, "and by a fellow about your size and build, too."

"Feller! I told you you had the wrong man! You're huntin' Amos Applegate!"

"Yeah? Well, I couldn't say. The murderer didn't leave his card. Left some damned good fingerprints though—bloody ones—on the ax handle. I've got the photographs in my pocket." As he spoke, the man placed a small pad and a sheet of paper on the desk top beside the packages of bills. "Just ink your fingers on that pad—all of 'em—and then put 'em down on that sheet of paper. I'll remind you of a thing or two about yourself that it seems you've forgot."

WHISKEY BILL complied, wagging his head slowly. "I don't know what all this here tom-foolery's about, feller—but there you be."

The officer drew a magnifying glass and a photograph from his pocket and for several moments he studied the fingerprints—those of the photo, and the freshly inked prints on the paper. Then he looked up, a puzzled expression on his face. "Who's Amos Applegate?" he demanded. "And where'd you get those bills?"

"Now, feller, yer talkin' sense," replied Whiskey Bill, heaving a sigh of vast re-

lief. "Amos Applegate is the feller which I got these bills off'n him."

"How'd you get 'em?"

"He paid 'em to me. It's like this. A couple of months ago Amos Applegate hits Halfaday Crick. He works fer a while fer Black John Smith, an' then him an' me has us a jamboree, an' hits out fer my claim. I'm tired of minin', an' wants to git back to ol' Missouri an' go to farmin', so I sells him what dust I've got, which it figgers up to fifty-one thousan' two hundred dollars, it bein' heavy an' onhandy to pack, an' the country bein' full of thieves an' chechakos. He pays me forty-five thousan' in bills, claimin' that's all he had, an' I come out on the Dalton Trail, hopin' to avoid a jamboree at Cush's Fort, which the same overtuk me here at Skagway, 'spite of my good intentions. I figgered on buyin' me a farm with them bills," he added gazing ruefully at the heap of money on the desk.

"Where's this Applegate, now?"

"He's up on my claim. I couldn't fetch it along, so I left him on it to hold it down, figgerin' that if some kind of a hitch come up about my farmin', I'd go back. It sure looks like there's a hitch, all right."

"Is this claim in Canadian territory?"

"Yeah—right clost along the line."

THE officer frowned and drummed impatiently on the desk top with his fingers. "It's going to be a hell of a long job to get him. A lot of red tape, and plenty of delay, with the Mounted Police overworked as they are with the gold rush."

Whiskey Bill removed his battered hat and scratched his head reflectively. "It looks like Amos done me dirt—payin' me them forged bills."

"He certainly did. It's lucky for you he left those fingerprints on that ax helve. If I'd taken you back to Illinois the chances are you'd have swung."

"I was tryin' to figger out if Amos ain't guilty of some crime," said Whiskey Bill.

"Crime! Good Lord, man! Forging and uttering, robbery, murder! What do you want for crime?"

"I mean on Halfaday," explained Whiskey Bill. "It's like this, feller—up on Halfaday we most of us is men that's outlawed, one way an' another. We're a couple of hundred mile off'n the big river, the police don't bother us none 'cause Old Cush an' Black John Smith sees to it that there ain't no crime committed up there. There ain't no questions asked about what a man done before he come up there—but after he gits there he's got to keep so damn moral his own mother wouldn't know him. We don't want the police snoopin' around, an' the way to keep 'em from it is not to give 'em nothin' to snoop fer. If a man does commit a crime, a miners' meetin' tries him an' he gits his damn neck stretched fer him. Police does come, now an' then, huntin' someone, but they ain't neither helped nor hindered. Cush's Fort, where the boys hangs out is only a mile an' a half from the line, with good goin' up a gulch, an' when the police shows up, the Yukon wanteds skips acrost an' holes up at the Alasky Country Club, which we built on the Alasky side fer such purpose. It makes it right handy fer the boys."

THE thin lips of the secret service man smiled. "I shouldn't be surprised. But, what's all that got to do with Applegate's committing a crime on Halfaday?"

"Listen, feller," said Whiskey Bill earnestly. "I ain't holdin' it agin you fer takin' them bills away from me. But I am holdin' it agin Amos fer payin' 'em to me fer good honest dust. I'm aimin' to help you. Yer in a condiment about how to git Amos back to Illinois without foolin' around with papers an' police an' what not. What I claims, anyone that would beat a man's brains out which he had kids with an ax, should ort to git hung even if the man didn't have no kids. An' Black John Smith, bein' a right thinkin' man, would say so too.

"But an' however, if Amos didn't commit no crime on Halfaday, he couldn't be tried by miners' meetin' no matter if he'd beat the brains out of a man with forty kids before he come there. An' no more would the boys step in an' help an officer arrest him fer somethin' he done before. Like Black John says, goin' into any man's past would establish a dangerous precedent—an' make it mean fer all of us. But an' on the other hand, if Amos done a crime on Halfaday, Black John would be willin' either to call a miners' meetin', er to help an officer git him an' take him away from there."

"That wouldn't do me any good if the man's on Canadian territory. He'd set up a howl, an' I'd never get him out past the Mounted Police. It would be an illegal arrest."

"Not if you arrested him on the American side—over in Alasky. You'd have a right to fetch him on through."

"That's right! But how could we get him over to the American side to make the arrest?"

"That," said Whiskey Bill, "we'll leave to Black John. He's better'n any lawyer you ever seen when it comes to figgerin' —knows as much law as any of 'em—an' a damn sight more tricks. It looks like Amos, payin' me them bogus bills on Halfaday, should ort to be guilty of somethin', hadn't he?"

"Certainly he is! He's guilty of uttering forged bank notes, and of fraud, and obtaining money under false pretenses, and——"

"Hold on, feller!" interrupted Whiskey Bill. "You've spilt a chinful a'ready! Half of them things would be more'n Black John needs—onc't he's heard about that there agent's brains, an' his kids! Black John's a kind hearted man!"

V

"THAT there," opined Old Cush, pausing at the foot of a rapid well up toward the head of Halfaday Creek and pointing to a canoe half concealed in a thicket of spruce, "is Whiskey Bill's dugout."

"That's right," agreed Black John. "His claim can't be far away. Here's a foot trail."

"Mebbe we've made the trip fer nothin'," ventured Cush. "Whiskey Bill might be all right."

"No trip is fer nothin'," replied Black John philosophically. "If somethin's happened to Bill, it's our business to find out about it. If there ain't nothin' wrong, that's our business, too. I'm bettin' you the drinks we don't find Whiskey Bill."

A short distance above the head of the rapid they turned up a side gulch, following the foot trail, and came presently to a small cabin built in the shelter of a spruce thicket. Pausing before the closed door they glanced about. From up the gulch sounded the shrill creak of a windlass.

"I'll go you ten ounces on top of that drink that we don't find him," said Black John.

"Why?" asked Old Cush, his eyes seeking some reason for the ten ounce bet.

"Do you take me?"

"No. But I'll make it the drinks fer the house. What makes you think we won't find him?"

"Whiskey Bill would of greased his roller. No one but a chechako would crank a windlass that squealed like a stuck hog."

Rounding the bend of the gulch, they saw Amos Applegate in the act of swinging a bucket of gravel to his dump.

THE man greeted them with a shout: "Hello, boys! Well, damned if this ain't a surprise!"

"I wouldn't wonder," said Black John. "Where's Whiskey Bill?"

"Whiskey Bill!"

"Yeah — Whiskey Bill. That's his shack, back a piece, ain't it? An' this is his claim."

"Sure," agreed the man. "I'm jest holdin' it down fer him till he gits back."

"Back from where?"

"From Missouri."

"Missouri?"

"Yeah. You see, Bill got tired of it up here, an' he 'lowed he'd go back to Missouri an' buy him a farm. He had fifty-one thousan' in dust, an' it bein' too heavy an' too resky to pack clean on through to Missouri, I boughten it off'n him fer forty-five thousan' in bills that I happened to have on me."

"An' the claim?" inquired Black John sarcastically. "I s'pose he figgered on farmin' in Missouri summers, an' slippin' back here to work his claim of winters, eh?"

"No. But he couldn't take it along. An' I didn't have no money to buy it with. So he tells me to hold it down fer him in case he goes broke farmin'. Me to have whatever I take out of it in the meantime."

"How long ago was that?"

"Well, it was the next day after we got up here—the time we got drunk together down to Cush's."

"Kind of funny you didn't say nothin' about this here deal when you was down to my place a few days back," ventured Old Cush.

"A man ain't supposed to tell everything he knows," answered Applegate, with a note of truculence.

"That's right," agreed Black John. "If they did, there'd be more hangin's."

"What do you mean—hangin's?" asked Applegate sharply.

"It's a quaint nick-name we've got up here fer the act of breakin' a man's neck, er chokin' him to death, accordin' to how his luck's runnin', with a rope. Thick-necked men generally always chokes," he added, with a speculative glance at the bull throat that rose from Applegate's open shirt collar. "Layin' aside this here Missouri business, where'd you hide Whiskey Bill?"

"Hide him!" cried the man.

"Well—even a chechako wouldn't leave him layin' around."

"What do you mean?" The man's face had gone suddenly livid as his glance shifted from one to the other of the unsmiling faces. "You don't think I murdered Whiskey Bill, do you?"

"Barrin' any evidence to the contrary, we do," admitted Black John.

"Hell, man—didn't I jest tell you that he went to Missouri?"

"Yeah. But you didn't tell us how-come he didn't stop in to Cush's, as he would of. Nor yet how he could git to the Yukon an' up it without his canoe. He couldn't of passed down Halfaday, with all the claims that's bein' worked, without no one seein' him, onlest he'd slipped past at night, which ain't reasonable."

"How the hell do I know what he done after he left here?" retorted the man surlily, "I never killed Whiskey Bill, an' you can't hang a man unlest you kin find the body!"

"Yer in error," corrected Black John, "as you'll prob'ly find out."

"You ain't no police officer, an' you can't arrest a man without no warrant, n o h o w !''

"Mebbe yer right," admitted B l a c k J o h n. "A n' such objection kin be brought out at the trial if yer so minded. I n t h e m e a n t i m e, we'll give you as good an imitation of an arrest, as we know how." Pausing, Black John drew a length of babiche from his pocket and handed it to Cushing. "Jest tie his hands, Cush, while I hold this gun on him, an' we'll walk him down to the shack where we'll do similar by his legs while we put in the rest of the day huntin' fer Whiskey Bill providin' we don't find him sooner."

Securing the man beyond any possibility of escape, the two spent the remainder of the day in a vain search for the body

of Whiskey Bill, even going so far as to shovel away the gravel dump beside the shaft. The empty gold cache was discovered, and its contents were later located in the shack, and duly seized.

Next morning, with the gold and the prisoner in the canoe, the two proceeded down the creek and arrived at Cushing's Fort on the following day.

THE word was passed, and afternoon found the barroom crowded with stern faced men. Black John thumped the bar for order.

"This here miners' meetin' is called fer the purpose of tryin' this here defendant, to wit, Amos Applegate, so called, fer the murder of alias Whiskey Bill, an' also fer feloniously an' with malice aforethought appropriatin' to his own use certain properties, to wit, one claim an' a couple of hundred pound of dust, which same bein' the ondisputed property of said alias Whiskey Bill.

"Bein' as you all remember how we had bad luck the last time we called a miners' meetin', owin' to Corporal Downey happenin' along an' spoilin' what would of ondoubtless be'n the most notorious hangin' in the country, I hereby grant a change of venue to the accused. Every prisoner, even one like Amos, here, is entitled to all the breaks he can git. He has got a right to be tried in such place where there won't be no interference with the swift an' rapid course of justice, such as the police buttin' in an' bustin' up the trial.

"Therefore, we'll transfer this case to the Alasky Country Club fer trial on the American side where the Mounted can't butt in. I'll app'int Long John Smith an' Joe Jones fer to fetch the prisoner up, an' the same is responsible fer gittin' him there, dead er alive. There's grub an' plenty of licker over there, an' the rope we used on Olsen, so we won't have nothin' to pack. Come on now, we'll git a-goin'."

The room quickly emptied, the crowd, with the prisoner in the midst, heading up the gulch that led to the Alaska line. Old Cush paused at the end of the bar as Black John was about to follow.

"I won't be goin' along, John," he said. "My rheumatiz is plaguein' me consid'able owin' to trackin' up through them rapids. An' besides, I wouldn't hardly like to ask none of the boys to stay in my place an' miss a hangin'. I've saw so many that one more or less don't make no difference, so I'll stay an' let the boys have their fun. I couldn't add nothin' to what you kin tell 'em about what we done an' found up the crick. The boys'll take your word without me backin' you up."

"All right, Cush. So long. We'd ort to git back by dark."

VI

THE low log building, facetiously referred to by the men of Halfaday as the Alaska Country Club, consisted of a single large room with bunks ranged along two sides and a huge fireplace, which served for both warmth and cooking, built into the end opposite the main or front door. Its furnishings were meager and rude, consisting simply of a large table, an ample number of benches, and shelves for the storing of dishes, food supplies, and liquor. It had been built to furnish shelter and comfort to such of the citizenry of Halfaday as, from time to time, deemed it prudent to sojourn outside the jurisdiction of the Mounted Police.

It was this building that Black John entered on the heels of the crowd of men who were conducting the prisoner. Inside, the huge man lost no time in calling the meeting to order.

"Miners' meetin' called," he announced, thumping the table with an empty whiskey bottle. "I'll app'int myself chairman, an' proceed to swear myself in as the principal witness fer the prosecution, which owin' to Cush havin' the rheumatiz, there won't be no other witness except such facts as I lay before you. You all know I wouldn't lie a rope around no man's neck. Neither

I don't aim to allow no damn ornery skunk, which he ondoubtless ort to be'n hung before he ever seen Halfaday, to git away with murderin' none of our citizens. I might add here that these here facts such as I aim to lay before you, proves onconclusively to your minds that this here prisoner, to wit, Amos Applegate, so called, did feloniously, an' in some manner unbeknownst to us, murder our respected an' departed citizen, to wit, alias Whiskey Bill, his other name er names, if any, bein' his own business an' none of our'n."

HAVING delivered himself of this prelude, Black John solemnly took the witness oath, and proceeded to relate how, suspicion becoming aroused in the minds of himself and Old Cush, they proceeded to Whiskey Bill's claim to investigate. He also told of the investigation, and the arrest of Amos Applegate, and turned to the prisoner, who stood between his two guards on the opposite side of the table.

"You will now be give a chanct to tell your side of it, not fergettin' to omit any extenuatin' er mitigatin' circumstances that you kin think up. Hold up yer right er left hand. Do you swear to tell the hull truth er any part of it, s'elp'e God?"

"Yes."

"What's yer name?"

"Amos Applegate."

"All right. Go ahead."

The prisoner, talking fast and nervously, told the same story he had told to his captors at the claim, winding up with the defiant statement that, "you can't prove a man's murdered till you find his body!"

Black John combed at his beard with his fingers. "I'll admit," he began judicially, "that yer grounds would be well took in dealin' with a court of law. But miners' meetin's is different. They've got, what you might say, more flexibility to 'em, not bein' hampered by such clogs to jestice as rules of evidence, an' precedent. Each miners' meetin' stands on its own legs, no matter what the previous ones done. Not, mind you, that a miners' meetin' don't give a man all the breaks he's got comin'.

"But meanin' merely that fewer guilty men walks out of 'em onhung.

"I'll admit that the body, er *corpus delicti,* as a lawyer would say, is a handy piece of evidence—if you've got it. But it ain't necessary, *ad valorum,* to the case. A successful hangin' kin be conducted without none—as you will ondoubtless find out. A *corpus delicti,* bein' a mere fiction of the law, is plumb redic'lous as you kin see fer yourself.

"Take Julius Caesar, fer instance. We all know he was murdered; but we'd have a hell of a time provin' it with a *corpus delicti* now, wouldn't we? All such foolishness is invented by crooked lawyers fer to have somethin' to auger about so their client'll think they're earnin' their money, an' as such, is disregardable in a miners' meetin' which relies on common sense, an' not trickery fer its verdicks.

"But," interrupted the prisoner, "I tell you Whiskey Bill did go to Missouri! He left with forty-five thousan' dollars of my bills in his pocket which I paid him fer his dust!"

"Which," opined Black John, "is ondoubtless good lyin' fer the brains you've got. But the evidence is throw'd out fer lack of common sense, every man here knowin' damn well that Whiskey Bill never got past no saloon with even one bill in his pocket—let alone forty-five thousan' dollars worth of 'em. But in the interests of jestice an' fair play we'll waive the p'int an' also the matter of not havin' no *corpus delicti.* We'll concede, fer the purpose of argument, that you succeeded in hidin' Bill where we can't find him. An' still you ain't no better off.

"We ain't got many crimes on Halfaday, but what we have got is important. We ain't got no jail, so there ain't only two verdicks possible—hangin' an' turnin' loose. Among these crimes is claim jumpin', theft, robbery, murder, an' skulldug-

gery, which last bein' as you might say, a broader term than the others. The fact that you removed the gold from Whiskey Bill's cache to the cabin you was occupyin' constitutes the crime of robbery, an' skullduggery with intent to hornswoggle. So you see yer only usin' up time, which you ain't got much of left, augerin' about a *corpus delicti*. 'Cause you'd be hung on the skullduggery charge, even if you succeeded in beatin' the murder one—which ain't likely. We fetched the evidence fer the latter charge along with us—two hundred pound of it."

The speaker turned from the prisoner and faced the crowd. "You've all heard the evidence, an' are convinced that this here, to wit, Amos Applegate murdered alias Whiskey Bill agin the peace an' dignity of Halfaday Crick; an' also robbed the said Whiskey Bill's cache of two hundred pound of dust. Anyone not so convinced kin peel his coat an' step up front, er forever hold his peace." Nobody accepting the challenge, Black John continued, "All in favor of hangin' hold up his er her left er right hand an' holler 'Aye.'"

A forest of hands shot upward, and a chorus of loudly bellowed "Ayes" filled the room.

Black John turned to the prisoner. "You'll take notice," he said, "that hangin's recommended in your case. The boys'll 'tend to it as quick as they kin git the rope ready, so if you've got anything to say you better start unloadin' it."

The words were greeted with a tirade of vile and sulphurous invective that included personally and collectively, every man on Halfaday, and reached its conclusion in a choking gurgle as the noose was adjusted and he was jerked clear of the floor.

VII

ALONE in his barroom after the departure of the miners and their prisoner, Old Cush mopped the bar, rinsed and hung up his bar rag, and selecting from the back bar several depleted bottles labeled respectively: "Rye," "Bourbon," "Sour Mash," and "Cognac," carried them into the store room and filled them from a barrel in anticipation of a rush of business. Returning them to their places, he reached for his account book, settled his steel-rimmed spectacles firmly upon his nose, and began laboriously to transfer certain entries from a sheet of paper that served as a day book.

A half hour later, as two figures darkened the doorway, he laid the book aside, shoved the spectacles to his forehead with the precision of long practice, and surveyed the newcomers with professional disinterest. The foremost was scarcely midway of the floor, however, when Old Cush stiffened with a jerk. Down popped the spectacles, and he leaned forward staring, both hands on the bar.

"Hello, Cush!" greeted the man jovially. "Cripes! Don't you know me? You look like you seen a ghost!"

"Yeah," answered Cush, relaxing a bit from his tense attitude. "Yeah—it might look that way, at that. Where in hell you be'n, Bill?"

Whiskey Bill and his companion, a hard-eyed, thin-lipped man, lined up before the bar. "Give us a drink," he ordered, "an' have one yerself. I took me a little trip down to Skagway. This here's a friend of mine, name of Newton. Where's all the boys?"

Old Cush set out bottle and glasses. "They're over to the Country Club," he said, "on a little matter of business. There's a miners' meetin'."

"Is Amos Applegate along with 'em?" demanded Whiskey Bill.

"Yeah," answered Cush dryly. "He went along."

"We're huntin' him," confided Whiskey Bill. "Newton, here, wants to see him. Give us another drink."

Instead of complying Old Cush waved a hand toward the door. "Wait till you git back, Bill. It ain't no good fer a man to hang around drinkin' when he's in a hurry."

"Hell—we ain't in no hurry! Fact is, we'd ruther find Amos over on the Alasky side than anywheres else."

"You're in a hurry all right," answered Old Cush, twisting an end of his yellow mustache. "You might not know it—but you be."

"But, hell—Amos ain't goin' away from there right away, is he?"

"Yeah," answered Cush. "The chances is, he will."

"Where in hell would he go to?"

"That," Cush replied, "is accordin' to how folks believes."

"Cripes!" exclaimed Whiskey Bill, with a sudden gleam of understanding. "You don't mean this here miners' meetin' is tryin' Amos!"

"If they ain't already tried him, they be."

"What fer?"

"Fer murderin' you."

"Me! Hell, man—I ain't murdered!"

"That," answered Cush, "is what you'd better go an' tell 'em. There wasn't no hell of a lot of evidence to be swore to, an' the boys has be'n gone quite a while. There might be some mistake made."

THE distance from Cushing's Fort to the Alaska Country Club was covered with admirable promptitude, and the two burst through the doorway and stood just inside the room, panting for breath. A man, his hands and feet securely tied, was writhing and twisting about on the end of a rope made fast to a rafter, as some thirty or forty grim faced men looked on.

"That's Amos," panted Whiskey Bill to his companion. "Cripes—look at him spin."

A loud shout issued from the throat of a man in the crowd, as he stood pointing at the newcomers, whose presence had escaped attention. "By Gawd, John!" cried the man, "there's yer crumpus delinktum, er whatever you call it, that you couldn't find! Everything's all fair an' reg'lar, now—there's Whiskey Bill!"

"Hell's fire!" roared Black John, reaching for his belt knife. "Cut him down! You can't have no *corpus delicti* on the hoof!"

He himself was the first to reach the man whose body thudded heavily upon the floor as the rope was severed with a sweep of the huge man's knife. The next moment the noose was loosened, and the heaving chest began to pump air into the tortured lungs in noisy sucks and gurgles.

Newton stepped forward as Black John was rising from his knees. "I arrest that man, Amos Applegate, for murder, robbery, and forging and uttering. He's guilty of a particularly atrocious——"

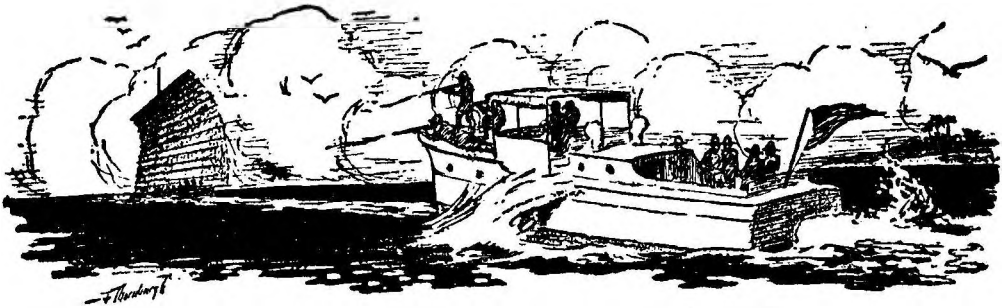
"Jest a minute, stranger," interrupted Black John, eyeing the man keenly. "Be you an American officer?"

"Yes—United States Secret Service. And I understand this is American territory. The man's wanted in Illinois for ——"

"Yeah," again interrupted Black John, his mind instantly reverting to Fort Gibbon and the robbery of a certain army pay roll. "This here's American territory, all right. But you jest wait an' tell me what he done when we git down to Cush's. Fact is—I'm in a hurry!" At the doorway he paused and called to the men, "Some of you Yukon boys help the gent down with his prisoner. An' see to it that he don't git away. It's gittin' so we can't pull off no proper hangin' no matter where we go!"

"But hell, John," objected Whiskey Bill, "it's a good thing we come along. You all come damn near makin' a mistake!"

"Mistake!" cried Black John. "What the hell you talkin' about—mistake! Didn't the gent jest tell about him bein' guilty of a partic'lar atrocious murder? I'm tellin' you—*miners' meetin's don't make mistakes!*"



The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

Sea Gypsies

THE egocentricity of mankind is universal, but an editor of a magazine of general adventure inevitably has moments when he sees the crust of the globe as a whole and feels himself about as important as a gnat.

Gloomily contemplating this temporarily sick industrial civilization; this out of hand mammoth of machinery that can produce absurd amounts of food, clothing and luxuries yet has the world's leaders so thoroughly buffaloed that they can't think of a way to deliver this groaning plant of its unwieldy offspring, the editor is suddenly confronted by a story about a place or people that he has never before heard of. Then this industrial segment slips into its proper place in a world that is vast and largely unknown and as pregnant with thrilling adventures, exotic atmospheres and romantic situations as our factories are with undeliverable goods.

But these rare fictional goods are not "undeliverable." There is an old saying among editors that "a good story will out." Ultimately all the corners of the globe will find themselves represented among the wares of the minstrels, and it is a curious fact that in casting about for a fresh locale various authors will almost simultaneously seize on the same place.

In this connection it is interesting that about the same time that we received a letter from *Carl N. Taylor*—who makes his appearance for the second time in SHORT STORIES with this issue—in which he said, speaking of the Philippines. "I walked, or traveled by native boat from one end of the archipelago to the other . . . and on this trip visited the Bajao Sea Gypsies in their floating villages, and published the first account of them that was ever written, to my knowledge," that we received also *The Pearl of Sulu* by *L. Clifford* which turned out to be so outstanding that we have used it to lead off the same number.

These Sea Gypsies, a group of hard-fighting Pagans, who live all their lives on the water, and have for centuries resisted all outside influence, are certainly a fascinating subject for the adventurous mind to play with, and *Major Clifford* tapped a mine of interesting material when he set himself to the task of using them for stories.

As to the army part of *The Pearl of Sulu,* we believe that *Major Clifford* is the only man writing soldier stories today, who can give a story the flavor of the old army as it existed before the war, as well as during and after it, and whose atmosphere, detail and characterization will be completely vouched for by old soldiers.

"The story is entirely fiction," says *Major Clifford,* "but the locale, Bajaos and other background are as true to life as possible. Nobody really knows a great deal about these people. They appear to be indigenous to the Sulu Archipelago, but I have seen them riding in their cockleshell *vintas* on the southwest coast of Mindanao. Mostly, though, they seem to

prefer the vicinity of Siasi and Sitankai. They are called also *Luwaan* and *Pala-u,* are pagans and spend their entire life on their out-rigger craft. Huge families are sometimes crowded into these tiny boats which are incredibly filthy and foul smelling, though I have heard of small communities living in low roofed huts built over the sea.

"Fishing and pearl diving and some weaving are the main occupations of these 'sea gypsies' and it is said that they can endure only a few hours on dry land without becoming 'land-sick.' The men are usually unclothed above the waist, wear wide, loose trousers and allow their hair to grow long. So far, they have resisted Mohammedanism and cling to their ancient rites. This fact and some highly ornamental legends told to me by obviously jealous and contemptuous Moros, gave me the idea for this story. For it is a fact up to this day that the Bajaos, regardless of where death overtakes them, are buried on the Island of Taluk, together with all their jewels and prized belongings.

"As nearly as can be determined—for their nomadic mode of life makes accurate census difficult—theirs is a very small tribe and is on the wane. They are not a warlike people as compared with the fierce Joloano Moro, their near neighbors, but conceivably, if interfered with on their sacred burial island, and properly armed, would give a good account of themselves. They are certainly villainous looking characters!"

Ivory

EVER since the dawn of history ivory has been a valued commodity in the commerce of the Eastern world. The very name suggests the romance of Arab traders, strange Eastern peoples and cities like Zanzibar and Mozambique, the splendors of Oriental royalty and the mysterious jungles of tropical Africa. Most of our ivory comes to us by way of the East though most of it is obtained from the tusks of the African elephant. Except for some experiments made recently in the Belgian Congo, this animal has never been tamed for draft purposes like his Indian cousin. Hence ivory hunters, both Arab and European, used to kill thousands of them for their tusks alone.

Their numbers were greatly reduced and this interesting animal seemed headed for extinction. In fact they have already practically disappeared from that part of Africa south of the Zambezi River. Strict government protection has saved them in East Africa and they are again increasing in numbers. Mozambique in Portuguese East Africa is the African center of the ivory trade. Most of the African ivory passes through this port from which it is shipped not to Europe but to Bombay where it is first sorted and cut before being sent to Europe. So important is the ivory trade to the colony that one of the postage stamps issued by the Mozambique Company shows a native displaying a group of elephant tusks.

Not all of the world's ivory is obtained from the elephants. Some comes from the narwhal of the northern seas, while an appreciable amount of ivory also came from Northern Siberia in form of tusks gathered by the natives who sometimes discovered skeletons of the extinct mammoths that used to roam the country in considerable numbers.

A fortune in ivory awaits the man who can discover what becomes of the wild elephants that die each year. Sinbad the Sailor amassed great wealth from an elephant cemetery he discovered while on one of his famous voyages, and many an ivory hunter has vainly wished that he could repeat the good fortune of that ancient hero. A governor of East Africa has suggested that the missing elephant skeletons lie in the beds of the rivers. A sick elephant, he thinks, like any other sick animal will seek water and one that is dying will get so weak after a time that it

will be unable to leave the water and will die there. Though this idea sounds reasonable, the question of what becomes of them still remains one of Africa's unsolved mysteries.

Ivory is one of those words that stimulates the imagination both by its sound and its associations, in fact if it had not been so alluring to the men who incurred the wrath of the Major in Patrick Greene's new story, they might have escaped punishment for their cruelties. We believe that the story will make many new friends for the redoubtable Major as well as bind more firmly to him the army of followers that won't let the editor rest unless he appears regularly in SHORT STORIES.

Congo Dust

AND while we're on the subject of Africa, Henry Nelson of 424 Bank Street, Ottawa, writes of an experience guaranteed to start a gold fever of about 108 degrees. He says:

"In a recent issue you refer to gold having been found on the 'Gold Coast,' West Africa, and this remark reminds me of an incident which occurred during the late nineties, while I was serving in the army of the 'Congo Freestate,' which is now known as the Belgian Congo.

"When I arrived at Boma in 1898, the Congo Government was proceeding to build a railroad from Boma up to the French Congo, to a point, if I remember rightly, named Ligny. A large force of natives under white overseers had, at my arrival, been engaged in clearing away and levelling a broad road for a good many miles. I was ordered to take a company of 'Houssas' up to the main camp on the road, and with this detachment protect the workers against native attacks and also do police duty, enforcing law and order among the native workers.

"To break the monotony, I would now and then take a couple of non-coms along with me and go for a few days' hunting trip to get an antelope or two so as to have a little variation in our diet, which merely consisted of canned food.

"On one of these hunting trips, a few days' march away from the working party, we arrived one afternoon at a small stream. The water in this stream was remarkably clear and only about a foot deep, as it was in the dry season. At places, the sand on the bottom was as white as snow. When I say at places, I mean that only in places could I see the sand, as almost the whole bottom of the stream was covered with a golden carpet of fine dust. I scooped up some of the surface layer and sifted it through a handkerchief, then put it away in an empty cigarette box.

"On my return to Boma months later, I brought the box with its contents to a jeweller and assayer who found this dust to be almost pure gold. I was then only twenty-one years old and thought nothing more of the incident, but I have often, in after years, thought that if anyone followed up this stream as far as the hills between French Congo and the Belgian Congo, one would surely strike the gold deposits from which such amounts of gold dust were being carried for miles by a gently flowing stream."

Utilizing Home Products

AROUND the Port Burwell district in northern Quebec, Eskimos have taught the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to use mud for sleigh runners. The mud is frozen on the runners and then iced over to facilitate traveling over the frozen snow. In order to withstand the hard knocks received by the runner, the mud must be peaty, free from sand and grit. Further north, where whale bone is available, it is used for the same purpose as the mud.

Thirty Million Lost Souls

THE reader who, having read *'Salvage of the Gods,'* in this issue of SHORT STORIES," says its author, *Frank J. Leahy,*

"is laboring under the impression that the Great Emerald Buddha of Angkor is merely a fictional statue has only to probe into history to learn that it was, once upon a time, quite an actual, almost a live thing. Only recently, in fact, a large and well-equipped expedition was sent to Angkor by the French Colonial Government of Cochin China to unearth what it could of the supposedly buried treasures of the mysteriously long-lost race. The emerald Buddha was one of the things the expedition hoped to find, and though, as far as I know, it hasn't yet been found, while I am cracking my breakfast egg tomorrow I am likely to be confronted with the startling news that, instead of a mere Chick Randall and a visionary Wagstaff having dived to find it in a sunken temple, it has been discovered buried with other priceless gods and golden altar furniture and jewels of all kinds in some deep cache dug by its people who, facing an invading enemy, or swept by plague, or relapsing into savagery, were wiped out or scattered to the four corners of the Orient.

"But perhaps what really happened will never be known. It has all been a mystery to which science has long been stressed to answer—how a people, estimated to have numbered some thirty millions, could so completely vanish and take with them, or leave buried behind them, all the wealth of which the imposing ruins of its cities still give stark evidence.

"Perhaps I have stepped ruthlessly upon the fingers of Probability in discovering and salvaging, as I have in the story 'Salvage of the Gods,' the Great Emerald Buddha of Angkor, but what if, through the medium of my flight of fancy, I should have solved for those puzzled over it the whole mystery? What if the Buddha would eventually be found in a sunken temple? What if a visionary's opium-induced belief that the key to the disappearance of the idol's people would be sealed inside of it, should turn out to be true.

"Ha! Riddle me that, indulgent reader, and be prepared to shed a fresh tear for Wagstaff."

Leopard Men

NO SECRET organizations in the world are less understood by white men than the Leopard and Gorilla societies in the Congo. One of our best-selling writers, in a recent novel, pictured the leopard men as a tribe, with tribal characteristics, warring on neighbors, holding captives, indulging in daylight powwows, performing tremendous marches.

"The Leopard sects of the Congo possess no tribal structure. Rarely, even, do sects communicate with each other. They

are comparable to local Greek-letter college fraternities without national membership.

"A favorite Leopard function is hazing. How they haze their own selected membership, no white man can truthfully tell. These rituals occur in deepest night in the blackest bowels of the Congo. They haze the tribe, the non-members, by terror. In the damp, feverish thickness of the jungle dark a ghastly wail fills the forest. Fantastic figures in skins and tails burst amok into the village. Men, women and children turn stiff with fear. Some die in the awful excitement. The Leopards, usually, depart without spilling life; but at times, when emotion whips their souls to a froth, they claw their own kinfolk to pieces.

"The original use of the Leopard sect was thus to inflict tribal discipline. Raids on neighboring tribes followed. Invading Leopards would charge into a nearby village, terrify the inhabitants, seize a number of captives and rush away to a cannibal orgy. The practice of selling captives into slavery, as touched on in *'The Claws of the Leopard,'* did not originate in Congo brains. It was foxily built up by the Arabs.

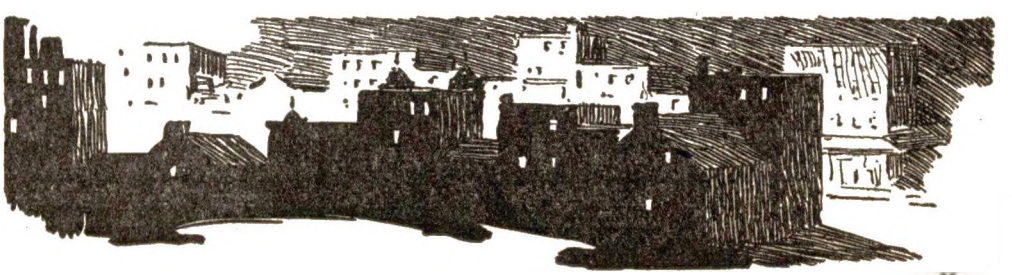
"So we can say that the Leopards are given over to rituals, hazings and bloody raids which can be consummated in a single night. At the core of all these raids and rituals, just as with the secret mummery of the white man's sects and societies, is the animal thrill the performer feels when he sets his emotions a-gallop."

This information about the mysterious Leopard sects, we quoted from a letter of *Walter Clare Martin,* whose story *"The Claws of The Leopard,"* suffers nothing in the way of excitement from being based on a true knowledge of the facts. We find that a knowledge of the background of his stories not only does not handicap an author in telling good stories, but gives him greater scope and a fund of real material that will create more interest than anything he can devise with his imagination.

The Next Issue

SAD SONTAG and Swede Harrigan, those two astute investigators of the ranges, are in on a great case in our next number. They know to prove homicide, you must produce the corpus delicti. Well, that was all right, but doggone it if the corpus warn't of the wrong fellow. So *W. C. Tuttle,* proceeding along those lines, lets Sad and Swede in on a great number of adventures in *"Blind Trail at Sunrise,"* the complete novel in our next issue.

As well as the *Tuttle* novel in the next number there will be a *John T. McIntyre* baseball story. *McIntyre* hasn't been in our pages for quite a while, been decorating the Saturday Evening Post, we suppose, but anyway here he is back with a tale of well seasoned ash, not to mention seasoned sluggers. Also, *James B. Hendryx* will have a Northern novelette in the next number; he'll show in it that once a reporter, always a news hound—even along the Yukon. It is called *"Joe Northern Investigates."* Another novelette will be by *Captain Frederick Moore,* one of his best yarns of the Outer Islands, called *"Jimmie Smith's Bamboo Jail."* There will also be tales by *Sewell Peaslee Wright, Frank J. Leahy, Conrad Richter, etc.*



Strange facts about far places and perilous air trails. Send in yours.

OUTLANDS AND AIRWAYS

Windless Auctioneering

EACH year in Burma are found crowds of wealthy merchants who have come from far places to attend the jade fairs. All the jade quarried during the year is auctioned off at this time—with not one word spoken during the entire transaction. Before the auction the stones are put on display, each bearing a numbered card and cut to expose the interior markings. When the bidding begins the auctioneer holds up each numbered card and the buyers rush up to him and grasp his wrists which are hidden under the long white sleeves of his robe. He can tell by secret grips the price they are willing to bid. The auctioneer must remember some fifty or sixty different pressures each with a meaning all its own. This method prevents hysterical bidding and unwarranted price boosts, thus insuring the mine owners a moderate profit and a steady demand for their jade.

Monkeys Test Money

SIAM is such a beehive of all races and nationalities that necessarily much of this country's currency is of foreign manufacture. Owing to the increased spread of counterfeit coins, pet monkeys are being employed in banks and bazaars to test the worthless currency. Stationed behind the counters, the monkeys try the coins between their teeth. No marks can be made on the good metal and it is thrown into a box to be later deposited in the bank vault or in the merchant's big chest. Should the coin bear visible teeth marks, it is tossed to the floor to be swept up and destroyed. One sandal dealer recently had quite a shortage in his day's accounts. After an hour of frenzied calculation he happened to look at the bulging cheeks of his pet monkey. When dangled by the tail, the animal very promptly went off the gold standard, and dropped two yellow coins from his mouth!

Frogs For Luck

MORE nightmarish tales come out of the jungles of British Guiana than from any other place in the world. Yet the most unbelievable report has been proven true in every respect. Emitting a croak of great volume, a bright red frog has been found in the back swamps of this territory. The scarlet animal is regarded as a charm by less civilized natives. When one is caught, it is hacked into as many pieces as there are men in the tribe. Each man

rubs his portion over the points of his arrows in the belief that this will insure the perfect aim of his weapons.

Eagle Fights Airman

A PILOT in the air mail service, Annibale Pecoroni, has returned to Trieste with the body of an eagle which he slew after a desperate battle in mid-air.

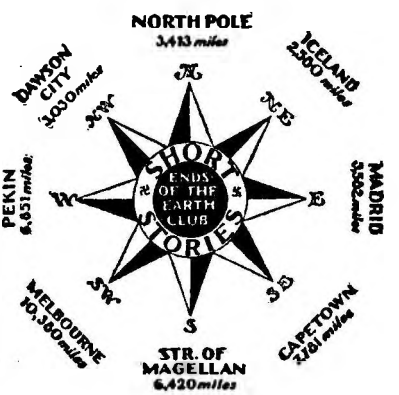
He said that he passed the eagle while flying with mails from Trieste to Zara. On his return journey, having no luggage or passengers, he decided to fly around in search of the eagle and sighted it again near Pirano.

He drew a revolver and then the eagle swooped down on the machine and a grim fight began. Pecoroni shot the eagle several times, and the bird, enraged by its wounds, made repeated attacks on the airman.

When it came to close quarters Pecoroni stabbed it with his dagger and it fell dying to the earth.

The airman, who was slightly hurt in the battle, landed to take his trophy on board. The machine was not damaged.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB



HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, % Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

Going South. No, not Miami—Mexico and South America!

Dear Secretary:

Have been a reader of SHORT STORIES for a long, long time, and have always read the letters from different members of the Ends of the Earth Club. Kind of makes me want to join too.

Have traveled considerable in the past couple of years and right now I am planning a trip to Mexico. Expect to see a lot before I return. Also am anxious to go to South America. Would like to hear about that country and if any members of the club can send me information in regard to South America, it would be appreciated. Have been from coast to coast and have also been in some wild country up in Canada. So come on everyone and I will join in with you in writing and exchanging letters about travel in North America.

Looking forward to my membership card, I am,

Very truly yours,

Joseph R. Reiniger

611—2nd Ave.,
North Troy, N. Y.

Here's an opportunity for stamp collectors to join the Spanish Philatelic Fraternity.

Dear Secretary:

The writer has received a letter from one of our friends in Spain who wishes to correspond in English, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, with residents from every country of the globe who are inter-

ested in exchanging news, post cards, stamps, magazines, newspapers, snaps, or any other article they might be interested in. He is the head of the Spanish Philatelic Fraternity, Bia (Alicante), Spain, and anyone who wishes to become a member free of charge may do so by writing a post card or a letter to the Spanish Philatelic Fraternity, Mr. Faust Vincent, Jr., Secretary, at the above address. I understand that after exchanging correspondence three times a free membership is issued. This is the only requirement. Everything is free and everybody is welcome in the Spanish Philatelic Fraternity.

Please publish the name of our friend in Spain so that he may have an opportunity to receive correspondence from every corner of the earth. Please publish my name also.

I have been reading SHORT STORIES for some time and like the magazine immensely. It helps to forget the depression.

Wishing you good luck and prosperity in your business, I am,

Very truly yours,

V. de Alvarado

Room 1118,
201 N. Wells St.,
Chicago, Ill.

World wandering brass pounder promises some fascinating correspondence.

Dear Secretary:

This is to ask that I be enrolled in the Ends of the Earth Club.

Everyone knows the saying, "Genius is the capacity for taking infinite pains." And if this adage is true, then the editors of SHORT STORIES have genius in their own right; for in everything they put into SHORT STORIES they pay the closest attention to the detail of pure entertainment.

I am free-lancing at present sixty miles out of Washington, up in the Blue Ridge Mountains of song and poetry but I have on my table here answers to letters from San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland, any one of which may be my home within the very near future.

I am a radioman, a Morse operator; good at both of them and aside from the little portable here, they're old standbys for keeping the old feedbag on during drouths, floods, pestilences and earthquakes. I love to read SHORT STORIES because I love to travel. Shanghai is no less familiar to me than San Diego, Rangoon, Boston, Nagasaki, Sitka, Cairo, Johannesburg, or bloody old London itself, and I promise appreciation and an answer for every letter received whether from Pearl Harbor, Zanzibar, Tulsa, or the Keeper of the Taj Mahal, with a speaking familiarity which I hope the writer shall find pleasing.

With every best wish, I am yours for a weekly SHORT STORIES and a bigger Ends of the Earth Club. Let's hear from you.

Sincerely,

Homer Marvin Coffey

342 National Avenue,
Winchester,
Virginia

It's a far cry from Long Island, N. Y. to the South Sea Islands—but this member can tell tales of both.

Dear Secretary:

May I become a member of the Ends of the Earth Club? I was born in England and at fifteen I sailed alone for Australia. After living there for several years, besides traveling around New Zealand and the South Sea Islands quite a lot, I finally came to this country about three seasons ago. I think that is sufficient to qualify me. I would like to hear from other members who are interested.

Faithfully yours,

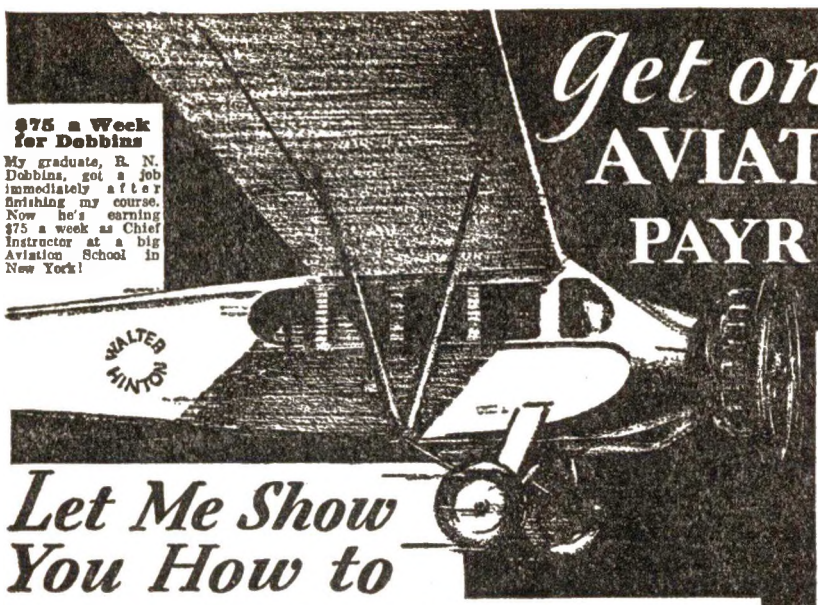
(*Mr.*) *Vere R. Hunt*

Box 1234,
Southampton,
Long Island

SAVE THESE LISTS!

WITH hundreds of letters from new members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. The editors do the best they can, but naturally most readers buy* SHORT STORIES *because of the fiction that it contains. Below are more names and addresses of Ends of the Earth Club members. Most of these members will be eager to hear from you, should you care to correspond with them, and will be glad to reply. Save these lists, if you are interested in writing to other members. Names and addresses will appear only once.

John Recher, c/o Schneider-Egger, Kappel, (Sol.) Switzerland
Josef Regler, 1971 Biltmore Street, Washington, District of Columbia
Joseph R. Reiniger, 611 Second Avenue, North Troy, New York
Jack Remington, 11th Bakery Company, Fort Slocum, New York
Jerry Renner, 803 Suire Avenue, Price Hill, Cincinnati, Ohio
Carl Renz, 160 West 98th Street, New York City, New York
Jack R. Reynolds, c/o U. S. Hotel, Bingham Canyon, Washington
Roy "Dusty" Rhodes, Stoneco, Dutchess County, New York
Edwin J. Rhiner, 3742 East 5th Street, Los Angeles, California
W. H. Ricks, Box 76, Davis City, Iowa
Roy Rideout, 38 Navy Street, Venice, California
G. J. Ringling, c/o B. L. Parker, Tahoka, Texas
Will Roberson, Murphy, North Carolina
Fred Robertson, Box 797, Short Hills, New Jersey
Edward C. Rockwell, 1764 North Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois
Francis G. Roder, 932 Oakdale Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
Sergeant Richard E. Rogers, Headquarters and Military Police Company, Schofield Barracks, Oahu, Territory of Hawaii
William A. Roop, Company E, 15th U. S. Infantry, U. S. Army Troops in China, Tientsin, China
William L. Rose, P. O. Box 333, Wailuku, Maui, Hawaii
L. Rosenstein, 43 Jefferson Street, Yonkers, New York
Robert Runser, c/o J. Dayton, 629 North Main Street, Ada, Ohio
Edward W. Russell, 3822 Mintwood Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Ferdie Santos, 13 Mosque Junction, Hong Kong, China
Charles Sasnette, 246 East Water Street, Washington, District of Columbia
Douglas K. Scharf, 19 Montreal Road, Eastview, Ontario, Canada
Carl G. Schminsky, 515 Curtin Street, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
George Schwartz, 246 East 112th Street, New York City, New York
Joe Schwober, 6120 Henderson Street, Chicago, Illinois
Zeke Serlnick, 99 Herzl Street, Brooklyn, New York
Murry Shapiro, Camp Kinderland, Bungalow 23, Hopewell Junction, New York
Herman Shapiro, 93 Everett Avenue, Chelsea, Massachusetts
C. O. Shaughussy, 918 St. Cicilo Street, Montreal, Canada
Eugene W. Shaw, Mount Clare, Nebraska
N. A. Sheffield, 1717 Brun Street, Houston, Texas
Vic Shenrod, Ste 21 McInnis Block, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada
Louis Sher, 410 East 101st Street, New York City, New York
E. J. Sherwood, U. S. S. Overton, No. 239 c/o Postmaster, New York City, New York
Crete Shively, 168 Washington, Alliance, Ohio
M. Siegel, 7 Pine Street, New Rochelle, New York
Richard Sigg, 5214 Prytania Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana
Sam Simon, 1486 Brook Avenue, Bronx, New York City
B. B. Singh, P. O. Box 715, Durban, Natal, South Africa
J. D. Slater, 20 Brougham Street, Hothom Hill, North Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
Joe A. P. Slivick, 506 Wood Street, Du Bois, Pennsylvania
Charles Smith, 35 Marlin Drive West, Mt. Lebanon, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Edwin Smith, 4810 North Springfield Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
Elmer C. Smith, 1016 McCarter Avenue, Erie, Pennsylvania
Frank E. Smith, 1708 Alamitas Avenue, Long Beach, California
George E. Smith, 1109 Estes Street, Keokuk, Iowa
Nat Smith, Dutch Harbor, Alaska
Erwin Sommerfield, 537 West 37th Street, Chicago, Illinois
Gerald Spaltz, 4464 Fullum, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Dan W. Spencer, 1710 Snyder Avenue, Cheyenne, Wyoming
H. Spencer, No. 4187650, A Machine Gun Company, 2nd Royal Welch Fusiliers, North Front, Gibraltar
D. F. Spillman, General Delivery, St. Augustine, Florida
E. LaBerne, Stamper, Box 7, Parkville P. O., Baltimore, Maryland
Phil Stangly, 6119 Henderson Street, Chicago, Illinois
Albert E. Stanley, 35 Woodhouse Street, Kirkdale, Liverpool, England
J. L. Steele, Box 105, Russell, Ontario, Canada
John Steinhauer, 160 West 98th Street, New York City, New York
John Stellrecht, 173 Penora Street, Depew, New York
Mr. Stevens, Hotel Cumberland, Apt. 711, New York City, New York
C. Stevens, 401 Queen Street, Chatham, Ontario, Canada
Private William Stroich, 3rd Engineers, Headquarters and Service Company, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, Territory of Hawaii
Edward J. Sullivan, 3rd Floor, Marine Hospital, New Orleans, Louisiana
Joe Summers, 11824—53rd Street, Sub. P. O. 6, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
Hewlett G. Symonette, Rock Sound, Eleuthera, Bahamas, British West Indies
Edwin Taylor, 431 East 26th Street, New York City, New York
George Clayton Taylor, 414 Oak Avenue Southeast, Massillon, Ohio
Leslie S. Taylor, 427 Broad Street, Conneaut, Ohio
J. Randolph Tayor, Y. M. C. A., Greenville, South Carolina
Donald Terrill, Belle, Missouri
William Henry Terry, Marcy State Hospital, Marcy, New York
Alexander Terrys, 686 Washington Boulevard, Baltimore, Maryland
Mila Teuchert, Gardelegue, vor dem Sabswedeler Tor, Germany
Charles T. Thorne, Box 6, Veterans Administration Hospital, Marion, Indiana
Dudley W. Tinopp, 815 Ray Avenue, Ridgefield, New Jersey
William A. Tompkins, R. F. D. 1, Box 94, Candia, New Hampshire
Stephen B. Toth, Jr., 2104 Newtown Avenue, Long Island City, New York
L. A. Trimen, 11, Portugal Street, Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England
Jack Tripplehorn, c/o J. Dayton, 629 North Main Street, Ada, Ohio
Ralph Tropanese, 56 James Street, Ossining, New York
Lacey Tyndall, R. 1, Lake View, South Carolina
Kenneth Ubsdell, Creighton Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia
Anthony Uslabar, 540 West 44th Street, Chicago, Illinois
Stanley F. Utilasky, Kings Park, New York
Harry Utter, 6553 South Damen, Chicago, Illinois
Leo Van Gels, Route 10, North Little Rock, Arkansas
A. A. Villar, 1206 Duval Street, Key West, Florida
Felix Von Falkner, 19 Del Mar Arms, 814 Columbia Avenue, Los Angeles, California
R. L. Wagner, 1924 Parsons Avenue, Columbus, Ohio
Robert Wagner, c/o Jesse B. Daniels, Anderson, Oklahoma
L. A. Walker, 1538—14½ Street, Rock Island, Illinois
Bud Walp, 915 Walnut Street, Perrysburg, Ohio
Buddy F. Walsh, c/o Miller, 530 Gregory Avenue, Weehawken Heights, Weehawken, New Jersey
Conrad Wascher, c/o Harvey Fardal, 1804 North 30th Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Laurence Watters, 1902 Myrtle Street, Detroit, Michigan
Duke Robert Wayne, 711 Lewis Street, San Antonio, Texas
J. H. Weaver, U. S. Submarine Base, Coco Solo, Canal Zone
Howard C. Webster, 95 Hobart Street, Ridgefield Park, New Jersey
Harold Wehmeyer, 4132 West Kossuth Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri
Carl E. Wells, P. O. Box 81, Lebanon, Ohio



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Walter Hinton

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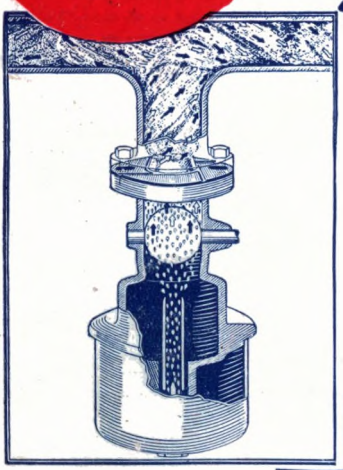
51 MILES ON A GALLON of GASOLINE WINS ECONOMY CONTEST

49 MILES Takes 2nd Place

Winning Cars Equipped With WHIRLWIND GAS SAVERS



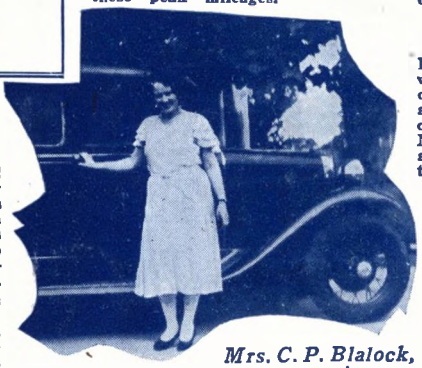
Automobile owners who have been worrying about gasoline expense will be interested in an amazing test recently conducted by a Texas Motor Car Company. Twenty-three cars were entered in a mileage economy test, the winning car running 51 miles on a gallon of gas, the second car 49 miles on a gallon. When official test records were published it was found the two winning cars were both equipped with Whirlwind gas savers.

"Peak" Contest Mileages

The amazing results obtained in this mileage contest are naturally greater than those obtained in ordinary driving. Careful throttling, most economical speeds—no traffic hold-ups—and no waste of power thru quick stops, help to bring about these "peak" mileages.

A Test On Your Car

More power, faster pick-up, less carbon, quicker starting, and increased mileage is what users say in telling of their experience with the Whirlwind. Every motorist owes it to himself to test the Whirlwind to prove the results on his own car.



Mrs. C. P. Blalock, contest winner

How Whirlwinds Save Gasoline

The principle of the Whirlwind is to slightly compress the partly vaporized gasoline as it passes thru the raised venturi. Extra air enters from four air inlets at such a tangent as to pick up the unvaporized gasoline particles, whirling them into action.

The turbulence created breaks them into a vaporized gas, giving better, smoother power, quicker starting, cutting gasoline waste and carbon formation.

FITS ALL CARS

In just a few minutes the Whirlwind can be installed on any make of car, truck or tractor. It's actually less work than changing your oil or putting water in the battery. No drilling, tapping or changes of any kind necessary. It is guaranteed to work perfectly on any make of car, truck or tractor, large or small, new model or old model. The more you drive the more you save.

GUARANTEE

No matter what kind of a car you have or how big a gas eater it is the Whirlwind will save you money. While we do not claim to produce 49 to 51 miles on ordinary driving, we do guarantee that the Whirlwind will save its cost within 30 days or the trial will cost you nothing. We invite you to test it at our risk. You are to be the sole judge.

Car owners all over the world are amazed at the results of their tests. "I have more speed, power, and increased mileage," writes Henry Bomberger. "Hills I used to take in second I now make in high." Anton Wetsch: "I wouldn't take the Whirlwind off my car for any money. I am certainly convinced." W. B. Fountain: "My mileage has increased greatly. My car has plenty of pick-up and starts like a whip."

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916-A Station C, Milwaukee, Wis.

Gentlemen: You may send me full particulars of your Whirlwind Carbureting device and tell me how I can get one Free. This does not obligate me in any way whatever.

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