

A STREET & SMITH MAGAZINE

JUNE 1931

The Popular[★]

MAGAZINE

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BIG
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NOVEL
BY
SEAN
O'LARKIN



JUNE, 1931 VOL. CIII
No. 2

★ THE POPULAR MAGAZINE 25 Cents

The Outlawed Guns of the White Wolf



never nestled long in his holsters. And when "Jim-twin" Allen, as special deputy, lines 'em up on the side of law and order, they blaze overtime in Hidden Valley County.

That's where there were more buzzards swaggering on the ground than there were winged ones hovering in the air. Every honest citizen was likely to be a target for the bullets of some desperado—

until James Allen put the gunmen in the running with his own deadly guns.

Not many people knew the past history of the quiet, freckle-faced runt who did most of his talking with his six-guns. They did not know that he was the famous outlaw, Jim-twin Allen, better known as the "White Wolf." But they saw him *make* history in his war to the death with the Hidden Valley bandits and outlaws.

You will read of some of the most thrilling escapades ever recorded in the life of this likable little outlaw in

The Wolf Deputy

By HAL DUNNING

This is one of the famous Chelsea House New Copyrights—a line of cloth-bound books—the equal in binding and make-up of many books selling at \$2.00. But the price is only

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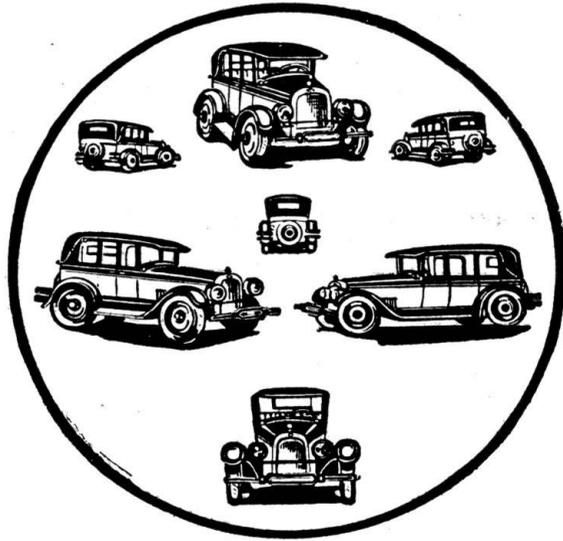
Other novels of the famous Western character, Jim-twin Allen, are:

**"White Wolf's Feud," "White Wolf's Pack," "White Wolf's Law,"
and "The Outlaw Sheriff."**

CHELSEA HOUSE, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

or \$3,000.00 in Cash

SOMEONE who answers this ad will receive, absolutely free, a latest model 8 cylinder Studebaker President Sedan or its full value in cash (\$2,000.00). In addition to the Studebaker Sedan we are also giving away six Ford Sedans, a General Electric Refrigerator, a Shetland Pony, an Eastman Moving Picture Outfit, Leather Goods, Silverware, Jewelry and many other valuable gifts—besides Hundreds of Dollars in Cash. Already we have given away more than \$150,000.00 in cash and valuable merchandise to advertise our business. A. H. Jones received \$3,050.00, John Burroughs \$3,795.00, Mrs. M. Iverson \$2,320.00, W. R. Eddington \$3,050.00, Mrs. Kate L. Needham \$3,150.00 and E. J. Cullen \$2,220.00. This offer is open to anyone living in the United States, outside of Chicago, and is guaranteed by an old reliable company of many years standing.



There are seven cars in the circle above. By drawing 3 straight lines you can put each car in a space by itself. See if you can do this. As soon as you are able to put each car in a space by itself by drawing 3 straight lines, tear out the puzzle, fill in your name and address on the coupon below and send both puzzle and coupon to me right away.

If you act quickly and win the Studebaker Sedan I will also give you \$1,000.00 in cash just for being prompt—making a total of \$3,000.00 you may win. Altogether there are a total of \$7,500.00 worth of prizes to be given and the money to pay the prizes is now on deposit at one of Chicago's largest banks ready to be paid to the prize winners. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be paid each one tying, and any winner may have cash instead of the prize won, if so preferred. Get busy right away. Solve the puzzle, fill in the coupon below and send it to me just as soon as possible to qualify for an opportunity to share in the \$7,500.00 worth of prizes. **EVERYBODY PROFITS.** Who knows but that you may be the Lucky First Prize Winner? It pays to act promptly.

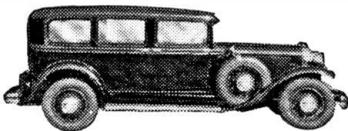
**James Armstrong, Mgr., Dept. J-609
323 S. Peoria St., Chicago, Ill.**

I have solved the puzzle and am anxious to receive a prize.

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On sale the First Wednesday of each month



Volume CIII

MONTHLY

Number 2

The Popular Magazine

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Contents for June, 1931

The Picture on the Cover	George Rozen	
A Chat With You	The Editor	1
A SUSPENSE-CRAMMED NOVEL		
Vest-pocket Treasure	Sean O'Larkin	2
A New Orleans detective carries a mystery box to a Mayan jungle.		
HUMOR		
One Every Minute	Thomson Burtis	114
In Two Parts—Part I		
Slim Evans, the "border patrol's dumbest flyer," gets mad and fights!		
FOUR SURPRISE-ENDING SHORT STORIES		
The Rap	Laurence J. Cahill	76
Two hands—they were responsible for it all! So he—		
Too Old	Captain Leighton H. Blood	88
Paul Tricot, <i>capitaine, Légion Etrangère</i> , in action!		
The Necessary Rabbit	J. Frank Davis	102
Is this the perfect crime, at last?		
The Sun Brand	Charles Tenney Jackson	148
Left to die on a Carib reef—prey of thirst and the "devil sun."		
THE SOLUTION OF THE MYSTERY		
The Scarlet Nemesis	Edgar L. Cooper	161
A Three-part Story—Part III.		
The mocking, phantom killer drops his cloak!		
LIVELY FEATURES		
East of the Grand Canyon	Robert H. Leitfred	112
A minute with a Popular author.		
Frontier Phantoms	James Edward Hungerford	113
Verse.		
Walloping Friendships	William Hemmingway	141
Boxers from rival ships slug for nothing—and what scraps!		
A Man Of Gloucester	John D. Swain	183
Real courage.		
New Places And New Friends	James Worth	185
And In Our Next—		190

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STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC., 79 7th AVE., NEW YORK, N. Y.

N O B O D Y P A I D M E \$ 1 0 0 0 0



"I GUESS you'd call this a testimonial all right, but nobody paid me a thousand dollars for it like they do those society women. I'll be lucky if I get an extra bone. After all it's only a story about my love for the boss, and I don't suppose it's worth much.

"I was just a puppy in a kennel when the boss came and took me away. It was pretty hard leaving my mother, but when I saw the boss' plain, kind face and felt his big, gentle hands, I knew that he and I were going to get along.

"Well, life was simply wonderful. All day long there were cats to chase. Any number of them. I don't think anything's more fun than putting the fear of death into a fat, complacent cat. They say, of course, that it can be overdone, but I doubt it.

"Every night when the boss would come home we'd romp down to the sea and he'd talk to me. Once or twice he let me take a snap at that nasty Chow across the street. A swell guy. And on week-ends we'd go out in his boat with some of his cronies. At night they'd sit around the cabin light and talk about the places they'd been, places they'd like to be, and yachts they'd sailed, and how some day they'd buy a big schooner and go off to the South Sea Islands and grow old in a fig leaf.

"A beautiful hand-painted chance you'll have of getting to the South Seas,' laughed one of the boss' friends, 'with the market the way it is, and Elizabeth Carstairs waiting next door. Why, Charlie, my boy, within another six months you'll be doing the lock-step up the dark halls of matrimony. You'll be home thumbing seed catalogues under the eagle eye of the adored one, while stout fellows like myself are braving the raging main.'

"She's a wonderful girl!' answered the boss. 'You are simply envious.'

"I guess she was a wonderful girl all right. And beautiful

too, with that kind of reserved stately beauty you see in Massachusetts women. The boss adored her. I can't say as much for myself. I would have liked to yap at her heels. She seemed kind of shallow to me—always fussing about little things.

"Suddenly she began to act sort of distant to the boss. They didn't kiss as often as they used to. He seemed to annoy her although he was just as sweet as he could be to her. Naturally, this cold attitude of hers bothered him; he used to sit with his head in his hands wondering what was wrong.

"And at first I didn't have the slightest inkling myself. But later I knew what the trouble was. Or at least I thought I did. After all, a dog's keenest sense is that of smell, and there could be no doubt that the boss' breath wasn't beyond reproach.

"I am only a dog but I know that a man can't get away with a thing like that. The ads say that even a man's best friend won't tell him, but believe me the only reason I didn't tell him was because *I couldn't*. I tried hard enough, but whimpers and barks don't convey much.

"It wasn't long after that she broke the engagement—and his heart, too, I guess. He never went anywhere—not even to his boat. Just moped.

"Then one night he got wise. I like to think I helped him see himself as others—including Miss Carstairs—saw him. It happened this way:

"There was a magazine lying open on the floor where it had fallen from the rack. Face up was one of those Listerine ads. Well, sir, I just went up and put my paw on it and barked till I was hoarse.

"For the love of Christmas, keep quiet,' he exclaimed, 'and get off that magazine.'

"Then he picked it up!

"Something made him read it. He read it all the way through.

"He must have taken the hint because he and Miss Carstairs have patched it up. The wedding's next month. And now, if you'll excuse me, there's a little cat trouble outside I'll have to attend to."

Halitosis (unpleasant breath) is the unforgivable fault in social and business life. Everyday conditions capable of causing it may arise in even normal mouths.

The one way to put yourself on the safe, polite, and acceptable side is to rinse the mouth with full strength Listerine. Every morning. Every night. And between times before meeting others. Listerine strikes at the cause of odors (fermentation and infection of the mouth, nose, and throat) and destroys the odors themselves. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.



“How we saved our first \$500”

“MARY and I had been married four years, but we couldn't save a cent. Fact is, we were constantly in debt and I was always worried for fear I would lose my position.

“Then one night I saw that something must be done, so I told Mary I was going to take a course with the International Correspondence Schools. ‘I've been hoping you would do that,’ she said. ‘I know you can earn more money if you really try.’

“So I started studying after supper at night, in the spare time that used to go to waste. It wasn't hard and pretty soon I began to see it was helping me in my work. In three months a new position was open and the Boss gave me a chance at it because he'd heard I was studying with the I. C. S.

“Well, that was the start. Before the end of the year I received another raise and we began to save. We've got \$500 in the bank now and we're going to have a lot more soon.”

For thirty-five years the International Correspondence Schools have been helping men to win promotion, to earn more money, to get ahead in business and in life. You can do it too.

At least, find out how by marking and mailing the coupon printed below. It doesn't cost you a penny or obligate you in any way to do this, but it may be the means of changing your entire life. Do it now.

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If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools, Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

GOOD READING

By CHARLES HOUSTON

“O, inexpressible as sweet,
Love takes my voice away;
I cannot tell thee when we meet
What most I long to say.”

There are those, however, who, unlike the poet who wrote the lines above, can express the sweet sentiments of love. There are those who can put on paper the thrill of anticipation, the suspense of courtship, the ecstasy of possession, which all true lovers know.

These are the writers of fiction—the writers of love stories, who, with a magic touch, transform the common emotions of a youth and a maid in love to the printed page so that hundreds of thousands of lovers can recognize the truth of what they read.

For many, many years such writers have found a ready buyer for their wares in the famous Chelsea House, one of the oldest and best established publishing concerns in this country. A pioneering publisher of some of the freshest and finest of the writings of America's best-known authors, Chelsea House to-day is setting standards for love stories which are clean, swift-moving, and altogether fascinating.

I have been reviewing books for many years, books of all sorts, adventure, biography, history, and science, but for sheer downright reading enjoyment, for the sort of thing that takes one away from the cares of the everyday into the realms of fantasy, give me a love story that car-

GOOD READING—Continued

ries on its jacket the familiar Chelsea House trade-mark.

Take the advice of a veteran reader, and go to your dealer this very day to ask for the latest of the Chelsea House love stories. Or, if he hasn't a full list, write direct to Chelsea House at 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. You will find these full-length, popularly priced novels which are published in book form for the first time, the surest cure for the blues.

Here are side glances at some of the latest Chelsea House titles:



HEARTS OF THE BIG TOP, by Ellen Hogue. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Price 75 Cents.

From the time that some of us older men carried water for the circus elephants, to this day, we have always wondered what the folks who make up the circus troupes were really like. Here is our chance to find out. And for you who want a good love story, without regard to its setting, "Hearts of the Big Top," is just that.

Milly, from top to toe, was circus bred, a daughter of the circus—that "little world complete and vivid, where life is a sawdust ring; where the sky is painted, canvas faded, and no road ever ends. Where, within the walls of big and little tents, there is played out the eternal human drama of love and hate, and fear and jealousy, and hope and courage—a drama more vivid, more intense, because it is so complete in itself and so removed from life as the rest of us know it."

And in this book is the story of "Milly and her young love and young despair and her rather terrible marriage; and Bojo the clown; and Loreena, the fat woman who loved them both; and Mark Savage and Sahara West; and Killer Boy, the great stallion; and a man, a derelict, starving, intent of purpose, who would have laid down his life for the girl he loved."

These are the ingredients of a most unusual and thrilling novel. The description of the mad riding of Killer Boy, which is the climax of this smashing tale, is as fine a piece of gripping writing as I know of. Read it yourself and take your hat off to Ellen Hogue, the author, as one who knows her circus life and the ways of life outside.



LOVE AND BETTY, by Louisa Carter Lee. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Price 75 Cents.

(Continued on page following)

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

**You cannot buy
a finer rebuilt
than the
PRECISION REBUILT
REGAL-ROYAL**

THE precision-rebuilt Regal-Royal is a Model 10 Royal of recent manufacture—standard of the business world—completely rebuilt. Brand new genuine Royal parts are used to replace any that show the slightest wear.

That is why we are able to say: "You cannot buy a finer rebuilt than the Regal-Royal!"

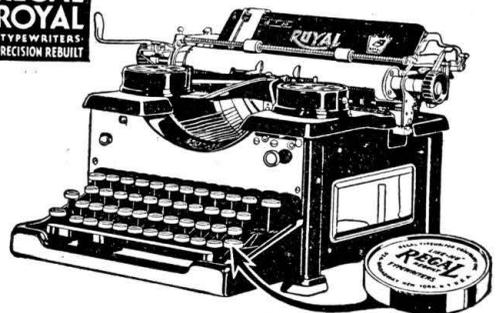
Every Regal-Royal is identical in its service qualities. And every Regal-Royal carries the same one-year guarantee as a new typewriter.

Go to any one of the 2500 Regal-Royal dealers in the United States and see this precision-rebuilt Regal-Royal at \$61.50. A demonstration will prove its greater value.

REGAL TYPEWRITER CO.
528 Broadway, New York



Look for the trade-mark which every Regal-Royal carries on the right hand shift key. If the trade-mark isn't there, it isn't a Regal-Royal



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PATENTS—Write for Free book, "How to Obtain a Patent" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch for Free Opinion whether it comes within Patent Office Rules. Victor J. Evans Co., 767 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

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HOMEWORK: Women wanting obtain reliable kinds write for information. Enclose stamp. Eller Co., 296-T Broadway, New York.

Detectives Wanted—Instructions

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Great demand. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Particulars free. Write, George Wagner, 2190 Broadway, New York.

Help Wanted—Instructions

\$158-\$225 month. **RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS.** Men 18-35. Sample coaching free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. C2, Rochester, N. Y.

Wanted—To Buy

MAIL US YOUR DISCARDED JEWELRY, GOLD CROWNS, Watches, Diamonds. Money sent at once. Goods returned if our offer refused. United States Smelting Works, Dept. 4, Chicago

Salesmen Wanted

WANTED COUNTY SALESMEN with car, to demonstrate for large Ohio manufacturer. First-class job. Fyr-Fyter Co., 2176 Fyr-Fyter Building, Dayton, Ohio.

Business Opportunities

GET OUT OF THE RUT: \$100 sufficient, learn privilege trading. Paul Kaye, 11 W. 42nd St., N. Y.

read AIR TRAILS

Stories of Aviation

on sale the second Friday
of the month

20c per copy

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

GOOD READING—Continued

They called the show "The Chameleon Girl." Because, as Betty, who was in the show as part of the chorus, explained it, a chameleon girl "sort of takes on the color of the people she knows, the place she lives in."

Betty happened to be so attractive that men of all sorts fell head over heels in love with her at first sight. There was Al, for example, and there was Donald van Stettin, men from two different worlds, whose color Betty took on. She knew the world of drudgery and the hardest sort of menial work. She was to find herself in the drabest of surroundings, and then of a sudden to be raised to the heights of luxury by a strange twist of fate. But, at the end, love triumphed over empty luxury, and in the soul of the little chorus girl there was lighted the fire of true love.

It is a novel of New York life that Louisa Carter Lee tells with magnificent artistry in "Love and Betty."



MAD MARRIAGE, by Beulah Poynter. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Price 75 Cents.

Strange things happen on long journeys. Sybil Copely was to discover that on her trip on the Miami Special—a trip on which a fellow passenger was the personable young Ted Sherry. Ted had a "line" and with it he swept Sybil off her little feet into the most fantastic of marriages. Into four lives it brought swift disaster. On the very day of their wedding Sybil was to discover the trickery of her new husband and to begin a series of adventures on land and sea whose telling keeps the reader enthralled to the very last page of this most swift-paced of love stories.

Beulah Poynter once more proves that she has not her equal in the writing of a modern love story.



THE LONELY HEART, by Mary Frances Doner. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Price 75 Cents.

"Listen to my song,
A lonely troubadour is singing for
A little word of love from you;—"

Thus David sang his wooing song to Rose—beautiful Rose, who had been brought up in a squalid shack in remote Barrytown, and now under the influence of David Marsh's love was so amazingly blossoming out.

How the great gulf between David and Rose was finally bridged, how these two, standing at last together, were able to work out their common fate, this is the touching, soul-shaking story of "The Lonely Heart." Surely a book that should stand high on the honor roll of all lovers of good reading and lovers of love itself.

"Sealpax makes pajamas, too!"



Other Products by
Sealpax:
Shorts Knit Shirts
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Child's Waist Suits

"That was a good tip I gave you on Sealpax Twin-Button Union Suits, wasn't it? I see you're wearing one. Well, you'll find the same style and comfort in these new Sealpax Pajamas!"

"Well, I'll play 'follow the style-leader' again! I'll be sleeping in Sealpax Pajamas tomorrow night, too!"

The Sealpax Company, Makers
Baltimore, Md.

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Sealpax Twin-Button Union Suits-\$1.00 to \$5.00 • Sealpax Pajamas-\$1.50 up—Boys' Sizes, too.

REAL LOVE MAGAZINE

A mirror in which people's love lives are reflected.

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CORNS

and tender toes—relieved in 1 minute by these thin, soothing, healing pads. Safe! Also sizes for Callouses, Bunions.

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Put one on—
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YOU can make \$15 to \$50 weekly, in spare or full time at home coloring photographs. No experience needed. No canvassing. We instruct you by our new simple Photo-Color process and supply you with work. Write for particulars and Free Book to-day.

The IRVING-VANCE COMPANY Ltd.
364 Hart Building, Toronto, Can.

Her Asthma and Cough Stopped

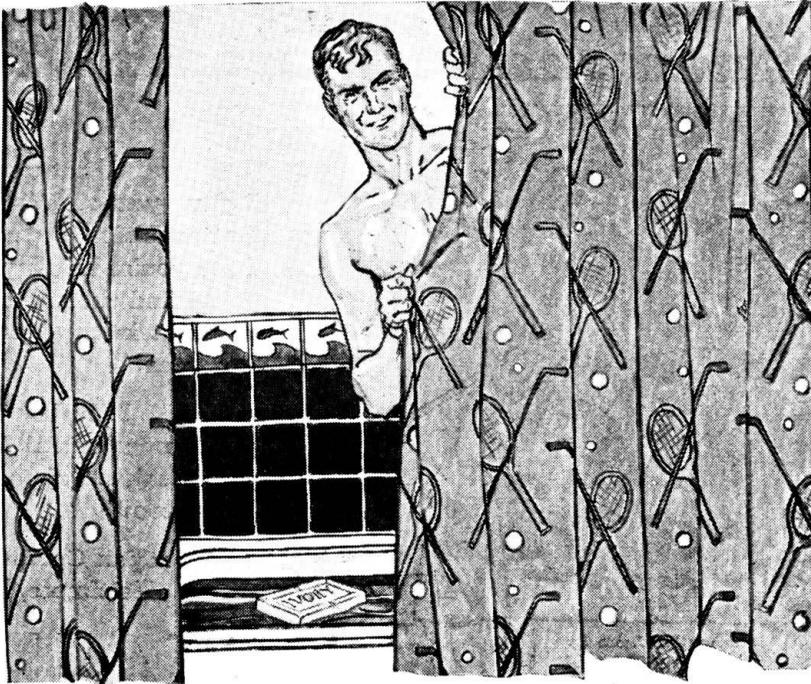
**Suffered 15 Years. Found Quick Relief.
No Sign of It Now.**

People tortured by asthma or bronchial cough should read this letter from Mrs. Amanda Kincaide, 1014 Russell St., Detroit, Mich.:

"I had asthma 15 years. I was very weak and my cough was awful. I had to sit up in bed to get my breath. I am 60 years old, and had almost given up hope. One day I read about Nacor and decided to try it. After a few doses I began feeling better and kept on improving. My asthma has disappeared and I feel fine in every way."

Hundreds of people who suffered for years from asthma and bronchial coughs state that their trouble left and has not returned. Their letters and a booklet of vital information will be sent free by Nacor Medicine Co., 629 State Life Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind. Write for this free information, and find out how thousands have found lasting relief.

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements



Pardon us, Mr. Jones!

Go right on splashing, Mr. Jones. Don't mind us.

We dropped in to congratulate you on finding a cure for the hot weather grumps. Don't apologize for them. They descend upon us all when summer is running in high gear. Perspiring employers bark at their secretaries . . . husbands blame wives for the humidity . . . kind fathers treat loving children with moist and clammy ferocity!

As for you, Mr. Jones, we'd never dream that you had ever sworn at the cat. You look as cool as a sprig of mint, if you don't mind the personal remark!

Our questionnaire department reports that you

. . . kind to everything it touches

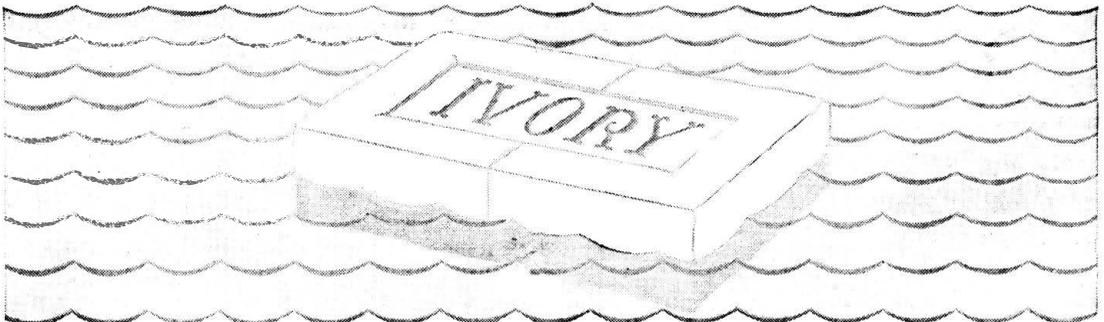
attribute this wonderful change to the soothing influence of your daily Ivory baths.

Yes, the market may sag, but Ivory always stays up. At merely a handshake it gives extra dividends with snowbanks of cooling foam. You'd never be the optimist you are today, Mr. Jones, if you had put your trust in a down-hearted cake of slippery sinker soap!

We must be getting along, Mr. Jones. You haven't a thing on us. For over fifty years, we've been prescribing Ivory baths, and we enjoy taking our own medicine!

PROCTER & GAMBLE

. . . kind to everything it touches • 99 ⁴⁴/₁₀₀ % Pure • "It floats" ©1931, P. & G. Co.



A Chat With You

SPRING is a magic season. Here on the Atlantic coast, up north, in the Middle West, and all over the country, spring, in many variations according to climate, is quickening the pulses of men.

Spring must mean very different things to, let us say, a boy in Connecticut and a boy in Southern California. It must seem strange to California lads that, at a time when they are plunging into warm surf, New England fellows are wondering when they'll be allowed to go barefoot.

Up in these Northeastern and Middle Western States, only the very brave dare try the chilly brooks, rivers, lakes or ocean surf before May or June—and even then, at the beaches and everywhere, you'll see the rest of us testing the water with timid suspicion.

* * * *

ALL of us become so accustomed to the seasons as they affect our own localities, that we tend to forget how surprisingly different they are in other parts of the world. In another part of this issue, in James Worth's "New Places and New Friends" department, a correspondent describes the temperate climate of Alaska, where, as he points out, children do more swimming than ice skating. That will seem very odd to those who have always pictured Alaska as a great white waste of deep snow swept by all-engulfing blizzards.

* * * *

WHAT does this time of year mean to you? To us it means friendly, twisted apple trees in full blossom, the tangy air of Eastern mornings, and the brown earth growing warm and covered

again with fresh green grass. It means planting time—long, brown, gleaming furrows overturned, with fat angle-worms wriggling deeper into their holes.

Again, it means that the entire panorama of valley and hill is changing from the starkness of winter. We look back and remember white birches in spring, the country roads rutted and stony from hurrying freshets, the young corn rising like whole battalions of gladiators.

* * * *

SPRING, to us far up in the country, spelled adventurous possibilities. There were to be dauntless expeditions into unknown parts of the woods where we hoped to find old wolf caves. There were to be days of fishing in the big river down at the junction. And a host of other adventures—the logs could go through at last, the circus was heralded on lurid posters tacked on barns along the highways, and canoe and camping trips were planned, maps pored over, highway, river, and forest routes weighed and analyzed.

* * * *

OUR mind was crammed with ideas, even though not all of them were acted upon. And we recall that, during those restless days of spring fever, when we were filled with the urge to go charging off across that far horizon like a wild colt, some magazine or book was with us always, like a comforting, interesting friend, its stories and personality speaking to us alone when the rest of the world didn't seem to understand. The Popular, a Street & Smith Magazine, tries to be that kind of companion to you.

Vest-pocket Treasure

By SEAN O'LARKIN

A New Orleans Private Detective Agrees to Deliver, in Spite of all Odds, a Mystery-Box to a Man in Central America. Can You Guess the Amazing Results?

FOREWORD:

THERE was a human culture on the North American continent that dated before the Ur of the Chaldees. Archæologists have found traces of men who made pottery in the Central American jungles around 4,000 B. C. But their name and their story are lost—still unfathomed.

Recently an English explorer formed

an expedition to search for this race, or traces of it; and not long ago Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh sailed over Yucatan, noting obscured Mayan ruins from the air. The world of men has never ceased to ponder about that strange lost civilization; men have never stopped wondering whether new discoveries in Central America might not change entirely their conception of





the first native lords of this continent. The effect of such vital discoveries on the written history of mankind might prove to be far-reaching.

Who are these puzzling Mayas—and who were their lost ancestors of the jungles? The lost tribes of Israel? Their portraits, 2,000 years old, showed a marked Semitic cast, some books say. Were they, on the other hand, the fabled men of Atlantis—a land which scientists now believe to be more fact than fiction? Did the Mayas spring from those who may have fled from Europe across land that once, perhaps, bridged the Atlantic? Were they a people who journeyed from the Orient via the island bridges running from Siberia to Alaska, or were they a people of growing intelligence who simultaneously built a Central American civilization while Chaldea and Egypt flourished?

Who knows? The subject is fascinating. To-day we have only the merest traces—cities lying fast in the coils of the jungle—cities buried beneath mounds that look like hills to the human eye. Therein are locked the ancient secrets, the life, customs, literature, religion and art of the Mayas and the lost race which preceded them.

SEAN O'LARKIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE VEST-POCKET BOX.

WHEN I cocked my feet on the battered desk in the agency I thought of Pontchartrain—as usual. That lake meant fishing to me, lots of broad sky and plenty sleep after ten hours in an open boat. The prospect commanded serious thought. I had a shack up near Milneburg. I could run up for the week-end. Why not? Business was poor in New Orleans—in my line.

I daydreamed. For a moment, I had my shoes parked on the thwarts of a

small boat. The broad, blue waters of Pontchartrain made a speck of me under the immensity of azure sky. The rod bent; the line sang taut. I was reeling in. Shiny scales flipped on the surface of the lake, silver in the sun. Oh, boy, it looked like a three-pounder—
“Business, Buck.”

“Huh?” The daydream faded. Carmichael, my side kick, stood in the door to my sanctum. Sharp-eyed and hairless, he was a towering *Falstaff* leaning against the doorpost. “Spill it, Mike!”

“Looks like a delegation of undertakers—or maybe prohibition pixies. Classy clothes. Look like ready kale.”

To hell with the fish! I needed money—plenty quick. “Trot 'em in, Mike.” I always used that abbreviation for Carmichael. The one and only time I called him by the name only known to his mother and the income-tax collector—Egbert—he pitched me through a glass door. Like an elephant, I never forgot the lesson!

A lot of men judge by appearances, so I ducked behind the screen hiding the washbasin mirror and ran a comb through my black locks. A wiggle smoothed the creases across the shoulders of the new double-breasted blue serge.

Five men, each with the look of cash in the bank, filed into the sanctum. Carmichael, playing master of ceremonies in his best Rudy Vallée manner, introduced them to me—standing in my best important air beside my desk. I got only two names, got them because the two faces impressed me—John P. Roper, a compact little man, doll-like in texture and with a misplaced eyebrow under a delicate ivory nose; and Rufino Estrado, a swart Latin type, gaunt and puffy eyed.

I passed the cigars when they found chairs. We agreed on the weather. Roper took the floor pompously.

“We'll come to the point of our call, Mr. Reynolds. We represent the board of directors of the Ganson Coffee Com-

pany of which I'm president and chairman. You were recommended to me by Inspector Voyt——"

"Decent of Voyt." I grinned, wondering what Voyt was up to. He was Carmichael's friend; I wasn't on speaking terms with that cop.

"He said you were the man for the job we have in mind," Roper said unctuously.

"Ah, señor," Estrado butted in, "he gave you the great boost! What you did for Señor Morton in the Beengham case, he say, was *muy bueno!*"

Roper continued, glaring at the Latin:

"Mr. Reynolds, this conference is to be held in strictest confidence. The matter, I feel, will appeal to you—since you're so ably fitted to handle it. Voyt said you've lived in Central America."

"Five years in Guatemala and San Salvador after the army."

"On the coffee *fincas*, señor?" Estrado was eager.

"Sure," I said. "I know coffee from bean to cup."

"And you speak several Indian dialects as well as Spanish, Mr. Reynolds?" Roper asked.

"Yep. I know Quiche best. The Quiches are the biggest Mayan tribe in Guatemala."

"Good!" Roper tossed a beam of satisfaction to his colleagues. "The man we need must know Central America and the language. Our commission, while simple in itself, may prove difficult in execution."

"I'm listening."

"We want you to carry a package to a party in Guatemala, Mr. Reynolds."

"Carry a package?" That was one on me. "Can't you send it by registered mail?"

"We don't dare. It is unusually valuable. However"—and Roper smiled suavely—"part of our bargain with you is—no questions asked on your part. We give the instructions and you follow them. Let me assure you, too, no smug-

gling is involved. And the package is so small, it'll fit in your vest pocket. You will deliver it to the consignee when he properly identifies himself. Failing that, you will return to New Orleans and return the package to this committee."

"Sounds damn mysterious!"

Roper laughed. "There may be a little trouble——"

My ears went up. "What sort?"

"An effort may be made to take the package from you. We think we are acting secretly, but forces at work have uncanny knowledge of our movements. That's why we're retaining you, Mr. Reynolds."

"What forces?"

Roper wagged a finger at me. "Ah, no questions, Mr. Reynolds. But this much, I'll tell you—a serious condition has arisen. The contents of this infinitesimal package may prevent the trouble we anticipate."

"It will prevent it!" A wispy, bespectacled committeeman had spoken up. "It must reach its destination. In the hands of certain persons it can do great harm!"

I wondered what in thunder a package that fitted my vest pocket could hold to prevent serious trouble. Letters? Business documents? Keys? Maps? And if none but these five knew about it, who'd know how to spot me to swipe it?

Roper disregarded the interruption. "We've investigated you, Mr. Reynolds, and are convinced of your integrity. You're our man. Will you take the job?"

"Maybe I'll get a bullet in my back for playing Western Union for you?"

Estrado protested excitedly. "No—no! It is not so dangerous, señor. An attempt to steal, *si!* But killing, *no!*"

Roper flashed a fat leather bill fold. From it his manicured fingers drew five bank notes. My eyes watered. They were "grand" leaves!

"Here's five thousand as a retainer," Roper said. "Deliver the package and you will receive an equal amount when we receive word from the consignee that delivery has been made."

This was a big play. Five grand! I could fish for a year—maybe, two years. But the old nose smelled the proverbial rat. "And expenses?"

"And expenses."

"Oke! I'm game. What's the bill o' fare?"

Roper took from his waistcoat a small square box no bigger than the usual receptacle for an engagement ring, and enthroned it in cupped fingers. "This is it. The paper wrapping and a waterproof cover protect the box within. You will note that it is sealed and bound with wire. You are to take it to Guatemala and place it in the hands of one Julio Yberra, a Guatemalan archæologist. Have him identify himself at a bank or a government office."

"Sure. Where'll I find him?"

Roper winked at me. "That's the catch, Mr. Reynolds. You'll have to look for him—unless my efforts to reach him succeed. He digs into Mayan ruins but his home is in Antigua. You may have to trek in-country to locate him around Solola or up in the Peten plains."

This looked like hot stuff. It wasn't to be as simple as Roper wanted me to believe. But for ten grand I'd hunt a collar button in a haystack. If I didn't find this Yberra, I'd still be five grand to the good.

"And knowing your reputation for dogged perseverance, Mr. Reynolds, we expect you to reach Yberra."

"Who's retaining me? You, Roper?"

Estrado made the answer:

"No, señor, it is the Ganson Coffee Company who hires you. The company wants this package delivered safely. So much depends on it, señor!"

"Thanks." I reached for the box in Roper's hands.

"Gentlemen," he said significantly to his four colleagues, "bear witness that I place the package into Mr. Reynolds's hands. You beheld its contents and saw it sealed in my office less than an hour ago."

The wispy, bespectacled fellow spoke again. "May I inspect the seals, Roper?"

The coffee executive glared as if he'd been called a liar, but he gave the box to the "wisp." The man eyed it all over, seemed satisfied and personally handed it to me.

It was lighter than a bird's tail. My fist covered it completely. I shoved it into a trousers pocket where I stowed coin of the realm and sundry keys.

"It's safe, gentlemen." I scooped up the money from the desk top. "Any further instructions?"

"Yes," Roper said quietly. His gaze fell from mine. "Please sail at once for Puerto Barrios. I'll notify our agent there, Tom Custody, to meet the *Princess of Alba*. It sails in the morning!"

"Just a moment," the wispy fellow protested. "Let Mr. Reynolds make his own sailing plans, Roper. We agreed in conference that once the box was turned over to him, we'd make no effort to trace his movements."

"Why—er—yes," Roper stammered uneasily. "So we did. Suit yourself, Mr. Reynolds. I was only suggesting. However, don't let the package leave your person!"

"Oke. The job's as good as done." I was hep to something already. These babies didn't trust each other. Some one—the wisp probably—made them agree not to watch my route into Central America. One of them was not to be trusted.

Hands were shaken all around. There were mumbles about great confidence in me and Carmichael led them out like a flock of trained geese. When he saw the lift take them to the ground floor, he raced back to the sanctum.

"Bo, what a break!" he cried. "Ten thousand simoleons for playing messenger boy!"

"Yeah, but it looks too damn easy. Notice the guy with glasses glim the package as if he was afraid Roper switched 'em in his pocket after the original sealing? They don't trust one another!"

"What's in the box, Buck?"

"Don't know and don't care."

"When do we sail, Buck?"

"We? Who'll run the agency if the two of us go? I may be away a month or longer."

"What's there to run? This is the first call we've had in six weeks. I know Central America and the lingo, too. I'm in on this!"

Why not take him? I might need him. "Suit yourself, Mike." I thought of something else then. "Odd that Voyt should give me a good word. He hates me like poison, because I broke the Findlay case on him."

"Oh, he's a square shooter, Buck. He knows we've the best agency south of Baton Rouge. He knows we'll give the Ganson people service—and they're big time."

"Mebbe so!" I strolled to the window. On the curb four floors below, the committee was splitting up, looking for separate taxis. Who were they, anyway? "Mike, take a walk. Get a line on this Ganson outfit. Find out who John P. Roper is—and about Estrado."

"O. K. Meet you here later on?"

"Yeah. I'll arrange the sailing by phone."

When Carmichael took his Falstaffian tonnage out of the office and closed the corridor door, I set the little box on the desk before me. My eyes bored its wrappings trying to fathom the secret. Ten grand to deliver it! And "in the hands of certain people it can do great harm"! It was TNT of some sort. The directors of Ganson & Co. didn't trust each other. But why did they pick

on me? For the money they were forking out, the five of them could go to Central America and look for Yberra!

Some one entered the reception room. I stuffed the box back into my pocket. "That you, Mike?"

There was a tap on the sanctum door and a natty, stocky fellow breezed in. "I'm looking for Reynolds."

"Right here—not a motion picture!"

This newcomer carefully closed the door. Looked like class and maybe cash. Might want his wife followed for a divorce action. Or a defaulting cashier watched after hours.

He declined a chair. "Reynolds, I've a proposition to make——"

Ah, a salesman. Buy the Encyclopedia and be educated! "If you're selling me something, stop! I'm not buying."

"I've nothing to sell. I'm here to offer you five grand for a little package in your possession."

"No speak English!" Somebody must have slipped him a fast tip. I put on the penny-ante face. "No packages for sale."

"Listen, Reynolds, no one'll be any the wiser. Give me the box. Make the trip to Central America. Cable back that it was stolen. They expect as much."

"Who does?"

"Don't stall. You get my drift. Name your price!"

"You forget you're suggesting bribery—on the supposition that I've got something you want. I don't play marbles that way."

"I'll give you ten grand, Reynolds. You've got five already. That puts you fifteen to the good—with no trouble later."

"I wouldn't know what to do with so much money, mister. Beat it!"

The fellow laughed at me. "I suppose I'll have to take it from you."

"Yeah?" And I was looking up into the maw of a .44.

"Sorry, Reynolds," he grinned. "Stand up and h'ist!"

I got up slowly and stretched my arms up. No time to reach for the rod under my armpit. Too risky. This bird was smooth. He knew the office was empty. Must have laid for Carmichael to go out. He was sure of himself—and the lay.

He stood behind me, shoving the gun against my spine while his hands burrowed into pockets. When he reached the trousers, he found the box and grunted, backing away a little.

He kicked a chair into the center of the room and relieved me of my pet cannon. "Now sit down, Reynolds. And keep your hands up. Don't try any funny business."

Instead of moving toward the chair, I turned and faced him. The .44 kissed my stomach. There was a hard light in his eyes.

"Think you can get away with this?" I sneered.

"Haven't I?"

"You haven't the guts to shoot me—if I reach for that rod!" He snickered but his hardness wavered.

"Try it—and see!"

"This isn't your racket, mug! There's too much yellow in you. I'll bet it's the first time you ever held a cannon!" I pressed against the .44.

His eyes stared into mine. "Sit down, Reynolds, or——"

I turned to the chair as if to obey. That put the range of the .44 parallel with my body. I laughed and my elbow shot up, snapping into the fellow's doubtful face. My fingers whipped to his gun hand. There was a cough-pop and the steel slug tore plaster from under an art calendar on the opposite wall. I held the gun from me, pressing close to him, and kicked my knee up.

The man's face went green and his body sagged. A low cry of pain came from his mouth. My fist pistoned up, snapping his teeth together with a sharp

click. He crumpled while I disengaged the gun from his senseless fingers, letting the hand thud to the floor.

I went after the box and my own rod and then began a systematic search of his pockets. They yielded nothing—no papers or letters of identification, no money, no keys—not even a match. The labels in his clothes had been snipped out.

This was pretty thick. He was no pro-gunman. He lacked the kidney for that. But the deliberate hiding of identification was puzzling.

The picture was easy to figure. His visit was prompted by one of Roper's committee. They alone knew I had the box. It seemed as though they had gone through the motions of establishing a pat alibi by giving me the box; then the smart boy acted to get it back by bribery or robbery. One or two of the committee might be crooked—the others were honest, the dupes who witnessed the passing of the package.

I was sore. The crooked committeeman, whoever he was, took me for seven kinds of a snap; thought he could pull a fast one on me. The package was not to reach its destination. It was to be stolen back from me—by his mob. Pretty smart of him—but not hot enough!

My grandfather was Irish and a top sergeant. I take after him—in luck and stubbornness—so while I stood over Mr. Stickup's slumbering bones I swore by all that's holy that the box would reach Julio Yberra. I swore I'd get to the archæologist—just to spite the mug who'd make a fall guy out of me.

CHAPTER II. UNDER THE LID.

THE fallen man stirred with a groan and slowly sat up, nursing his jaw. I parked nonchalantly on the desk, watching him and waiting to question him.

"What's the name?" I asked.

"Jones."

"Sure it isn't John Doe? Who sent you?"

"What's the use of asking questions?" he said weakly. "I won't talk."

"Maybe you will. Who sent——"

"I said I won't——"

I heaved forward, caught him by the back of the neck and yanked him to his feet. My fist ached to give him another wallop, and when he saw it he whimpered and hung back.

"Don't hit me again, Reynolds. I've got a bum heart!"

"Then talk!"

"I'm on the town—haven't got a cent. I never did this kind of job before." While he talked, I noticed the pulse hammering excitedly in his throat. "A guy picked me up in a Vieux Carre speak and offered me a break if I got a certain box from you. He said it'd be here after the committee left. I was to pull the rod and search you—if you didn't kick it over."

"Yeah? Where's the ten grand you offered?"

"That was bluff."

"Was the man, who sent you here, on the committee you saw leave this office?"

He hesitated and then shook his head.

"You lie!" My grip tightened on his collar.

"I swear, honest!"

My fingers tickled his windpipe and when he struggled I put on more pressure. He gasped, pleading for mercy.

"Was the guy who sent you among the committeemen?"

With a spurt of strength, he flayed me with puny blows, kicking at the same time. I sidestepped him.

"Reynolds—don't——" I let him breathe a bit while his finger nails clawed the backs of my hands. "I'll—I'll talk and——"

"Oke. I'm listening."

"He was the one with the——" He

went limp on me. "My—my heart!" I thought he was doing the possum act, but when I let go he fluttered to the floor and lay very still. I felt his heart; I could feel the faint beat. Perhaps he was going to——

Then I went tense. I thought I'd heard some one in the outer office. It wouldn't do to be found with a guy cold on my floor. I squinted into the other room; it was empty.

Cold water from the cooler didn't help Mr. Stickup much. The shock of it on his face roused him, but he remained miles away with the birdies. Then suddenly, he spoke: "Gold—old jade—in the lost temple—— Only Yberra knows how to—— The ring is the key." His voice rose shrilly. "The Viper of Kukulcan! The key to power—and wealth—tons of gold—the jade of the Mayas!"

This was news! A ring was the key to Mayan treasure. Mr. Stickup was a handy liar, but my wallop had made him blab. I was sure the package I had was tied up with what this mug said. But how?

As I tried to revive the fellow, he clutched at his heart and moaned. Then he snapped out of his delirium. "Mayan gold—in the jungle—— No, not that! What am I saying?" He glared at me. "Get a doctor, Reynolds. I'm awfully sick. Get a doctor!"

"All right," I said.

No time to take a chance. There was a medico on the floor above. I made a bee line for him, locking the outer door. But when I got upstairs, there was a sign on the M. D.'s door: "Gone for the day." It was long after four p. m.

I went back to the agency. The first wrong thing was the unlocked door. The second—Mr. Stickup was flat on his back, his eyes staring hard at the ceiling while pain twisted his lips. I bent over him.

I know a knife hole when I see one.

There was one over his heart. He was as dead as *Cock Robin*.

The killer had silenced this weakling, this amateur gunman. But how? I remembered the sound that disturbed me earlier. The killer had been in the outer office, listening—probably crouching behind a desk. I'd locked him in when I went for the doctor.

But why hadn't he killed me? He knew I still had the box.

I had the corpse to worry about. There was no blood on the rug. A search of the room revealed no further signs of the kill. I locked myself in and used a little gray matter—what little I had.

How to get the body out? That was the problem. I didn't want to explain it to the cops. The rooms didn't reveal the weapon. But they were stuffy. The windows had been closed against the cool weather.

The windows!

I went to the rear, opened a sash and looked down into a side alley between the office building and a warehouse wall opposite. The alley was deserted and filling with dusk.

The body was as light as a pillow. I lifted it easily and carried it to the sill. A glance below showed the coast still clear. A push sent my burden hurtling, and, simultaneously with the closing of the window, I heard a loud thud on the pavement below.

A cigarette would help. There were no cigarettes in the desk, but I found two sticks of gum and jawed them. The .44 slug was dug from the wall, and by tacking the art calendar two inches lower, I hid the nicked plaster.

The mysterious box grew heavy in my pocket. I laid it on the desk. This little thing was wanted badly by some one. Mayan gold! Mayan jade! It was the key to some racket. And the Ganson Company's committee trusted me not to open it. Still—

It was easy to crack. I heated my

penknife blade in a match flame, inserted it under the bulky seals and gently pried them loose from the paper wrapping. The ends of the wire cord were bared and it was simple to unwind them. The cover came off, remaining its creased shape.

A rubber pouch protected a jeweler's ring box. I snapped it open and beheld a peculiar, thick, stone ring—black obsidian—crudely curved with cabalistic glyphs and in the shape of a feathered snake biting its own tail. A serpent ring!

I'd seen that ring before—in pictures. It was the ring of the old Mayan legends—the famed Viper of Kukulcan. And Kukulcan was the warrior king and god of a Mayan civilization in the dim past.

The Viper of Kukulcan! But why should a committeeman slip it to me, and then work to swipe it back?

Kukulcan, Quetzalcoatl, Gucumatz—the old god had a lot of aliases. Toltec, Aztec, and Mayan once believed in his powers. The legends said he sent a ring to earth and he who held it held power over man and Ah Puch, the god of death. The ring had vanished, but the simple Indians in Yucatan and Central America still believed that when they found the ring, they would regain their lost lands, homes, and a glory which had crumbled before the gunpowder of the Spanish conquistadores.

The legends spoke of an obsidian ring. It had supposedly been delivered to an Itza king by Kukulcan descended from the clouds. And when the Itzas lost the ring, their dynasty fell.

My Mayan mythology was a bit hazy and I decided to read up on it some more. Meanwhile, the black stone ring would be safer elsewhere than in the package. I restored the wrappings, wires, and seals to their original state around the box with mucilage.

But the ring wasn't safe on my person. I was marked.

The chewing gum went sour on me.

And I thought of the old dodge of the pennyweighters. Taking the gum out, I embedded the ring in it and stuck the stuff far under my desk drawer, safe from prying, inquisitive eyes.

The outer doorknob rattled. Carmichael called to me. I turned up the lights and let him in.

Before Carmichael could talk, he had to mix two shots from the bourbon in his bottom drawer.

"It's like this," Carmichael said. "Roper is president of Ganson Coffee Company—and that outfit is plenty big. Rufino Estrado is their Guatemalan resident agent. He's in the States for this conference."

"What conference?"

"I met a guy who works for Ganson's rivals in Central America—in the coffee fields. He said there's trouble with the Indians stirring down there, and the planters—banana and sugar men as well as the coffee boys—are going to be hit hard. Indian blood makes up ninety per cent of the population and the chief form of labor. But these redskins don't want to work any more. When coffee-picking time comes along, there's no labor to do the work. The redskins lam to the hills and lay low. But what worries the planters most—the Indians are being organized to show resistance to working the plantations!"

"Organization? That's damn funny."

"Yeah? Well, some one is showing 'em how to stand on their own feet, how to fight the planters for more pay and——"

That was an old story to me. The Indians got little enough, working under virtual peonage. The *fincas* owned everything, the redskins nothing. And since the Indian had to live between picking seasons, the companies lent him land to plant wheat and truck stuff. In return for using that land, the Indian promised to do the picking—for less than two bits a day. The Indians hated this. I explained it to Carmichael.

"That's it," he said. "So now the redskins are quitting work altogether in order to paralyze the *fincas*. When they make the planters holler 'Turkey!' they'll talk terms. But the Ganson company is afraid the redskins'll get out of hand and ruin the business entirely down yonder. Hence this conference to do something about it. They're going to pull a fast one on the Indians—but just what and how, my friend didn't know."

I thought of the ring—the Viper of Kukulcan. Maybe the coffee company was going to use it to trade on Mayan superstition. Maybe the idea was to let the Indians hold the ring so long as they worked the coffee *fincas*. A bargain for cheap labor!

"I think," Carmichael went on, "that the company's play is in that package."

"Do you? Well, we may never know." I didn't tell him a thing. "We deliver the box, collect the other five grand and expenses—and then I go fishing."

"Fishing for what?" he demanded quickly, eagerly.

"The silver in Pontchartrain, Mike."

"Oh." He eyed me with suspicion. "Let me see the famous package, Buck." I gave it to him and he studied it, weighed it, smelled it, and finally returned it. It went into my vest pocket.

"I've a hunch, Mike, that this job means trouble. There's something funny about it."

"A little excitement may give me back my girlish figure." He drained his glass. "Have another?"

"Nope. Just three fingers this time."

"We sail in the morning?"

"Sure, Mike. Pack your toothbrush and cannon."

"On the *Princess of Alba*?"

I met an eager, searching gaze. "Why not?"

The telephone bell jangled. Carmichael answered it. "For you, Buck. Won't give any name."

I grabbed the instrument. "Reynolds speaking."

"This," said a familiar voice, "is Randolph speaking. I was at your office with J. P. Roper this afternoon—about the package." It was the wispy fellow who, distrusting Roper, had inspected the seals before the box was given me. "I'd like to talk to you—privately, Mr. Reynolds. It's very urgent."

"O. K. Where'll me meet? Here?"

"It's Mardi Gras night, you know. I'm taking my family to a café in Vieux Carre. Can you meet me at Père Babouche's? I'll be in costume, of course."

"Sure, I'll be there."

"If—if you don't mind, please come in costume, too. And masked. We'll be watched, I think."

"Say, what's up!"

"I'll tell you to-night. You'll find me at the table under Babouche's sign, on the terrasse. I'll be a black friar."

"O. K."

"At eleven o'clock. Be careful," Randolph added. "Shake off anybody who follows you."

Developments were afoot. When I hung up, Carmichael was staring at me. He had only heard the rattle of Randolph's voice; he couldn't get the words.

"Who was that, Buck?"

"A guy wants to see me about a case to-night. I'll have to tell him we'll be out of town a month."

"What case?"

"Don't know. He's very mysterious. I'll drop into your room later and let you know more."

Carmichael chewed on the end of a cigar. He had a lot on his mind, I felt.

"Say, I'm your partner, Buck. I'm in on everything."

"Sure you are."

"Is it about this package?"

I evaded the point. "Run over and see Voyt. Ask your friend, the inspector, if he has a slant on Roper's use of us. But first we'll put on the nose bag at Red Charlie's. I'm starved."

"I don't like your holding out on me, Buck! This box business——"

"I'm no hold-out, Mike! Only I don't shoot off my mouth till I know what I'm talking about. You know me."

"So we went over to "Red Charlie's" for beefsteak sandwiches and beer. Once, I gave a thought to the nameless fellow lying in the alley under the agency window. Too bad! The poor devil was born to tough luck! I hoped mine would be better—and when the apple pie came along I was wondering what Randolph would have to say.

CHAPTER III.

AU PERE BABOUCHE.

A SILKEN Pierrot listened attentively to a black-cowled friar at a little iron table beneath Père Babouche's battered sign. A clock was striking eleven. I was the Pierrot.

A gay, shouting mob whirled around us—a cowboy was Charlestoning with a Florentine princess, three of Louis XIV's *mousquetaires* were clinking glasses with five Klondike belles, Cardinal Richelieu was whispering nonsense into a Messalina's ear. Like us, all were masked.

Père Babouche hovered over the gala scene, a beefy Buddha. He snapped at his waiters in a miserable patois, demanding faster, more frenzied service.

Music and laughter, varicolored streamers and snowy confetti filled the night air of the brightly lighted Vieux Carre. The Mardi Gras was in full, final swing. In the morning, New Orleans would wake up with a splitting headache to begin the Lenten season.

Randolph, the wispy committeeman, hidden behind a black taffeta mask like mine, had just told me he was followed but had managed to shake off the tail.

"I didn't spot any one," I laughed. "Maybe I'm hard to follow. There're a thousand Pierrots loose in town to-night, all looking alike."

"This is no laughing matter, Reynolds. Millions of dollars and human lives are involved in this affair. You know damn well men would sell their souls for a five spot."

"Yeah, for less! But who is after what, Randolph?"

He explained that a bunch of unmitigated scoundrels were after control of Central American coffee—principally the Guatemala *fincas* or plantations.

"These scoundrels," Randolph whispered, "hope to drive American and European capital out of Central America and hog the *fincas* for themselves."

"How come?"

Randolph sipped at his whisky soda, glanced about suspiciously and let me have it. The mob was out to cause an uprising among the Indians in Central America. An uprising would kill off the *fincas* labor, which was solely Indian. Then the mob, with the plantations going to rot, would dictate their own terms and horn in on the profits.

"That's muscling in a big way—à la Chicago!" I said. "Pretty raw—if they can get away with it. Not much different from muscling in on the laundry, restaurant, or garage business, I'd say."

"Not much. Only these men are using an Indian nation to do their dirty work. They're playing with dynamite, giving the redskins any power at all. If the Indians down yonder get out of control, the uprising may not stop at the racket. The Indians may go drunk with power and wipe the whites off the map of Central America."

I was doubtful about that. An Indian uprising that could drive invested capital out of Central America's five republics. Randolph drowned me with figures. Sixty per cent of Guatemala's population was pure Indian, mostly old Mayan stock. Another thirty per cent was *ladino*, half-breed Indian blood mixed with European. There were twelve thousand Americans and Europeans there, and less than four per cent

of the total was old Spanish settler stock. The remaining five per cent was Negro—blacks imported from the Indies to work the banana plantations in the lowlands and to offset the laziness and balkiness of redskin labor.

"You see," he said, "we can't work our lands without the Indians. And if they get out of hand, being in the majority, they can play hell with us."

He prattled on. Private reports assured him that an effort was being made to organize the Indians—to cause them to go on strike and keep away from the *fincas*. An Indian who posed as a god, Itzamna, was handling the Central American end of the racket.

"Itzamna—I know the name," I said, remembering my reading on Central American history. "It's the same as Zeus in Greek mythology. But who's the big fellow in this coffee racket?" I wanted a line on the mob I had to buck in order to get the ring to Julio Yberra.

"If I'm not mistaken, I think it's J. P. Roper himself," Randolph replied quietly.

I couldn't see Roper as the bad boy. He was sitting pretty as head of the Ganson Coffee Company. It was a wrong picture. If he'd said Rufino Estrado, the swart, Indian-faced agent, I mightn't have been so surprised.

Randolph explained that he'd opposed Roper's election to the company's board and presidency. But Roper held control of the stock and hulled himself into power, and Randolph had to sit tight, being next largest stockholder. The principal objection to Roper was his past reputation which was smelly.

"Spill the rep," I said. "It might help me."

It seemed that four years before, Roper had been run out of Nicaragua for trying to pull off a racket similar to this that Randolph feared. Working through hired Indies, Roper had preached a mild socialism that made the redskins restless and discontented.

Then he managed to hang up work on several big *finca*s and he approached the planters, offering to send the labor back to work if they gave him a cut in their earnings. He tried to pose as labor boss of Nicaragua—but the marines gave him the bum's rush.

Uneasily, Randolph looked around for enemy eyes and ears.

"He knows the coffee game—and wants to make himself king of it."

"So the little doll would be king! Interesting!" My eyes seemed pleased with something. I looked harder. On the other side of the café terrace sat a fair Columbine. She smiled at me. "Say, Randolph, take a squint—that Columbine with the orchids isn't half bad, eh?"

"Not half." The black friar popped a quick glance at the girl in a red mask. He began talking about the mysterious box over which one man had already died. If Roper or the Mayan tribes got hold of the contents, they'd enjoy great powers.

"I never told Roper I owned what is in the box," he said, "till this Guatemala trouble started. Then I hit upon the idea of using the thing to control the situation."

"If you trust me," I said, "you might as well tell me what's in the box. It'll make our talk easier."

Randolph's face was a mask behind a mask as he studied me thoughtfully. "All right. It's a stone ring to which the Mayans superstitiously attach great power. Known as the Viper of Kukulcan, being carved in his symbol—a feathered snake—it is supposed to preserve from extinction the tribe or race that holds it. And he who holds it speaks as Kukulcan's mouthpiece. He will be obeyed."

Thus far, my guesses about the ring were straight. I felt kind of proud.

Randolph went on to say that to-day the Mayans were a proud, silent people. They lived in peonage to the white man

but had been content—till trouble was on the ball. However, always in their hearts burned the fierce hope that one day they would find the Viper of Kukulcan, often mentioned in their legends, and through the magic of the ring would regain their lost empire.

Randolph was something of an archæologist and had traipsed over Mayan ruins in his youth. He'd found the ring—he wouldn't say where—and had experts authenticate it as the symbol of the legends. But I thought that if it was so valuable—meant so much to the Indians—it was risky business sending it among the redskins.

"A trusted man," Randolph said, "can get it through to Julio Yberra. The Indians respect and love him, and look upon him as a messenger from Yum Chac, the dog of rain, who waters their fields. Once Yberra exploded a balloon during a drought and the cloud-burst put him in their good graces. With the ring in his hands, he'll know how to deal with the Indians. He'll play Kukulcan's mouthpiece to them, tell them to call off the *finca* strike and remain at peace with the white man."

I suggested they might swipe the ring from him.

Randolph shook his head. "They wouldn't dare. They consider him a god and fear he might stop their rains. I've written all this to him. He's to use the ring, then return it to me—by means I'll arrange later on."

"Simple if it works. Those beggars in Central America are damn superstitious. It seems like a lot of trouble to go to over our daily cup of java! If the world only knew—intrigue to dupe the redskins so the coffee output of Guatemala isn't affected! It's hot."

Randolph grew very serious. "There's more than coffee at stake, Reynolds. There's human life—that of white men in Central America. I want to stave off an Indian war, as well as safeguard the company's interests. I'll

go to any length, no matter how childish or seemingly foolish!"

"Suppose I swipe the ring and play king of the Mayás?" I laughed.

"You're not the type, Reynolds. That's why I picked you. I got the line on you and made the committee select you instead of Roper's man."

That was nice of him. My eyes wandered back to the Columbine of the orchids who now raised her glass to me invitingly.

"Say, let's have Columbine over for a snifter. She looks thirsty—that is, if you've no more to tell me."

Randolph sighed and smiled tolerantly. He had no more to tell.

"It's your last night in the States—and youth'll have its fling. I envy you. Go your way and use your head. But beware of anything that smacks of Roper. 'I've nothing on Estrado; but don't trust him, either. Trust no one—except Yberra himself.'"

"How'll I know him?"

"He has a feathered serpent, like the Viper of Kukulcan, tattooed on his left forearm. The Indians sometimes call him 'Snake Arm.' " Randolph got up to go. He was joining his folks across the street at Petit Pou's.

I thanked him for the low-down. Forewarned was forearmed. From now on I was trusting nobody but yours truly!

We shook on the deal and Randolph became a black friar again, losing himself in the crowds of masqueraders. I turned to Columbine's table. She seemed bored with the two *Gentlemen from Verona* who were with her. Pointing to them, she grimaced and then beckoned me with her head.

I hopped to my feet, picked my way through the ocean of packed tables and gave her a gallant how *à la Pagliacci*. And then I caught my breath!

Close up, she was a rare beauty. The red silk mask veiled her eyes temptingly; behind the narrow slits, they

flashed like pale diamonds. Her skin was soft, blending with the orchids gathered at her shoulders. Her mouth was enticingly crimsoned with rouge and her nostrils flared delicately like a thoroughbred's. But I couldn't escape the fascination of her eyes.

"May I have this dance, fair lady?"

"*Si, si*—yes. I was hope you ask me, señor." She spoke with a marked Castilian accent. I put her down as Creole or pure Spanish. This was luck—winning a beauty like hers for my last fling in God's country. Or was it? I might fall hard—and miss her when I went to Central America.

The Mardi Gras crowd was dancing in the streets; we moved toward the circling fox trotters. Père Babouche's band went dead and an Argentine Tipica in a café across the way raised its voice in a tango.

I don't tango—but I did. Pierrot and Columbine, the immortal, bitter-sweet lovers of medieval clowndom, embraced gently and drifted into the tempo of the music. She was a bit of down in my arms. She was pliant, quick—quite perfect.

I brushed off my rusty Spanish. "Señorita is very beautiful."

"*Mil gracias, Americano mio*. You are gallant."

"Tell me who you are?"

"At Mardi Gras, one does not have to tell, Americano."

"But I want to know you. We'll dance the dawn in—we'll dance me aboard my ship!"

"Ah, señor goes away?" Sadness touched her red lips.

"We won't think of that. Can you leave your friends?"

"I am alone, señor—with you."

"*Bueno!* We'll go back to my table."

"Ah, but it is taken, señor."

I shot a glance toward the chairs beneath Père Babouche's battered sign. A *Little Bo-Peep* with four Chicago racketeers occupied them, making merry.

"Well, there's other tables, señorita—other cafés."

She smiled and I felt her fingers tighten in mine. The tango melted into another fox trot. Columbine didn't like jazz; she drew me out of the whirling mob.

I was thirsty, and suggested that we go places. She knew where to find champagne. Some friends of hers were giving a party—upstairs in Père Babouche's.

I trailed her through the restaurant. Masqueraders mistook us for cronies and tried to slip us hard stuff; but Columbine steered a steady course to the stairs.

We passed along a garishly papered hall. Columbine stopped at a door and knocked. There was no answer; she tried the knob and entered. Deserted, the room was small and cozy, a bit of Paris in America.

Columbine didn't waste a second. The instant the door closed behind me, she stretched her arms to me.

"I love you, *Americano mio!*" she whispered.

"I guess," I grinned, "I'm sorta bitten myself."

Her lips burned mine. And did I care?

CHAPTER IV. A BROKEN FRAME.

ONE minute, she was just a girl; the next, she was *the* girl. I felt myself go goofy. I wanted to tell her that I'd tumbled like a ton of bricks.

She relaxed in my embrace and as a little sigh of ecstasy escaped her, she put her head against my shoulder. My lips were pressed into her mimosa-scented hair. I started to tell her how beautiful she was—how lovable. For a time, I got to believing myself!

Then—every muscle went tight.

My free hand snapped down and caught hers, beneath the Pierrot silks, fumbling at a vest pocket.

She pouted; there was hurt in her eyes.

"I want to see what time it is, señor. You have a watch?"

"There's a good clock on your dressing table, señorita. It's two fifteen a. m." I tried to fathom the diamond hardness of her eyes behind the red silk mask. "Let's unmask, Columbine!"

"No, no!" Her voice was frightened and she backed away from me. "It is not the custom."

"But we're friends." I pointed to the clock. "Already, it's Wednesday. Fat Tuesday is dead. So are its customs."

I'd moved toward her innocently and reached to take her in my arms again. She yielded, smiling roguishly. I caught her wrists together and ripped the mask from her face. Her cap fell askew and her hair, coarse, straight and jet, cascaded over her orchid-hued shoulders.

She slapped my face and remasked.

I'd seen enough to make my heart race. Still, she troubled some sixth sense. She was an exotic flower, the more beautiful unmasked—but of a peculiar, familiar beauty, with a low forehead, slightly almond-shaped eyes and high, delicately prominent cheek bones. Somewhere in the past, I'd seen her type.

"You are unkind, señor." She smiled, her small sharp teeth flashing. "That was not gallant—but I forgive you. Go find some champagne. We will wait for my friends."

"Champagne! Pronto!" I stepped out into the hallway of garish wall paper and shouted for a waiter. One finally poked his nose over the top step. The nose promised to return with a quart of Pol Roger *tout de suite*.

Returning to the bedroom, I found Columbine throwing a black wrap over her shoulders. The windows were open and a cool, early-morning breeze floated in with the music from the terrasse. I

took her in my arms and kissed her. She was clingingly submissive.

I gave a grunt. Something had prodded me in the bread basket. As I backed away from her, I looked down into the beady black eye of a small automatic, clenched with deliberation in her small white fist.

She motioned me away from the door and put her back to it. Her free hand fumbled at the lock and took out the key. What was up? A gold digger's stickup? Pointing with the weapon, she indicated that I reach for the ceiling.

More amused than annoyed, I put up my hands. "So this is your little game. You won't find much on me."

"Turn around, señor."

I presented my back to her and she jabbed the automatic against my spine. Her fingers fumbled their way through my pockets. She relieved me of my bank roll, handkerchief, keys, letters, armpit gun, and watch. These were tossed upon the bed.

There was a moment's pause in the looting. I felt her breath against the back of my neck. Like little spiders, her fingers crawled into my vest—and finally closed over the package destined for Julio Yberra down in Guatemala. A gasp of eagerness; the gun left my backbone.

That was what she'd wanted all the time. I'd never dreamed she was one of the mob that wanted the Viper of Kukulcan.

"Don't move, señor," she said. "If you follow me, I will kill you."

"Run along, señorita. Pleasant dreams!" I didn't care. The ring was safely buried in chewing gum under my office desk.

I heard her open the door.

"Forget me, *Americano mio!*" she called softly. "And if you love life, forget what I have taken from you."

"*Hasta la vista, señorita!*"

She laughed. "No, señor, it is adios! We do not meet again!" The door

slammed. The key grated in the lock from outside.

I scooped up my valuables and stuck the gun back in its holster. The window! I could beat her to the street, follow her. She might lead me to the mob.

The window gave upon a back yard where Père Babouche stored crates. Climbing over the sill, I found a rain pipe and, hand over hand, I slid to the ledge of the window below. From there a cat's drop on all fours landed me on the pavement.

I ran to the front terrasse and watched the door. The Mardi Gras was taking its toll at the tables—in sleepy heads, wabby limbs and renderings of "Sweet Adeline." But no Columbine of the orchids came through the door! A minute grew into five and I gave her up. She'd ducked out by another entrance.

But no!

There was a Columbine in a black wrap disappearing down a side street. I ran toward her. Under an arc lamp, she joined four other Columbines. I saw then that the costume was different. New Orleans held as many Columbines as Pierrots that night. The hunt was no go!

I corralled a taxi and drove through laughter-laden streets to my hotel. Since eleven p. m. when I'd met the black friar, I'd learned several lessons, and one of them was: "Don't trust strange women!" It made me sore to think that a girl I was set to fall for had duped me.

After all, I'd been watched all evening. The Pierrot silks hadn't helped; I was up against a smart mob. Columbine of the orchids had been planted to get me. And no wonder J. P. Roper said: "Don't let the package leave your person." That gent meant to swipe it back from me.

The hotel lobby was swarming with Mardi Gras celebrators from restaurant

and grill. I got my key and was starting for the elevator when I spotted the swart Rufino Estrado, dressed as a Spanish grandee but unmasked. He moved toward me so I ducked into a phone booth.

Estrado passed by, but a loud, liquored voice in the next booth held me with a one-sided conversation. "He hasn't turned up yet. . . . Yeah, I'm watching all doors. . . . I getcha. . . . He won't leave the country. Don't worry about that, boss. . . . Not if I have to give him the works, he won't leave. . . . Don't worry, it'll be done without a stink. There'll be no comeback. . . . O. K."

The man hung up and I watched him pass my booth. He looked like a rodster—but one new to town. When he got out of sight, I went on to my room.

I wasn't surprised to find my door ajar.

Tense and alert, I got my cannon and kicked the door in. There was no third attack. The lights gave me an eyeful of some one's frantic search. Open-mouthed valises sprawled on the floor, the trunk lock had been forced and the contents of a chiffonier piled in a corner. Even the bedding had been ripped open.

Those who sought the Viper of Kukulcan were taking no chances on the girl's failing. If I'd left the little box in my room, they meant to find it.

Without bothering to fix things up, I scrambled out of the Pierrot costume and put on street clothes. I'd spend the night in Carmichael's room; he had twin beds there. I'd promised to drop in on him and give him the low-down on matters—without mentioning the ring. He had stuff on tap, and we'd have—

A rap on the door! It was thrust inward and two men, heavy-set and pasty-faced beneath felt hats, barged in. One kicked the door shut behind him.

"We're O'Grady and Bruns from headquarters."

"Yeah? Glad to know you, boys." I'd never seen them before. I thought I knew every copper in town.

As if reading my mind, O'Grady said: "We're new here."

"Welcome! What can I do you for? Sorry I haven't got a bottle handy."

O'Grady glowered. "A man was picked up dead in the alley to your office building five hours ago. Night watchman spotted the body on his rounds. Knifed in the ticker. He was lying under your window."

"You don't tell me." I put on surprise. "You mean under my window—and fifteen others. That building is plenty tall."

"He was knifed in an office and chucked out," Bruns snapped. "What do you know about it, Reynolds?"

"Only what you're telling me, boys."

"A shot was fired in your office. We had a look-see and found the hole hidden by a calendar."

"Oh, that hole. A chair did that."

"Some chair!" O'Grady sneered. "Frisk his things, Bruns." He glanced at the upheaval in the room. "Getting ready to lam, Reynolds?"

"Nope. But have you a search warrant?"

"Nope; don't need one." O'Grady laughed harshly. "Listen, Reynolds, the dead man was seen going into your office. Now we're after the knife. We're on this case—because you've too many friends, on the force."

"Yeah? Isn't this a bit raw?"

"Mebbe."

Brun was a sap. He went directly to a valise instead of fooling around a bit, and, opening it, fished out a blood-stained bowie knife. It was an obvious plant, made by this pair. They'd searched the room to find the ring, and left the knife to work out some other angle.

"The knife!" Bruns exclaimed.

"Doesn't look like a steam roller, does it?" I said.

"You'd better come clean, Reynolds!" O'Grady rapped. "How about it?"

"It's news to me."

"Won't talk, eh? Well, we'll run you downtown and make you talk."

So that was it. They wanted to take me somewhere, for a ride. I grabbed the telephone. "I'll call Voyt and tell him to get the sweat machines ready." This was one time when I could use a cop!

Bruns grabbed the instrument, wrenching it from my hands and tearing the wires from the bell box. I was sold; if they were detectives, I was Clara Bow. They wanted to take me somewhere to sweat the hiding place of the ring out of me. The girl had failed and a search of my office and bedroom had failed.

"I'll get my hat," I said reaching for my armpit rod.

Suspicious, Bruns drew at the same time. There was a roar and a burst of yellow flame. I saw the sap hurl himself backward over the bed while his weapon bounced to the ceiling. O'Grady, quickly ashen, put up his hands without the suggestion from me.

"Thanks," I said. I took his cannon away from him. Like the knifed man at the agency, they were traveling light—without any means of identification. Bruns's gun was kicked under the bed.

The doorknob turned slowly. I jammed a foot against the panel and locked it. Bruns was moaning on the bed, nursing a broken shoulder.

"Open up in there!" bellowed a voice outside. It was the guy I'd overheard in the phone booth. "I heard a shot in there."

"Just a minute," I said. Facing the phony dicks, I commanded silence with my finger on my lips. Then I shoved them into the bathroom. O'Grady helping his side kick into the narrow, tiled chamber. I locked them in.

"Open up!" the guy outside shouted. "I'll bust in if you don't."

The fire escape was my next best bet. But I was sailing for Guatemala in the morning. I opened a small hand bag and threw in a toilet kit, shaving cream, tooth paste, a few shirts, handkerchiefs, underwear, and socks. The knife was wrapped in a pillow case; I'd lose it somewhere later on.

A shoulder bulged the wooden panel with repeated thumps. The woodwork cracked wildly near the hinges. "Unlock that door! Open up in the name of the law!"

I scrambled out on the fire escape and closed the window. No one stopped me or my bag on the climb to the dark alley. As I reached it, the door crashed in my room above. The mob's frame-up was a bust. My Irish grandfather's luck walked with me.

A taxi shot me downtown to the office. I'd get the ring, hide out till morning, communicate with Carmichael and sneak aboard the ship for Puerto Barrios.

I was hep to this much: some one, probably Roper, would stop at nothing to get the Viper of Kukulcan away from me. The job and turning over of the ring at the agency was all front; Roper couldn't risk filching the ring from Randolph—but he took me for a sucker. And now I knew my life wasn't worth two cents. I was up against some nice people!

I got the ring from under the desk. The watchman who admitted me to the building said nothing about the body in the alley—and he knew me for a private dick; so I guessed that the mob had taken care of the body and that by now it was a floater in Ole Man River.

In the morning, I'd mail a check to the hotel for my rent; I didn't mean to jump them. Then I went to an all-night drug store and phoned Carmichael. He was full of questions. He'd looked up the sailings; the *Princess of Alba* and the *Vargas* left in the morning. Which would we take? Roper had recom-

mended the *Alba* so I decided to take the *Vargas*. I told Mike to meet me on board—and to keep mum about it.

"Where're you now, Buck?" he asked inquisitively.

"At the Cosden House. I'll roost here." I told him about the mob busting up my room. When I hung up I hid me to the Hotel Francia down near the levees. I had lied to Mike about my hotel—as a matter of precaution.

CHAPTER V. THE WHITE REDSKIN.

THE S. S. *Manuel Vargas* stood well out in the Gulf, bound for Puerto Barrios and the ports of the Mosquitia. The sea was placid under serene blue heavens and upon its surface flying fishes played like silver dancing disks.

Dead ahead lay the Caribbean, and, beyond its sapphire rim, the yellow shore of Honduras which hid the blue *altos* of Guatemala from the seaboard.

I read in a deck chair. Carmichael, sprawled in another beside me, sawed wood, the roof of his mouth bared to the burn of the tropical sun.

His Falstaffian slumber couldn't spoil for me the visions of the first American civilizations that leaped out of the book pages. And it all seemed to converge on the ultimate fate of the obsidian ring—now safe in the purser's strong box.

"There is," I said to myself, "a lot of power in a belief. It's faith that makes the world move. And for a simple people, faith must be symbolized by a stick or a stone—or a ring. If the Mayas really believe in this Viper of Kukulcan, Randolph's trick might work. They'll do anything they're told to do—in its name."

Randolph was right. The ring must not fall into Indian hands or the hands of those who'd play false with native superstition. An uprising could wreck the economic empire the white man had built in Central America. It could rub

out a lot of innocent white lives. I found myself respecting the obsidian ring.

"Oh, boy," I murmured, "if I lose the ring, I loose an Indian war—or put my own people at the mercy of racketeers. Some job for yours truly—getting the ring through to Yberra."

Carmichael gave me a jab in the ribs. "What's biting you, Buck? Heat getting you? What's this about rings and racketeers and Yberra?"

"So you're awake." I did some fast thinking. "I was just saying we've got a ring of spik rackets to cut through to reach Yberra. We're white men and the redskins'll balk at every step, giving no coöperation in our search. They've a mad on against the whites now. Labor troubles."

He guessed that I was right. We talked about our get-away without being tailed to the *Manuel Vargas*. Maybe Roper had men on the *Princess of Alba*, thinking I'd take her as he suggested.

"Say, Buck, you weren't at the Cosden House last night. I tried to reach you there."

"I changed my mind, Mike. Put up at the Francia. Are you sure you weren't followed to this ship?"

"I'd take oath on that. Changed taxis three times. Unless a tail got in my suitcase——"

I changed the subject. Carmichael reported on his visit to Inspector Voyt. The cop gave Roper a clean bill of health, said he was a fine, upstanding citizen; but he didn't think much of Estrado, who'd been in hot water in Central America. Voyt had heard that Estrado played ball with the redskins.

Carmichael picked up my book and glanced at the pictures of Mayan treasure. "There's a lot of undiscovered stuff, isn't there, Buck? Gold and jade?"

"Sure. There must be dozens of temples untouched. Lindbergh spotted a few nobody ever charted before."

"Mayan gold is worth plenty cash, eh?"

"Plenty—if you can find it. And a treasure is worth more as such than for the gold in it. But most of the stuff turned up goes to museums and private collectors."

"But if you hit on a temple on your own hook, the stuff would belong to you?"

"I guess so. If the government didn't claim it." I was puzzled; he seemed to be driving at something. "Going to hunt Mayan gold, Mike?"

"Are you?" he grinned. "Know of any temples?"

"Hell, no."

He said he'd borrow my book later. Carmichael, the man who never read anything but racing forms, wanted a go at Mayan history. He had something in his nut! His eyes regarded me with marked suspicion.

At length, he decided to test the quality of the bar. I dozed—meeting up with the Columbine of the orchids. There she was in all her exotic beauty, smiling at me. "*Americano mio!*" I liked the way she said it—so sweetly haunting. I couldn't forget the tender lips, the diamond-bright eyes, the orchid-tinted flesh, the slightly prominent cheek bones, the straight, coarse, black hair tumbling over her shoulders!

Cheek bones! Straight jet hair! Indian signs!

I laughed, understanding. I should have guessed sooner. There was Indian blood in her veins. She was a real Central American type—probably Quiche. I'd seen her kind before in Guatemala—but none so enthrallingly beautiful.

She wanted the Viper—and got an empty package. She'd have killed to get it, like the rest of the mob. Her last words echoed in my ears: "If you love life, forget what I have taken from you." Hell, I could forget the empty box, but not her lips.

The dinner gong sounded and I went below to wash up. The cabin I shared with Carmichael looked all right—yet it didn't. A glance into a suitcase showed that it had been tampered with; another glance at the gun under my pillow revealed that its clip had been emptied.

So the mob knew I was on the *Manuel Vargas*. There was no escaping them. I got Mike's gun from his berth and broke it. All chambers were loaded; the searcher hadn't bothered to draw its leaden teeth.

I reloaded, strapped on the armpit holster and decided to keep the rod with me. Returning to the deck, I looked up Carmichael in the bar for cocktails. He wasn't there, but the steward's grin told me a lot.

Carmichael lurched into me on the port deck.

"S'matter, Mike?"

"Buck, I'm signing the pledge!" he hiccuped. "If it was only pink elephants, I wouldn't mind. Maybe he's what I think he is, but maybe he ain't. Maybe I didn't see him. Maybe it was two other fellows!"

He was tanked up to the gills. "You're loaded, soldier. What's biting you?"

"Come—come with me, Buckie boy!" he hiccuped.

I trailed him to the starboard deck, along a row of cabin doors. Carmichael pointed to one and winked, meaning for me to peer in. I strolled past casually, noted a huge man talking to a wiry, blinking-eyed individual, and went on.

"Well," hiccuped Carmichael, "is he or isn't he?"

"He's an Indian."

"But he's as white as I am on Saturday nights." He strangled over a double hiccup. "He's the spitting image of Chief Rain-in-the-Face or Miss Minnie-Kick-the-Bucket!"

I explained that the man was a San Blas—a white Indian. They came from an independency in Panama—from

which they keep white men. A few of them are albinos—like the chap in the cabin. He was one of the biggest men I'd ever seen.

"A white redskin!" Carmichael fought three explosive hiccups. "I'm not as tight as I thought. Let's have another."

"Beware the elephants this time, Mike!"

We drank. I wondered what a San Blas was doing traveling from New Orleans, so far from his haunts. That tribe had the build of orang-utans and were the cruelest, most resentful natives in all Central America. They showed no mercy to those who tried to rule them.

Toward midnight, the last night out, I couldn't sleep. Tiring of tossing restlessly in my berth, I slipped on a bath robe and went for a stroll on deck. Carmichael was buzzing away in the lower berth, untroubled by heat or closeness.

There was no moon but the skies were starry. I took a few turns around the deserted deck and finally hung over the taffrail to watch the phosphorescent glow in the black waters. I was troubled. How had the mob got wind of my sailing? Carmichael was the only person who knew my plans; I trusted him.

Could they have tapped his phone wires? I decided that he'd been followed. When they lost me at the hotel, they hoped he'd lead them to the Viper of Kukulcan. That was it.

I went tense. Some one was watching me. The feeling was one I knew. Perhaps it was a sailor, or—

I turned, my back to the sea. The wiry man I'd seen in the San Blas cabin was standing ten feet away. He moved toward me quickly as I spotted him. He was in pajamas and dressing robe, too. An unlighted cigarette dangled from his lips.

"Have you some fire, señor?" he asked easily in Spanish.

I said I had no matches. He was

sorry and apologized for disturbing me. As I was about to turn back to the taffrail, starlight glistened on steel.

I ducked. The knife swung over my head. My fist licked out, grazing his jaw. We closed, breathless and silent. Surprise made us desperate and mute.

We fell heavily, my hand holding off the knife. It didn't occur to me that I was fighting for my life; all I wanted to do was disarm him.

He was tricky and tried to kick me in the bread basket. I battered his skull against the deck boards. His hand slipped from my sweaty grip; the knife was free. I broke away to rise and the blade slashed the bottom of my bath robe. The devil did want to rub me out!

We fell again; he dropped the knife and I got it. As we struggled, he threw himself upon me, trying to regain the weapon. Failing, he dug his knuckles into my eyes; the pain was hellish. His fingers clawed at my knife hand; I thought I'd go blind.

I rolled on my side, throwing him off. He groaned, his grip broke, and life snapped out of him. When I staggered to my feet, I couldn't see; my eyes were burning with pain.

The cool night breeze helped a little. Vision returned. The man's body lay at my feet. He had rolled onto the knife.

No one came near us. If I left him there, the knifing would be investigated. The mob had tried to frame me once—it might be done again. If I heaved him over the side—well, dead men tell no tales. His disappearance might be laid to suicide.

I made my way back to the cabin quietly. No one saw me. Carmichael was still snoring when I climbed into the upper berth.

I was satisfied that I knew one of the enemy—the San Blas Indian. His side kick had tried to knife me. The Indian must have known about it. I'd be

ready for him if he made any accusation.

And I knew that the mob was out for more than the obsidian ring now; they wanted to kill me. It wasn't in their picture that I reach Guatemala alive and kicking.

I dozed fitfully, gun in hand, watching the open port and the locked screen door. Nothing more happened.

CHAPTER VI. ESTRADO—AND A GOD.

PUERTO BARRIOS was the hottest hole I ever struck. White walls and iron roofs reflected glaring sunlight and concentrated heat. We drove in a hack from the docks to an obscure hotel I knew; all the way, I had my hand on my gun in the same pocket with the stone ring. Nothing like playing safe! Carmichael watched our wake and reported no tail—no sign of the San Blas or anybody else.

We got two adjoining rooms and I plopped myself into a wicker chair. The shades were drawn to kill off the sun's rays.

"You know what I want?" Carmichael said from the doorway.

"Sure. I'll have one, too. Shout for the mozo!"

He went through his room to the hall and shouted. Another voice replied and Mike, in his fumbling Spanish, ordered brandy and soda. I heard him slam his door and tramp back into his room. He began to wash. I wished I had energy enough to do likewise; the heat was getting my nanny.

Somewhere, near by in the hotel, a parrot screamed. Its incoherent words sounded like Spanish. Another of the damn birds! They had them all over Central America as pets. I wished the drinks would hurry.

A scraping noise under my door.

What was that?

Something was being pushed under

the panel, into the room. I leaped for the knob; but when I whipped the door open, there was no one in sight. Three green feathers lay at my feet—feathers from a tropical parrot!

Without ceremony, my gun cocked, I pushed into all the rooms on the floor. They were empty. In one of them a parrot jabbered to himself. Carmichael had heard nothing. I couldn't fathom where the sender of parrot feathers had vanished.

Parrot feathers! In certain Indian tribes they meant a warning of violent death. I'd been in Puerto Barrios less than an hour—in a hotel I thought was unknown to the mob—and here were parrot feathers under my door.

That drink was welcome. I had three. Carmichael was as mystified as I was over the death threat.

"Maybe it was the mozo," he suggested.

"But he couldn't have gotten down the stairs before I hopped into the hall, Mike. I don't like this. It's spooky."

"I'll say so. Have another?"

My fourth limbered me up. I outlined our plan. We'd meet Custody, the Ganson Coffee agent in town, see if he had a line on Julio Yberra, then light out for the capital. I figured the government might know where the archæologist was wandering in quest of Mayan lore.

"Does this guy Yberra hunt gold?" Carmichael asked.

"Nope. He's interested in ruins and their history."

"I'll bet he strikes gold now and then. They say these lost temples are lousy with it."

"You've been reading storybooks, Mike! Chi-Chen-Itza was the wealthiest Mayan city known to mankind—but the gold Edward H. Thompson got out of the sacred well there wasn't so great. Stop pipe-dreaming!"

He grinned sheepishly. "All right, Only I've a hunch there's gold mixed up

in this coffee racket. It seems like an awful lot of trouble to go to over a cup of java—delivering a tiny package.”

“Yeah, it is. But it’s our job. No questions asked.” Yet he set me thinking. Mayan gold! J. P. Roper had made a killing in the stuff when he double-crossed the financiers of his expedition. He’d known of a temple to tap. But I didn’t think much of treasure being mixed up in this business. The labor racket, using Indians via an uprising, appealed to me more. It was so daring it seemed plausible enough.

Wasting no time, I told Carmichael to pick up Custody at the coffee outfit’s local office and to meet me in the Café Izabal; Custody would know the way. We left our rooms together and, at the head of the stairs, passed the door of the parrot’s room. I went in to inspect the bird, on a hunch. It behaved in a friendly manner toward me, and I stroked its feathers, noticing that some had been ripped from the tail. But when Carmichael came near it, the bird screamed excitedly.

In front of the hotel, I left my side kick and headed for a clothing store. I wanted tropical ducks to cool my body—or a pongee suit. I found a pongee that fitted and wore it out of the place.

My next stop was a novelty shop. I bought a camera. If Mike had been along he’d have sworn I was nuts with the heat. But while I pretended to inspect the inner mechanism, I sent the shopkeeper looking for film pack. When his back was turned, I took out the Viper of Kukulcan and wedged it into the depression that held the lens; then I snapped the back on the camera and had him wrap it up for shipping.

From the shop, I went to the American consulate and inquired if I could send a package with official mail to the Legation in Guatemala City; I knew I could. So, using the name of “Addison Simpson” of Savannah, I addressed the

oblong package to, “Mr. Herbert J. Wilbox, care American Legation, Guatemala City.” I assured the vice consul that the box contained important business papers and that Mr. Wilbox would pick them up in the capital.

Having consigned the Viper of Kukulcan to the care of the Guatemalan mails in Uncle Sam’s official pouch, I breathed easier. I had no fear of being robbed while I searched for Yberra—a job that might take a day or a month. My plan was to locate the archæologist and bring him to the ring; that lowered the overhead of risk. He’d do the rest with the Mayan talisman.

Then I joined Carmichael and Custody—a serious sort of youngster in white, in a window of the Café Izabal. Our table was about one degree cooler than those on the terrasse. We had coffee—and Mike, more brandy.

Custody seemed confused about Yberra. He hadn’t been about to locate the archæologist but he thought he might be able to help me later on. The last heard from the old duffer, he was headed for some uncharted ruins up in the Peten—that vast high plain in the north.

“Who finances his expeditions?” Carmichael asked bluntly.

“Nobody,” Custody said. “He’s rich. Hunting traces of the old Mayas is a hobby with him. He never took a wife because he married archæology at an early age. I had letters from Mr. Roper and Mr. Randolph asking me to locate him; but he’d left his home in Antigua before I got them. He’s a secretive cuss and never tells anybody where he’s bound.”

“Nize baby to tail!” I groaned. “Would the Indians put me onto him?”

“I think so, unless he’s told them to keep mum. They obey his wishes, you know. He’s a sort of god to them.”

“Where’d he get his money?” Carmichael asked, returning to his pet subject. “Find some Mayan gold?”

"No, Mayan treasure isn't that plentiful," Custody laughed. "He inherited his wealth. His family owned sugar down here."

I mentioned my plan to go among the Quiches and buzz them. The *caciques* or village and tribal mayors might give me a tip.

Custody tapped my arm significantly. "You may have to do this job yourself, Reynolds."

"Huh? What job?"

"Settling the Indian trouble. I've had a letter from Mr. Roper on today's ship. He told me all about you, your qualifications, army experience, et cetera. You know, millions are invested down here, and if the Indians start a rumpus we stand to lose our *fincas*, either through loss of their labor or seizure. A lot of big planters may be ruined."

I sat tight. Roper hadn't told me this so I pretended it was news to me. "But where do I come in—to settle the trouble?"

"Roper said he was sending us some one to act with a free hand. I thought it might be you—you, working with Yberra. You know Central America and the Indians; you talk the lingo, Reynolds."

I stressed that fact that my job was to deliver a package. That was all that was expected of me. Julio Yberra was to work the miracles with the snake ring. He knew the ropes. I figured that Roper's crack about sending a free agent down was a move to save his own face if the uprising came off, got out of hand and ruined his racket. He was already building an alibi of good intentions.

The situation on the *fincas*, Custody went on, had gone from bad to worse. There were definite signs of organization among the Indians. A lot of Pacific coast plantations were short-handed. Redskins supported by the planters through the long rainy season

now evaporated and refused to work with the approach of berry-picking season on the coffee slopes. The Indians had withdrawn to villages in the *altos* or mountains, and government troops, made up of Indians, went out to round up the shirkers and came back empty handed. When an Indian was lent land to work, he automatically bound his labor services to the planter. If he failed to show up to do his job, it became a government matter and troops went after him. And now the troops were even lax.

"Who's doing this organizing?" I asked.

"An Indian named Salvidar—a San Blas from down Panama," Custody said. "To the redskins, he's known as Itzamna—the supreme god next to Kukulcan. They've swallowed his guff and do his bidding. He's been out of the country lately and things have been rather quiet—though twenty Quiches, returned by a vigilante committee to our *fincas* near Retalhueu last week, mutinied yesterday, burned some storehouses and beat it into the *altos*."

A San Blas was behind the Indian resistance. Could it be that Salvidar was—

"What's Salvidar like? I asked.

"I was just going to tell you. He's huge, like a gorilla, and white—one of the albino San Blas. His whiteness helps to put over the Itzamna bluff."

My guess was right. The god Itzamna had sent a disciple to knife me. Gulf sharks would have a tasty meal today.

Carmichael said something about airplanes being used to locate lost Mayan ruins. That led to his admission that he could pilot a ship; had done so in France in '18. And that led to the story of how we met up. I was doing M. P. duty in Paris and saved Mike from a crowd of angry frogs when he wrecked a place in Boul' Mich'. Our partnership began then, and when we

were demobbed we joined the cops in New York. A fat reward on a case fixed me for business in a private agency, so I hooked with Mike and went to New Orleans because of connections I had there.

Custody was fascinated. We'd have been talking yet about what I did to Mike and what Mike did to me—in Paris—if I hadn't called quits. There was work to be done. Besides, I was sick of hearing Mike's favorite yarn about his being the fattest flyer in the A. E. F.

A carriage came staggering and creaking over the cobblestones behind a desolate, bony horse. The *cochero* was encouraging his nag with endearing cuss words and occasional lashes. I started when I saw the two men beneath the tattered umbrella in the back seat, unperturbed by their snail's pace.

Salvidar, the white Indian—and Rufino Estrado.

I blinked. The half-breed, gaunt and puffy-eyed, was talking excitedly with his hands; the San Blas listened stoically. The last time I had seen Estrado was in the agency; he must have come down on the *Princess of Alba*. His being with Salvidar who used the redskins for the racket, tied him into the racket. I had no more doubts about Rufina Estrado.

"Know them, Custody?" I asked.

"There's old Snow-in-the-Face!" Carmichael laughed, pointing to the San Blas.

"That," said Custody, "is Salvidar, known to the Indians as the god Itzamna. The other is Rufino Estrado, a disappointed revolutionist. He's a *ladino*—half Indian, half Spanish."

The men in the carriage hadn't seen us. I thought fast. I wanted to know where they hung out, how thick they were. I told Carmichael to take a stroll after the pair.

"Hell, in this heat!" A Falstaffian fist gugged at a breast-pocket handker-

chief to mop a wet brow. I saw two green feathers flutter to the floor—parrot's feathers.

No wonder I couldn't spot the guy who sent me the Indian death threat! No wonder the parrot screamed at my side kick. Carmichael was playing tricks on me. What in hell was he up to, this war buddy of mine who'd lived with me, worked with me?

I understood now how the mob got wind of my sailing on the *Manuel Vargas*. I had reason for my hunch to distrust Mike! He was in cahoots with the other side, the enemy.

But why? Did his curiosity about Mayan treasure mean anything? I couldn't fathom why he'd cross me up.

Putting on my best poker face, I told him to tail the carriage; I'd wait at the café for him. He went down the street—and I hoped I'd never see him again!

I asked Custody to case-history Salvidar and Estrado in words of one syllable—pronto! Salvidar's story was unusual. As a boy, he'd been put to work by his father in a Panaman's house. The son of the family liked him, took him to college as valet. That was how Salvidar had picked up some education; he was a smart Indian. A few years before, he quarreled with his young master. The next morning the man's body was fished out of the Canal. There was no case against Salvidar, but he drifted away from Panama. In Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Guatemala, the Indians hailed him as a god because he was white, though Indian blood flowed in his veins. He'd fitted into Estrado's schemes.

And Estrado was a choice character.

Coming from a well-to-do family, he wanted to boss the country; the *ladinos* have a weakness for that sort of thing. Three revolutions were planned with the half-breed five hundred miles behind the scenes. Each attempt failed, but the government couldn't touch the

wily Estrado; his tracks were well hidden. The Ganson Coffee Company, through Roper, made him resident agent because of his political connections.

One, two, three! I saw it all clearly now. Roper sponsored Estrado, who tied in with Salvidar—the god Itzamna to the simple redskins. They were birds of a feather, tarred with the same stick—racketeering. After all, what else is a Central American revolution but a Chicagoesque rumpus between political mobs!

But why had Carmichael slipped me the parrot feathers? What did he think he could scare me away from?

My war buddy turned rat! I called for a brandy. There was a mean taste in my mouth.

CHAPTER VII. THE TUNKULS MUTTER.

BY the way," Custody said, "I've news for you. It's confidential—a cable from Randolph, about Yberra. He said not to give it to you in any one else's presence." That was why he behaved so funny when we first talked of the archæologist; Carmichael was a third party.

"Snap it out!"

"Randolph had word from Yberra. The old man is somewhere near Solola on Lake Atitlan."

There was a blasting roar overhead. Sounded like a plane in trouble. We ran out into the street. Flying close to earth was a small, pontoon-rigged biplane. It seemed to be having difficulty getting its nose up. But it did, and shot into the western sky.

I began to think again. "That's all Randolph could tell you?"

Custody nodded, and I told him we'd be off. He threw a *quetzal* coin on the table for the waiter and walked to my hotel. There I packed my bag again and checked out.

"Tell Señor Carmichael," I said to

the clerk at the desk, "to wait in Puerto Barrios for me. I'm catching a train in twenty minutes." That was that. I made up my mind to leave Mike behind, since I could no longer trust him.

On the street, I turned toward the harbor, dragging Custody along by the arm. He was bewildered and puzzled by my abrupt action.

"Listen, Custody, you know this God-forsaken burg. You've got to find me a plane—something that flies in the air and floats on water. There must be one here, government or otherwise!"

"What for?"

"I want to go places. Lead me to a plane."

He knew of an Englishman who had an amphibian for charter; the man might be free. We got a hack and trundled toward a hangar on the edge of town. The giant water bird riding at anchor on the blue sea was just what I wanted. We pushed into the building and routed the Englishman from a workbench. Custody made the introduction, but I didn't get a man's name or bother about it. He was tall and fair and blue-eyed and looked straight.

I told him I wanted to charter the amphibian. "I've got to fly to Atitlan at once. We can make it before sunset."

The Englishman shook his head. "Oh, I say, that's impossible. I'm chartered to take a party to Honduras in the morning. I couldn't get back in time to——"

"Name your price to get me to Atitlan to-day."

"Sorry, old chap." The Englishman's smile was sardonic. To him, I was just another blustering, commanding American. "I don't do business that way. I've a contract to meet tomorrow."

"I can't waste time chewing the rag!" I snapped. My hand went to the holster; my cannon popped out. "Like it or not, we're flying to Atitlan—now!"

Custody went white at the gills. "Careful, Reynolds."

The Englishman bridled. "How dare you, sir! You presume to command me!"

"You're damn tootin'. If I could fly your ship, I'd take it away from you. But I need you for that job. We're taking off! You can return a little later or start back at dawn to pick up your party."

The Englishman stared at the black eyes of the revolver. He ran a moist tongue thoughtfully over his lips. Roving eyes sought means of escape—or help. But the hangar was in an isolated spot. A lone mechanic on a wing was oiling the amphibian's motors.

I stepped forward and let the Englishman feel the gun in his ribs. He shrugged. "Right-o! I want five hundred for this."

"You'll get it."

I pushed him ahead of me, hiding the rod in my pocket. Custody followed along the duck boards to the water edge. Orders were given to the mechanic and he hopped ashore. The Englishman climbed into the forward cockpit, cursing classically. I nudged Custody to hop into the rear cockpit.

"I can't go, Reynolds. Sorry."

"You're coming along, Custody. Sorry!" I wasn't going to leave him behind to spill my march to Carmichael and the mob. He could return with the plane later on. By then I'd be lost to Mike, Estrado, and Salvidar, who wanted my life and a certain ring. There was no stopping yours truly now.

If all went well, I'd locate Yberra in a day's time; then I'd tote him to the capital and present him with the Viper of Kukulcan and say: "Do your damndest!" Another day to get back to the port, three to reach New Orleans, one to collect and bank the other five grand, plus expenses, and then six months or a year *fishing*. I'd chase the silver shafts from Pontchartrain to

Canada. And hereafter, the New Orleans agency would be a one-man affair!

When Custody was tumbled, protesting, into the flying boat, I climbed in and sat beside him.

"I shall protest to my government about this!" the Englishman fumed as he manipulated knobs, switches, and buttons on a complicated control board. "This amounts to kidnapping!"

"Sure. Go ahead," I said, tapping him with the cannon. "But get started. I'm in a hurry."

"It's two hundred miles to Atitlan. We won't get there much before five."

"Good! But get me there—and I'll buy you a dish of tea!"

He cursed more rosily, ducked his head to the controls and there was a droning hum, a loud murmur from the revolving blades. The amphibian was nosed around to face the outer harbor; the traffic lanes were clear.

Then a deafening, thundering, hammerlike roar. The glassy surface of the blue shot backward. The thundering mounted till I clapped my hands to my throbbing eardrums. The flat waters beneath us tilted.

We were in the air. Custody looked ghastly, his teeth going like castenets. Puerto Barrios wheeled—a toy city on a spinning disk. There was no sensation of flying—only of rushing through hot space toward a molten mass that a few seconds before had been the sun.

The amphibian set her wings to the west, toward a jagged, smoky-blue horizon—mountains and volcanic craters. Two of the latter sent thin fingers of cloud into a breezeless sky. I grinned, happy that I'd put one over on three smart guys sweating down below in the town behind us.

Through a belt of hot air, I watched the country I knew pretty well from train windows and autos. First came the lowlands, coppery green with banana plantations where the pushcart fruit grew upside down. These were worked

by Negroes imported from the West Indies because the redskins were afraid of lowland fevers.

The Rio Motagua coursed beneath the plane into the Sierra Madres. Gold had been mined in that river valley. To the north stood the sentinel peaks of the Sierra de las Minas.

At length, high over the *altos* dotted with Indian villages tucked in the jungles, I spied the Pacific range. I knew those slopes of old. There was the most fertile soil in the world for growing Arabian coffee on the shanks of extinct volcanoes from two thousand to five thousand feet above sea level.

The *fincas* beneath the blue noses were richly green. The period of the white coffee flower had passed. The berries were ripe for picking. And it was partly up to me to see that they *were* picked—by getting through to Julio Yberra. They were to be picked for free planters—or if I failed, picked for the good of J. P. Roper's racketeers. It was Yberra's job to stop him from using the Mayan nation in a racketeer's game of chess!

Fuego! Agua! I recognized the volcanoes, old landmarks. Fuego still puffed a stream of smoke at the azure skies. Agua, having spouted water over the old capital, was long dead.

Chimaltenango, with its white, crooked streets and sun-bleached pink roofs, shot under us. The amphibian wheeled, banked. A sapphire glowed dead ahead. Lake Atitlan cupped in the mountains!

The Indian city of Solola, its roofs built by early *conquistadores* and now housing Mayan tribesmen and their numerous offspring, loomed to the northwest. The English pilot pointed and shouted. I nodded, intent upon the last swoop of the giant water bird toward the sapphire field.

We landed gently and taxied up to a cluster of adobe huts with thatched roofs—Mayan architecture from times

inmemorial. Bronze faces gathered at the bank—men in *criollo*, the native-grown cotton, women in colorful *huipils*, a garment that was neither nightgown nor Mother Hubbard. Indian children bawled from *rebascos*, shoulder slings in which their mothers carried them.

With the hammer roar of the amphibian still echoing in my ears, I hailed two Indians in Quiche. They brought a boat out and agreed to land me. I thanked the Englishman, told Custody to see that the company paid him five hundred dollars and threw myself and bag into the small craft. I remained deaf to the curses that floated after me, choice bits from a Tommy's repertoire.

The Indians proved to be Quiche and while they remained a little aloof, they were impressed by my knowledge of the tongue. However, the amphibian didn't arouse their curiosity; they seemed used to such a sight. I demanded to be presented to the *cacique* or village headman. Ek Balam (Black Jaguar) a seamy-faced old devil, met me in front of his hut. He was distinguished by a small, fantastically embroidered apron over his cotton shirt and pants, and his shoulders were covered by the *petate*, woven reeds that serve the natives as cloak, bed, or raincoat.

"Greetings, *Halach uinic*," I said, using the old Mayan form of address mixed with Quiche.

The bronze face brightened. "Welcome, white friend. We are honored."

"I seek a friend—Julio Yberra. Do you know of him?"

The *cacique* nodded. "He had been here but he has gone into the city—meaning Solola up the hill."

"Where can I find him?"

The old man grew suspicious and queried me about my friendship with the archæologist. I insisted I had come from the sea with an important message for Yberra. That satisfied him.

"A *holpope* (runner) will show you the way."

"You are generous, *ahoni* (No. 1 Man)."

The *cacique* bummed an American cigarette and invited me to be comfortable till the runner came along. I used the wait to quiz him.

"Tell me, *ahtohil* (lover of justice) is it true that *uinic ah Mayaa* (men of Maya) would make trouble with their white brothers?" I asked.

His eyes narrowed. "Their white brothers have made trouble for them. We had an empire, now we are your slaves." It was not a direct answer, but his discreet way of saying that trouble *was* brewing.

"Julio Yberra has no slaves!" I suggested.

"No, he is our friend. Our people love him as a blood brother. Bat Buul has even blessed him."

That was good, and I felt relieved. The Indians themselves admitted affection for the archæologist. His bond with the tribes might, after all, do the trick to save the plantations and prevent the uprising Roper and Salvidar were engineering. Yberra's word would carry weight, and that, coupled with the superstition attached to the Viper of Kukulcan could smash the racket.

I was just going to ask what Bat Buul was when the runner, a handsome boy, appeared. The old man instructed him to guide me to Yberra's resting place.

We climbed in silence over a rocky path that was little more than an Indian trail. A cobalt gloom settled over the cup of Atitlan, and, though the lake was visible, I couldn't see the amphibian. Night was rapidly approaching.

The boy, my bag balanced on his head, grew dim ahead of me. Then I could see lights twinkling in the adobe huts. We passed a few Indians, and black eyes bored me suspiciously. Unused to the altitude after years in New Orleans, I found it hard to keep apace with the boy.

A lonely stretch of road. A squat group of buildings half a mile away. The boy pointed to them.

"It is there that Snake Arm lives," he said, using Yberra's Indian nickname. "It is not far."

I sucked at my second wind. I'd make it somehow. It meant the end of my job—meeting Yberra and bringing him to the ring. The rest was up to him.

I gave my head a shake as though I had water in my ears. They buzzed. The air seemed filled with a subtle, soft vibration, a humming low and deep-chested. At first I thought it was the echo of the hammer-roaring plane. This sound was different. It came from beyond Solola—from the high mountain crags.

Of course! I'd heard that sound before, but not in this sinister note.

I spoke to the Quiche: "The *tunkuls* are muttering." He flashed me a grim set smile.

Muttering *tunkuls*! They were the Mayan war drums, once used to summon the warriors, now to gather tribesmen for community affairs. They were rarely used—and I'd never heard them produce such a sinister, forboding beat. What did they mean? Something was up! I recalled the *cacique's* evasiveness, the *holpope's* grim smile.

Hidden hands were thumping the catgut stretched taut over ends of hollow logs. Hidden, muttering war drums! They were gathering Mayas for some purpose. I grew worried. Yberra's light seemed still far off and I hastened forward. The darkness was thicker.

A patter of naked feet! A shrill, commanding cry!

A *petate* hood was flung over my head. I whirled to struggle, but too late. Steel arms gripped mine to my sides. I kicked. Another shrill cry!

The butt of a gun was smacked hard against the side of my head. Once—twice! My senses twisted, reeled, and

ebbed. I tried to keep my suddenly weak knees from buckling and then I collapsed.

But before consciousness lammed, leaving me in utter, silent darkness, I heard a laugh. It was familiar—it was the voice of—

CHAPTER VIII. JALOTE.

MY senses returned to a body quivering with arctic cold. I was corrugated with goose flesh. Fingers pawed me from head to toe.

The old head was acting like a boiler factory, filled with the hammer roar of the giant water plane. Or was I listening to the beating of mighty *tunkuls*? Nope, just echoes from a battered skull. I played possum, lying very still, my ears cocked, my eyes closed. Heavy labored breathing from the person pawing me was all I heard.

Then:

"Have you found it?" It was a hushed voice.

"It is not here."

"Nor in his garments?" A distant man's voice.

"Did you kill him?" The hushed voice again.

"No." A hand pressed against my heart. "He lives."

"Good!" I knew the voice. It belonged to the Columbine of the orchids—the girl who stuck me up in the room over Père Babouche's.

My eyelids parted ever so slightly. They'd laid me on the dirt floor of an adobe hut. The rafters and thatch above were smoke-blackened. A dim lamp glowed in a far corner, revealing the beautiful Quiche girl, now wearing the native woman's *huipil*. Her jet hair was caught tightly behind her well-shaped head. She had a sinister loveliness in that vague gloom.

"Lock his hands," she said. "And bring water."

Two Indians materialized, rolled me on my stomach, and caught my wrists together with vine thongs. I tried to tense the muscles for play enough to free myself later, but the redskins were thorough and powerful.

As they shuffled from the house, the girl moved to my side, a smile of triumph lighting her face. I could read her thoughts. She had me where she wanted me. She would make me talk.

She sat by my head, caressing my brow. A wild tune filled the room. She was humming some jubilant Indian song. I continued to play possum.

Once she went to the door to look for the water boys, and I tugged at my bonds. They couldn't be budged.

The girl lighted a cigarette and returned to the lamp, squatting on the floor, watching me with her searching black eyes. She was eager for me to come to life.

"Señor?" Her voice was soft—gentle. "*Americano mio!*" It was the sound I'd heard the night she loved me. That seemed ages ago—not four days ago. I held my breath.

"Trust me, *Americano*, and no harm will visit you." Her voice was music. I began to fear it—because I liked it.

My silence annoyed her. She grunted and puffed at her cigarette. The Indians returned noiselessly with earthen jars on their massive shoulders. I was still trying to fathom the meaning of the gentleness in her voice when icy splashes doused me. Impulsively I squirmed and cried out.

"Behold!" a Quiche said slowly. "He lives, Jalote."

"It is good. The gods are kind."

So that was her name. The man had called her Jalote—a luscious mouthing of syllables—Ha-lo-tay! Didn't that mean "Moon Music" in the ancient tongue?

She knelt beside me again and spoke in Spanish: "Señor, you are with friends. Do you hear me?" I groaned

in reply. No use fooling any longer. "Have no fears. We will not harm you." Again her cool, small hand stroked my head.

But I didn't trust her. Speechlessness and staring eyes were my game. Her words flowed soothingly, enticingly. There was a hypnotism in them. I was hep to her now. Once more she was trying to disarm me with the lure of her voice and beauty. She'd succeeded in New Orleans—but I was damned if she'd do it again in Central America!

"We found you helpless on the road," she purred. "You were attacked, Americano. But the gods sent you to us. You can help me, señor."

"I'd like a drink."

She held a stone cup to my lips. It tasted better than bourbon—then.

"You are better." She seemed pleased that I'd spoken.

I met her calm gaze. "Hello, we've met before, no?"

She nodded coolly. "It was not adios after all. The gods fated us to meet once more, señor. I'll come to the point. I want the little package you have."

"But I haven't got it. Search me."

White teeth bit at the crimson lips in consternation. She'd searched me and she believed me.

"*Diablo!* Then where is it?"

"I lost it."

"You lie! What have you done with the ring? Tell me or I'll cut the truth out of you, Americano! Much depends upon that ring. Where is it?" Her voice broke harshly and rose into a shrill, angry cry. She meant what she said.

"Why do you want it, Jalote?"

Her eyes flashed in surprise at the mention of her name. "You know me?"

"*Si*—and about the ring, too. Why do you want it?"

"To save my people much unhappiness—to prevent the reddening of the rivers with blood, señor."

"So you believe in the Viper of Kukulcan?"

She started. "You know—even that!" The softness left her voice. "*Si*, I believe in the Viper. It will save the Mayan people from destruction."

"Who's going to destroy them?"

"White men. But do not question me. I want the ring!"

"It isn't here, Jalote." I spoke to her as I would to a two year old. "It's far from here—and it is not for you."

With brooding eyes and a face torn with disappointment and emotion, she went back to the light. The Indians conferred with her in muttering. I saw one unsheath his knife, the light glistening on the steel blade.

Jalote returned to me. "Why did you come to Solola, Americano?"

"For my health," I grinned.

"Where were you going when the robbers struck you down?"

"Into Solola, for a drink."

"You lie!" she screamed. Turning to the Quiches, she rattled out commands. They ran out of the hut. Jalote stood listening.

There was a cry of protest, then a scream. I recognized the voice of the *holpope*. They were forcing him to tell where he was taking me. His cries of agony grew unbearable; he was a stubborn customer. All the while, Jalote watched me like a green cop pulling the third degree for the first time.

Now the boy was blubbering. One of the Quiches returned and whispered something in Jalote's ear; she gave him a brusque order.

A moment after he left the room, there was a shot.

The girl was smiling again, triumph on her mouth and cunning in her eyes. I watched her dim the wick in the lamp. But before turning it out, she stole to my side and, kneeling, brushed her lips lingeringly over mine.

"*Yo t' amo*," she whispered. "And this time, I say, '*Hasta luego, amigo*.'"

It was Greek to me, saying that she loved me and that we'd meet again. I wouldn't trust that wench with the right time—but her kiss was sweet; it took a long time to forget.

The lamp went out. I was left in inky blackness. Three sets of footsteps clattered off into the distance. That was fishy, too. Usually the Quiches, bare-footed, walked with cat tread.

I was wise. They wanted to let me know I was alone, free to make my escape. But why?

I sat up and tugged at the vine bonds. The flesh at my wrists grew raw and hot. The bonds loosened. Half an hour of playing Houdini for all I was worth finally freed my hands.

At the door, I listened. There was no human sound in the night outside. I found my clothes; nothing had been disturbed—watch, keys, or money. But my gun was missing.

When I was dressed, I crept out into the cool, starry night. There was no moon. And before I'd gone twenty paces, I stumbled over a half-naked body—the *holpope* the *cacique* had given me for a guide to Yberra's house.

His flesh was cold and he was dead. My fumbling fingers found a bullet hole in his forehead.

It was no cinch finding the road, but I got on a path and thought I recognized a few landmarks from the earlier trip. Facing the direction of Solola, I moved forward cautiously. Lights gleamed ahead, and I thought I made out Yberra's house again.

But why was I free? Jalote's finding me was luck, I was convinced. If she'd been in New Orleans five nights ago, she arrived in Puerto Barrios the day I did. How had she gotten across Guatemala to the Pacific *altos*? It was a day's journey by train. She must have used a plane, too. Perhaps the sounding of the *tunkuls* meant business she was attending to.

Still, I was puzzled. She'd seen and

recognized me on the road to Solola. Her Quiches slugged me and I was held prisoner to give information about the ring. Then I was left to my own devices. Damn queer!

A house appeared as I staggered along. I was sure it was Yberra's—the place pointed out by the *holpope*. Anyway, I decided to inquire. I banged on the oaken door.

An Indian opened up. I asked for direction to find Julio Yberra.

"He is here, señor."

"Señor Reynoldo from New Orleans wants to see him."

When the servant returned, I was admitted into a barren hall and led into a long room lined with books and poorly lighted. An old man stood waiting for me beside a refectory table heaped with papers and Mayan curios. He bowed graciously, took my hand and said he was Yberra.

As I explained my mission the house got on my nerves. It was the wrong place; I don't believe in spooks, but this *hacienda* was spooky. Yberra waved me to a chair and pointed to a bottle of cognac. For the first time in my life, I declined a drink; it was pure hunch. He helped himself.

"Considering the risk and the importance attached to the package," I said, "I didn't bring it with me. Besides, I was instructed, Señor Yberra, to have you identified by a banker or a government official."

"Quite so, señor. I understand the need for secrecy, for absolute identification. The tax collector will be summoned at once; he knows me well."

"No hurry. We'll wait till morning and go to his office." A tax collector in his office was more convincing than one plucked out of the night.

"There *is* hurry!" Yberra snapped impatiently. "I've been listening to the *tunkuls* beating all evening. Something is up. The Indians are massing for some purpose. I know what is in that

package you hold, and I must have it—to use it.”

“You know what’s in it?” I didn’t gather from the committee that he was supposed to know; it was supposed to be a secret shared by five. A letter couldn’t have reached Yberra. “You were expecting me then?” I smiled.

“*Si*, Señor Reynoldo, I had a letter from Señor Roper.”

So he was lying.

“I suppose,” he went on, “that you left the package in some bank vault?” I nodded warily. “Which bank, señor? I have trusted friends who’ll bring it to me quickly.”

“We’ll talk about that after you’ve been identified!”

He bridled. “You doubt my word, señor?”

“I’m only obeying Señor Roper’s orders. Sorry.”

“Quite so.” He smiled grimly. “Let me offer you my hospitality—a bed and food. You’re hungry and thirsty?”

“Suits me, señor.” I had a feeling that I was being watched. The book-filled walls seemed to have eyes. But I could see nothing. Yberra clapped his hands and when the servant showed his ugly face, a room and food for me were ordered prepared.

Yberra was perturbed. “Can we get the ring quickly, señor, when you are satisfied that I am Julio Yberra?”

“*Si*.” An idea occurred to me. “We might be able to save time, Señor Yberra. There is a secret mark on your body that will identify you to me.” I was thinking of the tattooed snake on his left forearm, the mark Randolph told me of. “If you will strip to the waist, señor, I can satisfy myself that you are Yberra.”

A mask descended over his face. He nodded, stripped off his coat, and removed his shirt. His torso was white and tender, that of an old man.

My eyes hunted the left forearm. It was as white and as unblemished as the

rest of his lean body. This man was not Julio Yberra.

“Well, Señor Reynolds?”

“I’m satisfied,” I grinned. “You’re my man. If you’d had a mark on you, I’d have doubted you.”

“Now you can tell me where the ring is?”

“In Puerto Barrios,” I lied. “I’ll name the bank when the tax collector completes identification. A matter of form—and my orders, you know.”

He hid his annoyance as he got into his shirt again. Food was brought and I asked to have it taken to my room. The old man led the way across a patio filled with whispering leaves. The night and the house were eerie and I remained alert.

A candle was lighted, revealing a cot, a chair and a wash stand with a crucifix above it. The servant set the food tray on the chair.

“*Buenas noche, Señor Reynolds.*”

“*Hasta mañana, Señor Yberra.*”

He went away quickly, but I detained the Indian. I pointed to the food tray. “Tell me how it tastes.”

The man’s beady eyes widened; there was fear in them. He shook his head. “I am not hungry, señor.”

“*Gracias!*” And I meant it; I was grateful to him for what his refusal told me. If he wouldn’t eat, neither would I. To do so meant being drugged or poisoned. I watched him recross the patio.

Kicking off my shoes, I blew out the candle and lay upon the cot till my eyes grew used to the darkness. The stillness, save for the whispering leaves, was awful.

Satisfied that I wasn’t being watched, I got up and in my bare feet crept to the door. It opened quietly. The patio was shadowy but lifeless.

I made my way to the room where I’d interviewed the fake Yberra. A light cut under the door. Voices mumbled behind the panel. I put my ear

to it and wasn't surprised at what I heard.

Jalote was inside talking to the old man.

CHAPTER IX. A FREE-LANCE MESSIAH.

THEY'D tried to trick me. I understood now why Jalote let me free myself. Her Quiches had tortured the *holpope* into betraying my destination in Solola—Yberra's *hacienda*. She belonged to the mob that wanted the obsidian ring and knew quite well that it was bound for Yberra's hands. And failing to get it from me, she hoped to trick me into revealing its hiding place to a fake Yberra.

Clever of her! She'd learned from the *holpope* that I was headed for Yberra's when attacked—that I had an idea which was his house. Probably if I'd passed it on the road, an Indian—one of hers—would have stopped me to redirect me.

But the trick was no go. I spotted the old man as a faker. Now I knew she was behind him. The tax collector I'd meet in Solola would be phony, too—if I was fool enough to wait for morning and that interview.

So far, so good! I was a play ahead of them.

Yet I was troubled. Obviously, this was Yberra's house. The *holpope* was headed for here; Jalote laid her trap here.

Where was Julio Yberra?

Had he gone away on one of his expeditions? Had they ousted him by some trick? Or had they—Probably they had. I needed Yberra—dead or alive. He was my goal.

Again I flattened my ear to the door. Jalote and the old man were deep in some chatter; I couldn't make it out, but I guessed they were satisfied I was out for the night.

Why not take a look-see? The rooms of the *hacienda* seemed to open into the

patio. Quietly, I crept to another door. It was ajar and silent. My hand was invisible before me.

Another door. Silence. Two more rooms. Both empty!

I tried the fifth and was turning away when a low moan reached my ears. So they hadn't rubbed him out after all. My hunch was pretty good. I pattered in, my arms outstretched.

The groan was louder now. It sounded muffled. I could make out the outline of a bed against the whitish walls.

There was a man lying on it, bound and gagged. His heartbeat was feeble.

"Are you Julio Yberra?" I asked in Spanish. "Nod if you are."

He nodded and I undid the gag that choked him. He gasped for breath greedily. I explained that I was a friend, and how I came to be there.

He sighed. "There are matches on the floor. Strike one and let me see you." Speech was difficult with him. He sounded like a goner to me.

I found the matches and carefully lighted one. A thin face with glossy eyes stared up into mine. His face was bloody.

"An *Americano*." He tried to smile. "*Yo tengo mucho gusto, señor*. But it is a dead man that welcomes you to his house."

Before the light went out, I looked at his left arm. The mark of the coiled snake was there, indelibly tattooed. I was sure this was the real Julio Yberra—the man Jalote's Quiches had overpowered to make way for the faker and the trap sprung for me.

Briefly, I whispered my mission. The ring was safe. What was to be done? The coffee *fincas* were threatened by high-powered muscle men! They were using Indian labor as the bludgeon to beat their racket into success—the control of Central America. The lives and property of the whites were in danger. The Mayan tribes, if organized, might

get out of hand, and there'd be hell to pay. What did he suggest?

For a long time, he struggled with speech. At length, it came:

"If the Indians organize, God help the foreigners down here, Señor Reynolds. They have long hoped, have made sacrifices to their pagan gods, that one day they would be free to return to the glories of Quetzalcoatl. Those who would steal the coffee *fincas* cannot succeed, but the Indians can if they find the Viper of Kukulcan."

"Then there's power in the legend!"

"The power of faith, señor. With the Viper to lead them they will gladly die, believing that their lost empire will return to this earth. They must not use the ring!"

"Then back it goes to Randolph in New Orleans!"

Yberra fought for breath. We were enveloped in darkness, but I knew life was ebbing fast from his battered body.

"No, Señor Reynolds—use the ring! Señor Randolph trusted you—and I—I dare to. Use the ring of Kukulcan! Trade upon the superstition attached to it, and prevent the uprising. There is trouble in the air. To-night, I heard the *tunkuls*—many of them—for the first time in years." He became incoherent.

"How'll I use it, Yberra?"

He managed to gasp: "The Temple of the Cow—beyond Rio Cache—to the north—it is a lost place. Trust the *Ah Kin*—who is Bat Buul. Carry it there. Bat Buul will help." The death rattle in his throat began its tune.

"Where's the temple?" I whispered frantically. "Who's Bat Buul?"

"With that ring—Bat Buul—will hold back the—the warriors of *Mayaa*!"

I pleaded in vain for more detailed directions. How in hell did he expect me to find a lost temple, north of Rio Cache? I was no archæologist? How would I know it belonged to a sacred cow? There was no reply.

I dared to strike another match. His

blood-streaked face was still and the eyes fixed on the rafters. But suddenly, the lips hardly moving, he whispered:

"Kill the woman, Jalote! She is evil. Destroy her—before she destroys *Mayaa*—and the rest of us!"

Footfalls in the patio! Out went the light in a quick puff! Some one was approaching the room. I readjusted Yberra's gag and darted to a corner near the door and crouched.

The Indian servant entered and bent over the archæologist. A single word escaped his lips. "*Muerto!*" He went out without seeing me. When I crawled back to Yberra, my hand found that his heart had stopped. The Indian had spoken the truth.

The old think factory hummed. Find a lost temple. Some one named Bat Buul would help me. He'd use the ring to prevent the uprising that might drive white men out of Central America.

If my ten cents' worth of Mayan served me right, "*Ah Kin*" meant high priest. But the temple was something that only Yberra and Indians knew about. The archæologist was dead with that secret—and Indians rarely betrayed lost ruins: they held them sacred. And who ever heard of a cow in ancient *Mayaa*? The books said they didn't have domestic cattle. What kind of a temple was this, anyway?

But it was up to me to act.

Yberra was out of the picture now. Still, he'd told me what to do—what he'd have done himself! A new brand of racketeer was set to bury his hands deep in Central American gold—coffee, bananas, sugar! He hoped to use the Indian; but Yberra knew the redskin would outsmart him—use him to establish the old order.

And the Viper of Kukulcan had value. The superstition attached to it could be cashed. It was up to me to try to stem the uprising, to break the racket.

Yberra had given me a commission. I was a white man and it was up to me to see things through.

First move—get away from the *hacienda*. I needed a gun and a car to get me out of Solola to the International Railway at Retalhuheu. I'd get the ring from the American Legation in Guatemala City and scoot for the Rio Cache—wherever that was!

But I needed my shoes. They were in the room across the patio.

I crept to the door. A ruby glow arrested me. Some one smoking a cigarette was at the end of the patio. The servant! He appeared to be watching the door behind which I was supposed to be asleep.

A nice fix! My feet were tender and I needed those shoes. The roads were rocky and I was no leather-skinned Indian.

I picked up a pebble and tossed it noisily into the middle of the patio. The cigarette was thrown away. Another pebble brought the watcher my way.

He loomed in the gloom three feet from where I crouched. I pounced and the surprise helped to topple him on his face, with me on top of him. Before he could cry out, I slugged with all I had. His head was a hard punching bag, but when I got up he didn't move.

I got my shoes. It was a cinch climbing the rear wall of the patio. Somehow, I was turned around in avoiding the house, and running, stumbling along the dark path, I soon found myself headed for the lake.

There would be no sense in rousing the *cacique*. I didn't want to explain the *holpope's* death. My gun might have been planted to throw suspicion on me.

The amphibian! It might still be riding at anchor off the Indian village. I hadn't heard it climb into the skies after I'd deserted it.

The water bird could drop me in Lake Amatitlan. That was five miles

from the capital. I'd be saving time and a railway trip. Every minute counted—since I had to look for a temple that might just as well be on the moon for all I knew!

As I pressed forward, I almost prayed that the amphibian was still parked on the waters of Atitlan. The darkness told me nothing. I sensed the closeness of the broad lake as a purple crack of dawn broke over the eastern rim of mountains.

The flying boat was where I'd left it. I stole an Indian boat and paddled out. Custody and the Englishman were dozing uncomfortably in the forward cockpit and cursed me plenty for coming back.

I explained my desire to be dropped in Amatitlan. We'd take off when there was a little more light. There was two centuries in it for the pilot. He thought of the gun I'd used before and decided he had no choice.

Starving and thirsty, I sat with them watching for the dawn. And at last we roared up into cool skies, filling the cupped lake with an unholy clatter.

We flew over a cove, quite low, and my eyes made a discovery that explained a few things. A smaller plane on pontoons was parked down there. Wasn't that the plane I saw flying over the port town? No wonder Jalote came from Puerto Barrios as easily as I did. Damn clever, this Quiche girl! I wondered if I'd have to carry out Yberra's last command: "Kill the woman, Jalote! She is evil!"

Somehow, I couldn't forget the way she'd kissed me.

The blue *altos* of Guatemala crept from under the mantle of night. The day was flooding the coffee *fincas* on the volcanic slopes with golden bars of light. Lake Atitlan fell behind us and as we lost sight of it, Amatitlan's waters puddled like a white gob ahead. Roaring over the ancient capital at Antigua, the Englishman threw his stick

forward and the water bird swooped toward the lake.

We road to anchor off the town. I'd done some tall thinking en route. There was no railway to the Peten. It would mean a two-day trip by car. And I couldn't afford to waste time. Why not fly to Lake San Andre—if possible, into the Rio Cache valley, too?

"I say, here we are," the Englishman said, nudging me. "And here you get out and stay out, Reynolds. I've barely time to meet my chartering party in Puerto Barrios."

I studied the fellow. He had nerve—nerve to run a charter plane in Central America. Business couldn't be too good. "You were with the Tommies in Flanders, weren't you?"

He nodded. "And I got a bullet and billeted at Ypres. But I say, don't try to get into my good graces, Reynolds. I'm having no more to do with you, you know."

"You've been pretty raw, commanding this plane," Custody snapped. "Mr. Roper wouldn't approve."

"Says you!" I ignored him and grinned at the Englishman. "What's your name?"

"Raingo." He stood up in the cockpit and bellowed to a string of Indians staring at us from the shore. He wanted a boat to take off a passenger.

I waited. The boat came out. "Get in, Custody. You're going ashore." He obeyed quickly.

"You're going, too," said Raingo. He told the Indians to wait.

I stuck a hand in my empty gun pocket and poked a finger up at the Englishman. "I'm going next trip, Raingo. Meanwhile, I'm having a talk with you."

He looked at the "gun" and shrugged. He gave an order and the Indians rowed Custody away. "Well, what is it now, Reynolds? I'll not let you bully me any further!"

"You like excitement," I said. "I've

plenty to offer. You look like a right guy to me."

"Thanks. I'm not interested in any more propositions."

"How much does your charter party pay you?"

He eyed me shrewdly. "I say, I'm through with you."

Quickly, in words of two syllables, I told him about my mission to Yberra—about Yberra's death. Now I had to find a redskin named Bat Buul in the Temple of the Cow up around Rio Cache. The trip called for a plane and a man with guts to fly it. Money was no object. (I was spending the Ganson Coffee Company's funds!)

"You mean," Raingo said with aroused interest, "that you're off to look up a Mayan ruin nobody knows about?"

"Sure. Lindbergh went to look for some and found a few. We can cover a lot of ground from the air."

He mused. I could see that he was keen for the adventure; he was forgetting my sample of bulldozing.

"How much for the plane?" I asked. "I'll make good your charter cruise losses."

"A thousand dollars if nothing happens, Reynolds," he said, grinning. "Two fifty and petrol costs—if something does." His hand was extended to me.

I took it. "You're on! We're out to bust a racket and stop an Indian uprising. I'm the free-lance messiah with the Viper of Kukulcan to play with and——"

"And I'll be assistant messiah. It's a go!"

CHAPTER X. RIO CACHE.

I LEFT Raingo and the amphibian in Lake Amatitlan. He'd framed a telegram to the charter party saying that his plane had broken down, canceling the cruise; I sent it. Then, with Custody fuming at my side and threatening

retaliation for his kidnaping, I rode by train to the capital.

Custody went to the Ganson office to report my swashbuckling conduct, and I hid me to the Hotel Nacional for breakfast, a bed, and a wash. The food and wash-up were swell, but I only used the bed till nine thirty. Eighty winks weren't much, but they helped.

I shopped for guns, a decent suit of ducks, and a sun helmet. Then, stopping at the American Legation, I asked for my mail in the name of Herbert J. Wilcox. There was the familiar package waiting for me—my own handwriting appearing on the wrapper. A visit to the confines of a telephone booth revealed the camera intact and the obsidian ring nestled in the lens space. I pocketed the ring.

So far so good. I'd shaken Carmichael and his parrot-feather warnings, and Jalote with her cunning tricks and alluring kisses. Raingo was a new ally that I'd picked myself; I trusted him. Custody would return to Puerto Barrios unaware of the hop to Lake San Andre in the Peten. My plans were unknown to those who would have liked to know what I was up to.

I sent a cable to Randolph:

FOUND YBERRA STOP BEFORE HE
DIED HE GAVE INSTRUCTIONS STOP
AM FOLLOWING THEM STOP

Then I caught the next train back to Amatitlan and the amphibian. In the town I got one of those rare but brilliant ideas and bought ten pounds of salt—ordinary table salt.

Raingo was waiting for me with the rowboat, surrounded by Quiches with whom he tried to talk in a miserable dialect. He was surprised with the salt.

"Salt? What's the idea, Reynolds?"

"I like my food well seasoned," I said. "Besides, it's good ballast." He shook his head doubtfully but was pacified by a mysterious wink.

"I've news," he said as we were rowed

out to the plane. "Another amphibian dropped into the lake across the way half an hour after you left here."

"A small plane?"

"Yes, I say, I think it's the one I noticed in a cove up in Atitlan."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised. Let's shove off."

That *was* news! If that was Jalote's plane, she'd followed us. Amphibians in these lakes were rarities; and I was certain the smaller craft was hers. How else had she gotten from Puerto Barrios as fast as I had? We'd have to shake that plane when we headed for the Peten.

Alone with Raingo in the cockpit, I showed him the obsidian ring and its feathered-serpent motif. He marveled that so much superstition should be attached to it. I pointed out that in Haiti the natives got excited over a piece of red thread when it was tied into fancy bow knots. Superstition was as strange and as unfathomable as a woman in love.

"I say, Reynolds, it's hard to believe your yarn—about racketeers using Indian labor to gain control of the *fincas*. It's colossal!"

"Ever read stories about the boys in Chicago and New York?"

"Oh, yes, of course."

"Well, they get away with murder in their rackets. Why can't this coffee mob get away with making a racket out of the *fincas*—squeezing them for tribute? It's big time—but possible."

"And they'd start an Indian uprising to do that?"

"Sure. And that's not all! If Yberra was right, these redskins are playing ball with the white mob to gain power through organization. Then to hell with the whites! The Indians'll take everything they can get!"

"Like *ladinos*, eh? They start revolutions down here, using the Indians for armies. Once, when Rufino Estrado was engineering a blow-up, they turned

on him and he ran out of the country. Then the government troops put down the trouble because the redskins were leaderless."

That was nice to hear: Estrado using Indians in one of his flop revolutions. Perhaps Roper was using Estrado as his agent in the field—the man who did his dirty work in Central America. I couldn't get rid of the notion that Roper was after the ring. Randolph had said as much. Maybe Roper had bought Carmichael to help get back the package intrusted to me.

That hurt, Carmichael's entanglement in this business. I'd trusted him for years. But gold can play hell with friendship!

We took off with a crashing roar. I kept my eyes on the other flying boat. It seemed deserted.

But as we pulled away from Lake Amatitlan, I saw we had a tail on us. The other craft popped up from the water and swung after ours. The sky was clear, devoid of clouds to play hide and seek in. I cursed the weather.

Shouting in Raingo's car, I pointed to the follower. He saw it and nodded. The altimeter's hony finger pointed to eight thousand feet. We were level with several volcanic peaks.

Raingo shouted something and we dropped three thousand feet in a nose dive. I didn't like the sensation one bit—nor did my breakfast. But flying low over the high jungles, zooming over low cones, we reached the Motagua Valley flying eastward. Raingo looked over his shoulder again. The other craft was still in sight but losing distance; she lacked the power of our motor.

Another drop. I thought I could reach out and touch the coffee berries on the trees of the *finca* below. Natives scurried out of our path. The amphibian cut to the north and we went through, not over, the Sierra de las Minas.

But we could still see the other plane,

trailing us doggedly. It was a fly speck on the heavens. However, if they had strong glasses, they could still see us plainly.

Down behind the palm fronds of the Rio Polochie that flowed into Lake Izabal, another cut to the north, and we slid over Alta Verapaz into the Santa Cruz mountains, the sun warming up the fuselage till it burned my fingers to touch it.

I could still see the trailer.

Then we went through a mountain pass. Raingo was flying low to hide his huge bird—to throw off the other hawk. Jagged teeth of rock licked out at us. The pass was less than a hundred feet wide. I hoped the Englishman knew his way about. The channel turned and twisted and we banked, swimming the precipitous walls. Once our tail touched and I closed my eyes.

We got through somehow. Raingo shot to the northwest, and below us was a flat, level plane, several thousand feet above sea level, a sea of palms and banyans, thick, encroaching vegetation that cloaked the earth as though it were a secret thing. Here and there we spied a ravine, with a creek or a river flowing sluggishly to its mouth. No signs of human life reached us, low as we flew.

This was the plain of the Peten, comprising a good third of Guatemala's territory. It rolled like a gentle ground swell in the Gulf, yet dotted on its face were tiny bumps. Raingo circled one of them, shouting and pointing.

I strained my eyes. The bump was not a hill but a mound—the product of man's work. Through the crust of vegetation, I saw the light of the sun striking a sheer-white stone wall. There were carvings on the wall.

Our experience was much like Lindbergh's in Yucatan. From the air we'd located an old Mayan ruin. The wall and the carvings were unmistakable. It might be a long-lost temple. Deserted a thousand years ago, it had crumbled

in places, and wind-tossed seeds did the rest, blotting it from bird and man with greenery.

Raingo pointed to the east. At first I saw nothing, for he continued to circle the Mayan mound. Then I recognized a speck in the sky—not a bird, but a plane. It cut across the Peten toward Lake San Andre—our destination.

"He's going to San Andre!" Raingo roared. "He thinks we'll land there!"

I nodded and shouted back: "Look for Rio Cache! Maybe we land there!"

It was all right with him. He made a few more turns, flying close to the palm fronds till the other plane was out of sight. Then we shot northward, maintaining a low visibility; to a distant observer we were hidden by a background of green below his horizon.

Soon we were coursing up a dried river bed. And I was scratching my head, amazed.

Below us, their faces easily visible, were hundreds of Indians. They'd discarded their criollo suits and wore only leggings and loin cloths. Many of them carried guns. They waved to us and I heard the sound of a weird marching chant blending with the roar of the amphibian's motor. These redskins were headed north, too.

At another point we crossed a pasture land. Much of the Peten was cleared by the Indians for grazing. And here we found more bronze natives, oblivious of the biting sun, marching in route formation toward the north.

Something was up. These Indians weren't troops. And from what I knew about them, they seldom moved about in such large bodies. They were massing, heading for some central point. Had the beating of the *tunkuls* in Solola anything to do with this demonstration?

We overtook a *holpope* and he darted into the underbrush to hide from us. He, too, was running northward—with

a message. For whom? Was it Indian business? Or something concerning the business I was out to kill?

Raingo climbed to get his bearings, confident that the other plane had dropped into the Lake San Andre. Miles away, we saw its glare, a mirror under the sun. Rio Cache was still farther north. We descended again to the treetops and shot along.

More Indians moved beneath us. It occurred to me that we were moving toward their destination, too. What a break if we all met at Rio Cache! Till I found Bat Buul and his Temple of the Cow, the one thing I wanted to avoid was the redskin.

We crossed a lake, a tiny diamond on the green floor. We crossed a skinny river, then more of the monotonous, bumpy sea of green beneath the blazing blue sky.

"I say, I think that's the *rio* we want!" Raingo shouted. "If I remember my map, that's the Cache!"

"Look for a quiet village!" I called back to him.

But try and find a "quiet" village. We passed several. They were all teeming with men, naked warriors. A few shots were sent up to us by way of greeting. One bit a period in the right wing. The river, coursing to the southeast, was alive with canoes filled with bronze flesh. It looked as though we were over the massing point of the marching Mayas.

Raingo cursed. The motor was missing. He tried to rise and, light as we were, the amphibian proved balky. Ahead, the river widened. He cut for it, shutting off the motor and starting it again. The racket was awful, ear-splitting. I noticed now that something was wrong, that we had to land.

We did. It could have been neater, but I saw that Raingo was glad we hadn't cracked up. The amphibian roared till he choked off her voice. There was a swift stillness in which our

ears rang. The Englishman let the water bird drift into midstream and then he heaved over the anchor.

We'd landed with necks intact. How safe our hides were in this infested Indian country, was another matter.

A canoe passed us. I hailed it in Quiche. The paddlers stared but paid no attention to us.

"There's a village about half a mile back," Raingo said. "I'll buzz the motor and see what's wrong. Then we can taxi down."

"O. K."

"I say, old man, I didn't like the way those Indians stared."

"Maybe they didn't understand my Quiche cracks."

"Anyway, they didn't bother us."

While Raingo was looking for the motor trouble, I spied another canoe coming around a bend. It approached swiftly, and I recognized one of the men aboard for a padre. I called to him in Spanish, and he almost fell overboard with surprise, exhorting his paddlers to bring him alongside the plane.

He was Don Ignacio, who had carried his message into the wilds of the Peten—a conscientious missionary, old and wizened in the service of the church and bronzed by the tropic suns. A holy fire mingled with mortal fear gleamed in his eyes.

"What do you do here, señores?" he asked. "It is dangerous country just now."

"We're looking for some one." I asked him why the redskins were massing in the vicinity.

He shook his silvery head sadly. "Trouble, I fear, señor. They, who love me like a brother, will tell me nothing. They insist that I go away, to safety. I feel that the devil is loose in Peten." He explained that he was headed for El Progreso on the Rio Don Pedro—and Mexico across the border.

"Any idea what's up, padre?"

"My red brothers say that the white

man's day is ended in *Mayaa*. It is rumor that I hear, but I fear a holy war. There have long been whisperings of a new empire of *Mayaa* fostered by the pagan gods. This can only be when the white man goes—and it is whispered that he will be drenched in his own blood or driven into the seas." Don Ignacio seemed to believe all he'd heard.

I asked him why the Indians had picked on the valley of the Rio Cache for their powwow.

"For the blessings of their evil, pagan god, the awful Kukulcan!" he said sadly. "They have admitted the devil among them!"

"Who's behind all this, padre?"

"A poor, demented creature who calls herself the 'Bride of Kukulcan.' I have never seen her, but she answers to the name of Jalote. She's the devil's handmaiden, señor. Beware of her!"

I asked him if he'd ever heard of Bat Buul. He started, and horror contorted his cracked face. "That beast! I know of him but have shunned the sight of him. He deals in human sacrifice, señor."

"And where is the Temple of the Cow, padre?"

Again his eyes were filled with loathing. "Beware of that place. My son, you are trafficking with the devil if you seek that house of evil. It is the place where the Indian worships Kukulcan!"

That was good news to me. I wanted to meet up with this Kukulcan. "But where is this temple?"

"I don't know—not far from here, I think. I saw it once raising its hideous face from the jungle, but I did not go close. I wasn't strong enough to destroy it single-handed. But the Indians of the *rio* know the way, señor!"

"I must find Bat Buul," I said.

"Beware of him and his temple, Americano. But one white man has been there to return with his life——"

"Julio Yberra?"

The padre was amazed that I knew him. "Si, it was Yberra. He is a wicked old man—a lover of the pagan beauties which are evil. I've tried to save his soul, but he would not be saved. He loves *Mayaa* too much."

I told Don Ignacio that we expected an Indian uprising and were seeking Bat Buul to enlist his aid in preventing it. He doubted our chances of reaching the high priest. "Bat Buul does not have dealings with the Indians of the *rio*. He lives in his temple with his primitive people to protect him."

"But has he power over the *rio* Indians?" That was important.

"Power? He speaks to them from afar—as a god! They obey him. He is secretly known to all Indians in Guatemala. He is keeper of the Cow and the voice of Kukulcan!"

That was what I wanted to hear. Bat Buul was the man I wanted to deal with. We offered to fly Don Ignacio to El Progreso, but he calmly assured us that the amphibian was a machine of the devil; he would not set foot upon it. He blessed us, we exchanged good-bys, and his Indian paddlers swept him away in his flight to safety.

He'd told me enough. I was convinced now that the uprising was more than rumor and hearsay. The Indians were headed for the Temple of the Cow and for Kukulcan's benediction before beginning the slaughter of the white men in Central America.

And the man I sought, Bat Buul, the high priest, was considered a creature of evil by Don Ignacio. Yet Yberra said I could trust Bat Buul to use the ring to prevent bloodshed. Could I?

CHAPTER XI. IN THE JUNGLE.

RAINGO repaired his motor to his satisfaction. We weighed anchor and taxied down the river to a settlement. Redskins massed on the shores

to watch us. But when we called for a boat we hurled our words at deaf ears.

A voice called out in Quiche: "Go away, white men. Your day is ended!"

I told Raingo to taxi alongside the north bank. I was going ashore for a confab with the *cacique*. We'd come too far and too much was at stake to be scared away by this indifference.

When the flying boat's breast grazed the river bottom, I stepped into the water and strode ashore, my gun ready in my pocket. I demanded the *cacique*. The naked warriors nodded toward a cluster of mud houses with the thatched roofs, architecture as ancient as *Mayaa*.

"Cover my rear!" I shouted to Raingo. "If they act funny with me, get busy."

"Right-o, old chap."

I found the *cacique*, a middle-aged man taller than his short brothers, sunning himself before a doorway. What looked like a *caluac* or ceremonial scepter of office, rested on his knees. He met my gaze obliquely. For a moment I thought he was cross-eyed.

"*Ahtohil*, I come as a friend," I said.

His eyes widened at my mixture of Mayan and Quiche. "The white man can be my friend no more. Go in peace before death overtakes you."

"I come to seek Bat Buul."

Again he was startled. "White man, he is not for you. You cannot see him. His way is far from here."

It was high time for a good bluff. I fingered the ring of Kukulcan in my pocket, slipped it over a thumb and held the hand under the *cacique's* nose. His breath stopped. He dropped on his knees and kissed my wet shoes.

"The Viper!" he whispered. "You are his messenger!"

"You know the sign!"

"The ring of hard stone! *Uinic ah Mayaa* have expected it for centuries! It is come. Victory will be ours!"

"Maybe!" I asked for a runner to

show me the way to the Temple of the Cow. The Indian promised me a guide and a body of men for protection. The Temple was a two-day journey through dense jungle.

"We start at dawn," I told him. "And the *quetzal* (bird) I came by, is a *quetzal* of the gods. Protect her, too."

"It shall be done. Our lives are yours, messenger from Kukulcan!"

I went back to Raingo and reported success with the ring. They knew the legendary Viper of Kukulcan and accepted me as its delivery boy. We were trusting to luck. But I was uneasy about Bat Buul. The Indians wanted the blessings of his temple in the jungle before starting their extermination of the whites in Central America. Bat Buul, as high priest of that temple, must bless them. Yberra had said to trust him. Don Ignacio said not to. Still, I had to chance it.

That night, the *tunkuls* sang. Raingo and I went to the village to watch the drummers beat the catgut taut over the ends of hollow logs. The beat was not steady as I'd heard it before, but staccato; it sounded like the drumming of a message.

I knew the Indians drummed messages from point to point; the sacred *tunkuls* also served as primitive telegraphs. It was the same with the drums of the African blacks. Hadn't I read somewhere that the death of Queen Victoria reached South Africa via native drums, beating the telegraph by two days? To whom were these Indians signaling?—I asked the *cacique*.

"We tell the people of *Mayaa* that the Viper Kukulcan has come to lead them," he said. "The *tunkuls* carry the word from here to the Motagua."

That the ring was on the Rio Cache was being spread through *Mayaa*! I acted at once. "Send no more messages, *ahoni*. I do not wish it."

He obeyed me and the *tunkuls* were muted. Good Lord, the messages would

have Jalote on my neck! She and her mob had a plane, too. We'd tricked them over the Peten—but the drums might locate us for her.

We slept uneasily in the amphibian. Through the night, I expected any minute to hear the roar of the plane that tried to track us in the air.

Nor did I like the prospect of a two-day trek through the jungle to the temple. That meant leaving Raingo with the plane. I'd be alone on my own hook. The plane! Why not take a squint at the temple from the air? There might be water near by for a landing. Only the amphibian was so big, it needed a lot of water.

I'd been awake an hour before the sky cracked with white in the east. The sun was on its way. Already the jungle lining the shores was alive with the chattering of monkeys and the screaming of parrots.

I commanded and ranted and belted, but the Indian said he couldn't help me out. His men were mortal and the plane was immortal; the two couldn't mix. He called the warriors together and propositioned them, but they refused to leave the earth.

I went back to the plane. Somehow, I was afraid of the trek through the jungle. It was too much of a gamble when the plane might save time and energy. Raingo had no suggestions to offer.

Then my eyes fell upon the ten pounds of salt. I'd bought it for a reason. Why not give it a try? I pocketed a pound and returned to the warriors. The sun was sticking its dome over the horizon now. Any minute, I feared the sight of Jalote's plane.

"The gods," I said, "will reward the one who shows the way to the temple—from the *quetzal*." I plucked salt from my pocket and dribbled it into the breeze.

Black eyes flashed greedily. I was right. Salt was more precious than gold

to these jungle people. I'd read somewhere that it was scarce, that they'd do anything for it. The *cacique's* men offered their lives and services for a handful of the precious stuff.

I selected two guides, filled their hands with salt from my pocket and ordered them to report at the plane at once. They scurried to their huts and deposited the white gold with their wives.

When we took off, the two guides cowered on the deck of the cockpit. The hammer roar was too much for them. They began to regret the salt bargain. But once we floated free of the water, I persuaded one man to sit up and peer over the side. Thinking I was a god who gave him courage, he began to enjoy himself. The other man, not to be shamed, sat up, too.

We circled over the village, waiting till the guides got their bearings. Undaunted by dense jungle on foot, they found themselves unfamiliar with their country from the air.

"Which way," I shouted, "to the *cenote* of the temple?"

One pointed east, the other west. I began to have misgivings. Their black eyes scoured the mapped terrain for familiar landmarks, and at length they agreed on a northerly course.

Raingo sent the amphibian's nose over the jungle. Once or twice, I thought I recognized mounds that might conceal Mayan ruins. But no *cenote* marked them from the skies. The guides seemed satisfied, pointing to familiar signs—mounds, creeks, and dried *rio* beds.

After about an hour, we saw it—a broad pool of water—a natural well. Geologists say the stone floor of the Peten is mostly porous limestone, and in spots the pore is so big it forms a natural well. Rain water seeps through the earth and limestone and collects in the open basins high above sea level. The jungle Mayas used to build beside these *cenotes*, looking upon them as

sacred wells, gifts from the pagan gods. Raingo reached the well and ringed it with spirals. It was big enough for a landing, but the water was a good hundred feet below the limestone rim. A take-off would be a hard stunt. I wished we had one of the newfangled auto-gyros to drop us vertically into the water hole.

The guides insisted that this was the *cenote* of the Temple of the Cow. But neither Raingo nor I could see signs of a temple or so much as a mound. The motor was shut off and we glided over the rim, looking for signs of human life. There were none.

The motor hammered again. We zoomed upward. The guides insisted it was the right place.

"I say, let's land," Raingo suggested.

"But can you climb out of the hole again? It's a good hundred feet from water to top."

"It's easy. I know a trick."

"O. K. It's your plane," I told him.

He swung, preparing to land. The amphibian set her nose for the rim. We rushed over it. A deafening, echoing clatter was smashed against our eardrums from the walls on either side of us. The water rushed up to meet us.

The Indians were panic-stricken by the noise. One of them threw his arms around Raingo, pleading, begging to be taken away from the sacred well.

That was enough. Surprised by the embrace, Raingo lurched to one side. The stick went over with him. I saw the walls whirling. The water was where the walls should have been. The bottom of the boat grazed the limestone and our speed, though diminished, was so great we were flung downward.

I saw a wing carve the water in our spiral dive. Raingo tried to right the plane, and almost succeeded, but the Indian's action caused him to misjudge distance.

We rode the surface with a grinding, tearing, smashing noise. A nice pickle!

One wing was torn off by the porous wall. We'd landed with our necks, but we'd never rise from that hole again in the amphibian. The damage was irreparable.

Raingo was so mad he wanted to shoot the frightened Indian—the cause of this rotten break for the four of us. A man's fear had stranded us in a jungle well—Lord knows how far from possible help. And to keep going we had nothing but our guns, nine pounds of salt, a pack of cigarettes, and our wits.

Of the four, the salt proved the most valuable asset.

"Don't blame the redskin," I said to Raingo. "He knew no better. And we can be thankful we didn't get a ducking. Our guns and the salt are still good."

"Damn your salt!"—Raingo was beside himself. "My plane is cracked up. And where in hell are we?"

"That's what I'm going to find out."

The broken water bird floated idly on the surface of the well, hemmed on four sides by towering white, pock-marked walls. There were no evidences of steps or ladders. How were we going to get to the rim?

Then I noted that one wall sloped back less precipitously than the others and that at its base there was a beach of rubble. There'd been a landslide at that point.

I stripped and stuck a toe into the water. It was icy, as yet untouched by the sun. I decided to slide in instead of diving, being uncertain about the depth and hidden rocks.

The water almost turned my blood into ice cream. I struck out for the rubble beach two hundred yards away. The swimming warmed me a little, and when I climbed upon the rubble, the air was chilling.

But the expedition was worth the arctic bath. I spied a series of footholds leading from the rubble up the

sloping wall to the green border dividing the limestone from the blue heavens. We weren't mountain goats, but I was sure we could make the climb.

Back into the ice water. Back across the well to the amphibian. This time, more accustomed to the cold, I stayed submerged and commanded the Indians to hop in with me.

"What's the idea, old chap?" a more mollified Raingo asked.

"We'll push the plane to the beach and anchor there. It's an easy climb to the top. I've seen a way."

But the Indians refused to dive into the sacred waters. A god might—but not they. I shouted to Raingo to throw them in. He grabbed one and hurled him overboard. The other put up a fight, but Raingo managed to topple him in, too.

I shouted my idea to the Indians and, since I wore the Viper of Kukulcan on my thumb, they obeyed me. We swam to the rudder and started pushing the amphibian. It was hard work, but we moved her slowly toward the beach. Raingo hurled the anchor ashore when within reach and then we climbed upon the rubble and hauled the boat close.

As I dressed, Raingo found a knapsack and a canvas bag in which we stored the salt and the plane's instruments; Raingo couldn't bear to part with the latter. Then we set ourselves to the climb. The footholds I'd seen were man-made. The ascent was stiff, but the four of us managed it in half an hour, clawing the sloping wall like horseflies.

When we sat down to rest, on the fringe of the jungle, the silence was appalling; it was like being in an empty church on a Monday. I figured that if any people lived near this *cenote* they'd have heard our crash.

I asked the guides how close the temple was. They hung their heads and I guessed the truth. They'd pulled a boner. This was the wrong well!

Pretty soon we'd be hungry. Parrots and wild bananas might keep us alive for a while—if we found any. The guides were at a loss as to which way to turn. I put them to work circling the huge well to look for a possible path.

"We've no machetes," Raingo pointed out. "It's damn near impossible to cut a path through these jungles without one."

"I know." More and more, it dawned upon me that we were stranded beside the well. I contemplated spending the rest of my days there, living like *Robinson Crusoe*. The thought made me shudder. Raingo paled and I dare say mental telepathy carried the same thought to him.

I watched the Indians, circling the rim in opposite directions. No shout came from them, indicating the discovery of a path. I saw them on the far side, heads down, moving forward to the point where they'd meet. And if they met without finding a path, it was good-by Buck Reynolds & Co.!

They did meet. I heard them shout. Their voices carried easily over the hole: "We find nothing!"

I decided to look myself. These redskins who were dumb enough to pick the wrong well, might have overlooked a path. Still, the well might not have been used in ages, hence no paths. My feet carried me around, and I even beat into the twisted vines and shrubbery in the shade of the trees.

I guess it was the luck of my great grandfather, the Irish top sergeant. A narrow thread of trail appeared, veering into the darkness of the jungle. Shouts brought the others to my side.

"It must lead somewhere," Raingo said. "The fact that it exists proves it's been used in recent years. It isn't overgrown."

An Indian pointed to a vine. It had been freshly cut—cut by a blade and not broken by some animal. A few feet

farther on, he pointed to the floor of the jungle.

The print of a bare foot stood out in the dust. It had been freshly made; the breeze hadn't had time to disturb the dust. There were men near this spot.

But where?

"I say," Raingo grinned, "shall we chance it—this path?"

"Nothing else to do. We either walk out of this mess—or into something else."

"I'll take something else!" he laughed. "We're trapped and we might as well put up some fight. We're white men."

"And we can't count on these redskins—for all the godhood they hand us!"

"Right-o, Reynolds. Lead the way."

So we pushed into the dark wall of the jungle. I led and the Englishman brought up in the rear of the Indians who toted out knapsack and bag.

I had gone a mile before I had that old uncanny feeling; I'd had it in Ybera's house while talking to the faker. Some one was watching us from the jungle screen.

CHAPTER XII. THE FRYING PAN.

BUT we saw no one, heard no human sounds. Our progress was made in silence. The heat became unbearable. I threw away my sun helmet and stripped to undershirt and trousers as did Raingo. The Indians didn't show a bead of perspiration.

The trail continued to the west, I think, and continued in good condition. I saw no more footprints, but I did pick up a jade arrowhead. At another point, we noticed where the creeping vines had been freshly cut to save the path.

When the sun was high and Raingo's wrist watch registered noon, we stopped to rest in a small clearing. I shot two

gibbering parrots and we roasted the meat over a fire the Indians kindled.

The parrots could have tasted worse. A generous salting helped but, fools that we were, it left a hellish thirst. We were so eager to get away from the lost *cenote* we hadn't had sense enough to provide for water. That was going to be a stumblingblock.

But during the afternoon's trek, I saw the Indians stop and munch on a thick juicy fruit that grew close to the ground. The skins came away, leaving their lips wet. I tried one and found it watery and sweet. Raingo and I quenched our thirst thus, taking the tip from the Indians who, talking between themselves, agreed that the white gods would get along without food.

The day wore away. Dusk came. We were still enmeshed in the network of jungle. Only the trail persisted, though I had noted before calling quits to the march that it was fading away. Had we missed some turning? Was it going to end abruptly?

More parrots sufficed for supper. The Indians brought in clusters of wild berries. But after eating we had to take notches in our belts.

"What I don't like about this stroll, old chap," Raingo said, "is the fact that we're heading west. There's less habitation there than to the east."

"The trail must lead somewhere."

"It might have a few years ago. But it's thinning out."

We huddled close to the fire and elected watches. I was to sleep till midnight; then Raingo would have his turn to rest. We weren't trusting the Indians to look out for our interests any more.

I slept soundly and dreamed plenty. Jalote wandered vaguely through the mists, confused with Carmichael and Estrado. I wondered what had happened to my side kick in a moment of waking. His little game, whatever it was, must have had a severe jolt when I dropped

from sight. He'd been counting on me for some purpose, hoping to scare me into some move with his faked death threat via the parrot feathers.

Still, I felt his warning was independent of the white San Blas's. Salvador, the white Indian, hooked up with the mob that ganged me in New Orleans, trying to get the ring. I couldn't see Carmichael tied in with Salvador's outfit. Perhaps he was on another tack. Wasn't he more interested in Mayan gold than in the more modern problem of the labor trouble on the *fincas*, the uprising?

My thoughts whirled in half dreams. Estrado, the disappointed revolutionist, used Indians to work out his racket. He was Salvador's friend. And the San Blas was known to be organizing the redskins. But I'd heard nothing about Salvador from the *caciques*; they said they didn't know him.

And I remembered what Randolph told me about J. P. Roper: The man had engineered a racket in Nicaragua, a racket similar to the one that threatened war and bloodshed in Guatemala. But Roper had chucked his game for Mayan gold. I should have thought of that before.

I found myself awake, thinking and putting two and two together. Estrado might have the racket up his sleeve, using Jalote and Salvador to line up the redskin vote. Roper's game might be more, the Mayan gold, too; and Carmichael might represent his interests.

Yet, racket, uprising or gold, the obsidian ring was the key to the trick! I was convinced of that. And thus far, I held the key. And my only use for it was to prevent an Indian war, to use it to save the lives and property of the unsuspecting white men in Central America. To hell with rackets and gold!

But unless the damn trail we followed led somewhere, I stood a swell chance

of passing out with the ring on my thumb. I could see myself—a sun-bleached skeleton—the Viper of Kukulcan adorning a bony digit. Vultures had picked me clean, leaving only the ring. Nice thoughts to have, lost in a Central American jungle!

I dozed again. Jalote stole over to my side. Her lips brushed lusciously across my own. It was a sweet dream till Yberra appeared with his bloody, battered face. "She is a woman of evil. Kill her." I heard Jalote scream as she recoiled from Yberra's gory ghost.

The scream persisted. I sat up. It was Raingo.

Beyond the light of the fire, he was thrashing about in the underbrush. The Indians held back, crying out: "*Chaib! Chaib!*"

The Englishman was in the embrace of a sinewy boa constrictor whose emerald green-and-brown spottings glowed like phosphorous in the firelight. The snake, still hanging from a low tree, was crushing Raingo in its relentless grip.

I tore a knife from an Indian and attacked the thing. Its skin was soft, but the muscles beneath were of steel. Hacking at the suspended, living rope, I managed to sever the body in two.

Raingo crashed to the ground, still held by the convulsively contracting coils. Wary of his body, I struck at the creature's head, slashing its neck to ribbons. When the convulsions subsided and the boa was quite dead, I disentangled the Englishman from the remains. He was badly bruised and suffering from shock. If rum was ever needed, it was then—and we hadn't a drop.

"I say," Raingo gasped with a weak smile when he could speak, "I thought it was a vine. I went to look at it and the bally thing grabbed me."

"Give up nature study, Raingo, and it won't happen again."

"Right-o, old boy."

POP-4

He turned in and I took the watch. The Indians were impressed by my deed. They muttered about it till I shut them up so Raingo could get some sleep. There was more walking to be done before we could safely marvel at our luck.

' In the morning, we breakfasted on some iguana—lizards the Indians said were good to eat. I didn't think so but the tart flesh was something to relish—with the aid of salt. All morning I ate the watery fruit to get the iguana taste from my mouth.

At noon, we stopped again, this time not for lunch but because the trail ended abruptly. Search as we did, we couldn't find any more of it.

An Indian, however, called attention to a newly made footprint. It was small, almost womanly. There was only one and that heightened the mystery considerably.

The feeling of being watched had persisted throughout the morning. But where were the watchers? I scanned the trees and saw nothing.

"Well, old fellow," Raingo said, "what next? Do we expire here, or return to the well for a dip? It's just a day's march."

"Search me? But I'm ready for a parrot or a lizard."

We ate. We dozed in the awful heat, still unable to accept our fate. But the word "lost" began to etch itself upon my mind. I could see no way out. The trail ended abruptly. Why?

A new and odd bird's call reached me. I asked the Indians what it was, thinking of a change from parrot meat. They listened and stared at each other. I saw terror mount in their eyes. They began to tremble.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

They shook their heads and stared as though hypnotized by a snake ready to strike. Raingo got up to move upon the bird.

Instinct spoke from me: "Don't! Sit tight!"

"I say, it's only a bird, Reynolds."

"It's something else to these redskins. Sit tight." I fingered my gun.

The bird's mate answered from behind us. I didn't like that a bit. If the guides could have blanched, they would have. Their fear was pronounced now. Then the call came from where the trail ended.

That was all. Silence settled upon the jungle again, only broken by the breeze in the treetops, little birds and gossipy parrots. Raingo got up impulsively and started back on the trail, saying that he thought he'd heard something there.

I held my gun in readiness, as did he, aroused now to the fact that something queer was happening. But nothing happened.

Raingo returned, his face haggard and white. "Reynolds, the trail's gone."

"What?"

"It's vanished. Fifty yards from here it ends as abruptly as at the other end. Only vines and underbrush. No sign of it on the floor of the jungle."

I went for a look. He was right. Those who watched us had erased the path, somehow. There was no finding it when we pressed farther eastward. Then I told the Englishman of my hunch: we'd been tailed by natives of some sort. He had the same feeling.

We sat down in a cool spot and waited for something to happen. The afternoon died a slow, hot death. I couldn't get rid of the impression that we'd been bottled up to die there in the jungle, far from the *cenote*.

Toward dusk, we finished the last cigarette and the Indians made a fire. Then I heard the peculiar bird call again.

There was something I could do. The fate of a lot of white men, women, and children depended on my gambling with the ring. Both Randolph, in New Or-

leans, and the dying Yberra, in Solola, believed that if the Viper of Kukulcan reached the right party, the uprising could be averted. It was my job to find the right party—and dying, lost in the Peten jungle, wouldn't help matters.

I stood up and shouted. The bird ceased its twittering.

"*Uinic ah Mayaa*," I shouted, "I come from Kukulcan with a message! Behold his symbol!" Repeating these words in Quiche and my fragmentary Mayan, I waved the ring and lighted it with a flaming stick taken from the fire.

Raingo and the Indians thought I'd gone mad. I was addressing the jungle at large, the oncoming night. And I wondered if I *were* mad. Maybe the bird call was real after all—not man-made as we suspected. But the erasing of the trail gave me hope.

If we were being watched, my words were heard. But were they understood? Lord knows what the dialect in these parts was! My reply was the same, awful silence. And swift nightfall.

Raingo gave up all hope of escape. He was for pushing to the east and the *cenote* and trying to make a go of life there till some flying archæologist happened along. Several plane expeditions, he'd heard, were on the make. Failing to reach the well, we could always shoot ourselves.

It seemed the wisest plan. Our plunge into the jungle had been foolish in the first place. But human nature insisted that we head for some place, and the trail seemed hopeful at first.

A twig cracked. Raingo raised his gun. I blinked.

A little man stood at the edge of the firelight. In his hand, limp at his side, I recognized a *hulche*, the ancient Mayan throwing stick used to hurl arrows and darts. His features, while resembling our guides', were more primitive. Scant flesh clung to his small bones.

"Don't shoot!" I whispered to

Raingo. "The stick at his side means he comes in peace!"

"He's a weird-looking beggar!"

I got up and the native backed away from me, quaking. He was scared stiff and cast several long glances into the jungle's black screen. I sensed that his friends were lurking there, their *hulches* in position, ready to let arrows fly if we moved to harm this messenger.

The man who appeared out of the night began to ramble in a thick voice. His words sounded Japanesy—but so does the Mayan language. I slowed him down and gathered from odd words that he wanted to see my hand. I gave him a pound of salt; his eyes bulged with greed.

I flashed the obsidian ring on him. He took one look and shrieked at the jungle wall. Before I could say "Herbert Hoover," our clearing was fringed with a hundred or more natives, all eyes intent upon the Viper of Kukulcan. I let them all have a good look.

The brave messenger knelt and the others took the cue from him. I was on top again. These jungle people believed in the ring of the legends. Why and how were matters I couldn't be bothered with then. It was enough that the ring meant something to them.

"I seek Bat Buul!" I announced. "Take me to him!"

That was easy enough to say but hard to make them understand. But they finally did. Another bag of salt helped matters. Raingo was reluctant to follow them into the jungle—but I was beginning to believe in the magic properties of the ring myself. So off we trekked, surrounded by the gliding, silent bodies of the jungle people.

About half a mile from the trail end, we debouched into a clearing. The heavens were starry, and looming against their diamond points was a tall, flat mound, the upper part sprouting jungle trees like a thorny crown. But the sides of the mound, as seen from the

ground, were massive walls of masonry. I thought I glimpsed carvings.

We cut around a deep, black pit which I took to be another *cenote*, and headed for the heart of the mound. Was this the Temple of the Cow, lost in the jungle by an early American civilization? Now we could make out terraced floors, square-cut doors and bas-relief carvings lighted by moving torches. It was like something I'd seen in Mayan illustrations.

But as we reached a huge door which spewed out a red light, restraining hands were held out. We halted. Several of the little men went into the red glow.

There was a long wait. I wished I had a cigarette.

Raingo whispered: "The world's cup of coffee has certainly given us a bit of wear and tear, what?"

"I'll say so!"

Then a shadow was cast in the red glow and a voice called out: "Who seeks the *Ah Kin*, Bat Buul, Keeper of the Fires of the Great Kukulcan!"

"*Uinic ah Kukulcan!*" I replied, identifying ourselves as that god's henchmen. This was no time to stop pretending. Their superstition was our best bet to play on.

"Do you come with his symbol?" This in good Quiche from the invisible bass throat.

"I do."

"The sacred feathered serpent?"

"The Viper of Kukulcan."

"And what is its shape, messenger?"

"It is a ring of stone."

There were mutterings in the doorway and an ecstatic cry. A form detached itself from the shadow's side and, silhouetted against the fiery light, we beheld a woman. Her voice was one I'd never forget.

"Welcome to the Temple of the Cow, Señor Reynolds!" It was soft, seductive Spanish—Jalote's. Her laughter came out to us in the darkness.

"Jalote!"

"The gods are kind, señor. I feared that the jungle claimed you. But Kukulcan has heard my prayers. You have brought us the ring."

Hell, we'd jumped from the frying pan of the jungle into the fire that was Jalote. What a break! And I'd even admitted that I had the ring on me.

Where was Bat Buul? My date was with him. I asked Jalote and the men where he was.

She answered: "I speak for Bat Buul. You can give me the ring!"

"Not if I can help it!" I turned and whispered to the Englishman: "Don't let them get your rod! We'll fight our way out of this if we have to!"

"If we can, you mean," he laughed.

"Beware the girl. She's a rat, Raingo!"

"But a stunning figure, what?"

"Keep your mind on business, man. A lot of human lives are at stake."

"Right-o, Reynolds!"

CHAPTER XIII. ORDEAL BY LEAD.

JALOTE rapped out orders right and left. The hordes of squat men increased; many brought torches, lighting up the face of the ruined temple. The girl, her skin covered with a glowing paint—something to impress the redskins, I guess—remained in the doorway. I could hear the invisible voice muttering to her from the inner chamber.

"Sit tight," I said to Raingo. "So long as the little fellows think we're from their gods, we've a chance. It's bluff or curtains for us."

"I say, if they believed in that ring once, they may believe a second time."

"Here's hoping!"

I gathered that Jalote was hemming us in with her boys. She seemed to be telling them to do something they didn't want to do. But they surrounded us several hundred strong. It was weird,

unreal—these primitives torn between loyalty to the girl and fear of us who held a sacred symbol.

At length, Jalote said: "Señor Reynolds, I'll take the ring to Bat Buul. Give it to me."

"Señorita, I prefer to present it in person."

"Must I take it from you, señor?"

"Don't try if you value your health, Jalote. We're covering you with our guns!" I brought mine up, but Raingo wavered.

She laughed at me shrilly. Her next words were a command to the Indians. A murmur ran through them like a shower breeze.

Her voice rose in the old tongue: "Men of *Mayaa*, seize these false gods. They come with lies. Kukulcan's wrath will be upon you if you listen to them. Seize them! Bind their arms! They are false gods!"

Puzzled, hostile faces were turned on us. Our two *rio* Indians prayed to gods of their own. They saw death in those torch-lit eyes.

My ten cents' worth of Mayan wouldn't do. I risked Quiche. "Men of *Mayaa*, no woman can speak for the gods. We come from Kukulcan—with his symbol."

Silence! Heads revolved on broad shoulders, from me to Jalote, from her back to me. It was known to all that I wore the obsidian Viper. The men who led us from the jungle had reported as much. Which of us, they wondered, spoke the truth?

Jalote uttered an hysterical shriek to command attention. Her curved arm shot high over her head and she held her hand close to a torch. I spied a ring upon a delicate finger.

"Here is the Viper of Kukulcan—on his bride's finger!" she cried. "There is but one symbol!"

What a game? The girl was smart! Failing to get my ring, she'd gotten one of her own—probably had a copy made.

From where I stood, the ring she wore looked like the one intrusted to me.

So it was to be ring against ring!

Stepping close to a torch, I shot my fist holding the Viper into the light.

"Behold, men of *Mayaa!* The true sign of Quetzalcoatl—who is the warrior-god, Kukulcan!"

A gasp rolled like a wave over their heads. Two rings! The legends told of only one! The men fell back. This was too much for their primitive brains.

Several daring fingers reached out to touch my ring. Hands ran over my body, fumbling at the other gun in the armpit holster. For a moment, I thought they were going to pinion me.

"It is not the true ring!" Jalote screamed at me. "White men made his ring!"

I used the same dodge. "She speaks with a woman's cunning, *uinic*. Her ring, like her words, is false. The gods do not speak through women's lips."

What I said had logic. Jalote was biting off too much. The redskins would sooner believe a man than a woman. They fell away from us and jabbered at her.

Crack!

The shot came from inside the temple. The lead smacked against my armpit gun and ricocheted over my shoulder, drawing blood. I had all I could do not to yell with surprise. Two inches to the right and my heart would have been lead-clogged!

A giant appeared behind Jalote. It was Salvidar, nude save for a ceremonial apron. His white, apelike body was scarlet in the torchlight.

I heard a Quiche voice cry out: "He tried to kill a god!"

That was my cue. I bared my chest and revealed the scratch, a trickle of blood running from the heart upward.

"He who holds the Viper of Kukulcan," I cried, "is invulnerable against man-made death!"

The little men inspected my wound.

The blood was wiped away and the scratch was nothing. They could find no bullet hole.

"It touched my heart," I said, "but, you see, it did no harm."

They believed, swallowing that guff—hook, line, and sinker. I heard some say that Salvidar, whom they called "Itzamna," was expert with the "stick that spat fire." Still, he could not harm me. They had beheld a miracle. I still lived.

Jalote and Salvidar were annoyed. They'd overplayed their hand and given me a trick. The Indians were sold on the magic of my ring—also on my salt bounty. I thanked the Irish luck of my great-grandfather.

I was tempted to call upon the redskins to seize Jalote and Salvidar. But that might weaken my hand. They were Indians and might have some other hold over these primitives.

"Where is Bat Buul?" I insisted. "I am come to deal with him."

Before Jalote could answer, a Quiche voice called out: "He is gone, O messenger. The woman speaks for him, but——"

Jalote snapped out a few words. I heard a cry of pain from the direction of the Quiche. Somebody had slugged or knifed him. I put two and two together and decided that Jalote had done away with the high priest of the temple. The Quiche had sounded suspicious of her, and wanted to tell me that. But would she dare to kill the *Ah Kin?* I doubted if she'd go that far.

It was up to me to make peace for the night and find a few friendly redskins to pump for information.

"We are weary," I said to the crowd. "Our trip was long. Give us beds, and when the sun is high I will seek Bat Buul once more."

Jalote offered no resistance. The torchbearers led us four to a chamber in the side of the temple designated

by her. She and Salvidar went back into the chamber of the red glow.

Our room was a bare hole on the second terrace of the mound. The walls bore traces of Mayan glyphs and drawings, but the weather had ruined most of them.

"Go in peace," I said to the guides after taking torches to light the room. "Ah Puch watches over us."

"Ah Puch!" Their teeth chattered on hearing the name of their old god of death. "Ah Puch!" They scrambled to clear away from the terrace.

Raingo hadn't understood much of what I'd been saying. So I gave him the low-down up to the minute. He was impressed.

"You think they've got the old priest sewed up, eh?"

"Sure. But there is another matter. Jalote and her white Indian boy friend are aces high here. We've got to watch our step."

Food, heaps of it, was brought to us. We tried it on the two Indians and, when it didn't affect them, we ate, too—greedily. It was better than a dinner at the Ritz, that jungle meal! We had two-day-old appetites to satisfy.

I thought of taking a prowl but when I stuck my head outside the door, an arrow, thrown by a *hulche*, smashed itself against the masonry beside my body. That meant Jalote's crowd was watching us. And now that the torches were gone, the jungle darkness was inscrutable.

We made up watches and snoozed. I was so sleepy I had no time to dream.

The chatter of life about the temple awakened me. Raingo was admiring himself in a piece of shiny metal he'd found wedged in a crevice. It looked like an old breast plate but glistened like a mirror.

Breakfast was served. When the Indians lived through it, we ate.

Then Jalote, alone, wearing a white *huipil*, called on us. She wanted to talk

to me—in private—so we went on the terrace. An emerald plain of jungle top was spread about us under the bluest sky imaginable. The bronze people went about their business in the village to the north of the temple.

"Señor Reynolds," she said sadly, "you have beaten me. I come to you for help—and for my life."

Her attempt to be guileless was childish. A fool could see through her mock fear. I let her talk.

"We gambled and we lost. You hold the sacred ring, señor. The Indians believe in you. Spare my life—and that of Salvidar."

"What was your game?"

"If I tell our secret, you must promise to spare us, señor."

"*Bueno*, I do." I was fishing.

"There is gold in this temple—much gold. The Viper of Kukulcan is the key to it. These Indians are guarding the treasure, for it is sacred to them."

This was another story. She said nothing about the uprising, the gathering of the Indians on the Rio Cache. I was positive she was behind that—with Salvidar's help. Hadn't he been organizing the redskins to free themselves of white rule? She didn't need all the Indians in Guatemala to steal Mayan gold.

"And where is the gold?" I asked.

Her eyes betrayed her eagerness. "Spare us, Señor Reynolds—and we share it." She was playing now on the white man's greed for the yellow stuff. But she'd picked the wrong sucker. Still, I was anxious to know what was on her mind.

"*Bueno!* Where's the gold?" I feigned interest in the stuff. She thought she had me.

"In a chamber, deep inside the temple. Come with me; I'll show you, señor. You will be the richest man in the world!"

That was it. A trap, deep in the temple!

"I'll go with you—when I see Bat Buul first!"

My face must have given me away. She was suddenly livid with rage and hatred. Now she knew I'd been playing with her—that her lure wasn't as overpowering as she'd thought. And she'd admitted a weakness in her hand to me. Her ring was a fake.

No sooner had Jalote left me than a group of the men appeared on the terrace with greetings. One of them carried a *caluac* and wore an apron of office. He came to the point. The Indians were divided on the matter of the rings. Some believed we came to steal the sacred gold, others, that we were Kukulcan's messengers.

I hadn't believed Jalote on the gold. Now I knew there was another angle to these plottings and counterplottings—Mayan treasure.

"*Ahoni*, the rings must be tested," the spokesman said.

"How?"

"We have planned it. Come below."

I felt squeamish. Something was up. A test was the last thing I wanted for the damn ring. Superstition isn't in me. My escape from Salvidar's pot shot was a break. They didn't come in pairs, such breaks.

But I had to agree to go through with a test, whatever it was. These redskins had to be won over. Before the spokesman left, I grabbed his arm.

"Where is Bat Buul?"

He shook his head sadly. Bat Buul was the *Ah Kin* of the Temple of the Cow. The day Jalote and Salvidar arrived in a huge *quetzal*, the man of the gods vanished. The white Indian who called himself "Itzamna" said he came to rule in his place. The people were troubled.

"If you are a god," he said to me suspiciously, "you must know where Bat Buul is. He can only be with the gods, or in the land of the alive. The gods know all."

That tipped me. My asking for Bat Buul made them doubt me and my ring. Being a god, I was supposed to know everything. This test would make or break us.

When Raingo started down from the terrace with me, the Indians explained that I was to go below alone. We could see two lines of Mayas below, running from what looked like a *cenote* to the jungle wall. Silence hung over the crowd.

"I'll stay and watch," Raingo said. He winked and patted his gun.

I went to those who awaited me. Salvidar was not in sight, but Jalote, her eyes flashing at me, stood by. A revolver hung from her hand.

The spokesman explained the test. Jalote and I wore rings that carried magic. One of them held Kukulcan's blessings. We would first demonstrate our marksmanship with the "sticks that spat fire," then we would use those sticks on each other.

The true Viper of Kukulcan protected the owner from death. The one who survived this ordeal by lead possessed the real ring. It was simple—and deadly.

I shouted the news to Raingo on the terrace lest he think my life was menaced and start shooting. He told me to plug the woman and have done with the mess.

Marksmanship came first. An earthen jug was set upon a rock, between the lines of watchers, twenty yards away. I potted it easily. Another was set. Jalote did likewise. I was surprised she shot so well, so easily; her gun came up quickly, there was a *bang* and the jug was shattered.

Then we faced each other, The sun was in my eyes.

Jalote's body tensed beneath her cotton *huipil*. She presented an easy mark.

The man with the *caluac* tapped me. I was to fire first.

It was her life or mine? Yberra

called her a creature of evil, warned me to kill her on sight. His dying words rang in my ears. Then I remembered her lips—at Père Babouche's—in the hut near Solola!

She was my enemy—yet she was a woman!

Hard boiled as I was, I felt unnerved. She stood down the Indian-lined avenue, meeting my gaze unflinchingly. Perhaps she counted on my chivalry, perhaps on her animal luck. Still, the world was too big for both of us, in the Peten. While I lived, my ring nullified the powers of her own. She seemed to welcome death rather than defeat in this game she was playing to crush the whites in Central America and reestablish the Mayan empire.

The spokesman commanded me to fire.

I took aim. What was her life weighed against those of white people who'd suffer in an uprising? It was my duty to kill her—yet I wondered if I could. My eye ran down the barrel. She smiled, flashing her teeth, and threw out her arms to welcome my bullet.

My finger tightened on the trigger. A distant hum reached my ears. Sounded like a plane.

Again I was told to fire.

Damn it, I couldn't kill her! I sent the hot lead past her ear.

Raingo cursed above me. Jalote laughed. The Indians filled the air with a buzz of wonder. Hell, I'd jeopardize the lives of the four of us by being chicken-hearted—the lives of thousands menaced by an Indian war!

Now it was Jalote's turn to plug me.

I faced her squarely. The sound of the plane was nearer. But no one paid any attention to it. The game was up for me.

I read as much in the girl's sparkling eyes. She had me where she wanted me. She didn't believe in ring magic. She didn't know the meaning of mercy.

The mouth of her gun winked at me. The command to shoot was given. I

watched her finger on the trigger, trying to grin. A blot of white light danced over her *huipil*. I followed it up to her face.

There was an explosion!

CHAPTER XIV. INTO THE WELL.

HER bullet seared the tip of my ear. She'd missed me, too—and I was an easy mark! The Indians were bewildered. The test had failed. For them, both stone rings were loaded with magic. Jalote cried out with surprise when she saw me standing before her, untouched. Raingo was laughing like a fool on the terrace.

And Jalote saved the day! She advanced toward me and fell upon her knees. I read mortal terror in her eyes. Her fingers reached for the ring I wore and she carried it to her lips humbly. Then she stripped off her ring and gave it to me.

She herself was sold on the magic of the thing I had on my finger. She thought she could kill me and now believed that the ring had saved me.

The Indians clamored over her act. She had bowed to me. I was headman now. They wanted her blood for duping them.

Salvidar was kicked out of the temple room where he cowered, witnessing the ordeal. None called him "Itzamna" or took stock in him now.

I waved the redskins aside and took Jalote up to the terrace with me. Raingo was full of chuckles, but I dragged the girl past him. Alone in the room assigned to my crowd, I went at her.

"From now on, I call the dance tune," I said. "Tell me the truth or I'll turn you over to the Indians as a false god—you and Salvidar!"

Her eyes widened. "But what can I tell you—a god!"

"The truth. I'll test your loyalty by it—for if you lie, I'll know it."

"Kill me, but don't give me to the Indians. Their tortures are horrible, señor."

"You're here to start an uprising, not to seek gold!"

"That is true."

"You want to drive the white man from *Mayaa* and use his wealth for your own?"

She nodded.

"You want to control the coffee *fincas*, all the white man's lands?"

"No, I do not want that."

"Then who does?"

She bit her lip and stared shrewdly. "I do not know."

She was lying, but I had to be careful. My hand wasn't any too strong. I had two pair, but I needed a full house to win the pot. "Where is Bat Buul?"

Her terror evaporated and triumph lighted her face. Her head went high, proudly. "Isn't he with the gods, señor?"

I wanted to kick myself. Curiosity trapped me, spoiled the miracle of the ordeal. Her voice told me that. No longer did she believe I was a god. I fished too hard for information. Now I wished I'd killed her. Her genuine fear had made me too sure of myself, and I tipped my empty hand to her.

A moment ago she'd have been my slave; now she was hep to me. Once more, she was the enemy.

I summoned our two Indians and told them to keep her in the room. At least I could hold her prisoner, shut her tongue off, till I'd busted up the uprising.

Raingo met me outside the door.

"Why didn't you pot her, old man, when you had the chance?" he asked.

I grunted, worried about other things.

"I say, don't put too much faith in the Viper's magic, Reynolds."

"Huh? I'm not. It was luck that she missed me."

"Luck, hell! It was Raingo!"

"How come?"

"Didn't you notice a dancing sun-beam?"

I remembered the white spot that ran from her *huijil* to her face just as her finger pressed the trigger. Raingo produced the shiny breastplate he'd found during the night.

"I say, didn't you ever get teacher's goat at school, using a mirror to flash sun into her eyes?"

"Well, I'll be damned!" He'd saved my life and I told him as much.

"Forget it. We're quits now," he laughed. "You got me away from the boa and I got you away from the wench."

Other matters claimed our attention. The plane? What had become of it. I'd heard it during the ordeal; now it had vanished. Raingo admitted seeing one close by, but he was too busy setting the sun in Jalote's eyes at the crucial moment to follow the flight.

I was puzzled about that plane, but I decided to find out where Jalote's machine was. Hadn't a redskin said she and Salvidar arrived in a *quetzal*—or bird.

Raingo and I went among the Indians to make a tour of inspection. We ordered Salvidar kept under guard. But when we entered the temple, via the door where we saw Jalote the night before, we found a small, empty room like the one we occupied on the upper terrace. A wooden panel, hooked on the other side, barred further passage.

Rather than demand free run of the place, we left the ruined mound and drifted through the village. Women were grinding maize in their *metates*, children were playing naked in the streets and the men watched us eagerly as we passed. None followed us.

We reached the edge of the well—a smaller one than where we crashed the amphibian, but one as deep. Steep, precipitous walls fell a hundred or more feet into the green waters below. On one side, where a long avenue led from

the temple, there was a tumble-down ruin with a stone platform on the rim of the hole.

A look at this building revealed it to be the old altar to the well god, whoever he was—Yum Chac, the Sender of Rain, probably. My book reading came in handy. At Chi-Chen-Itza, there was a similar altar and platform on the *cenote* rim. From there, the most beautiful girl in all *Mayaa* was sacrificed to Yum Chac—was hurled into the well to be his bride, her body shattered by the fall and her bones strewn on the *cenote* floor, mute testimony of pagan ritual.

I wondered if this lost Mayan tribe persisted in such practices—offered human sacrifice to buy rain from the heavens.

The well was deserted. No drawers of water came to it, though we caught sight of a long flight of steps winding around two sides from the rim to a platform at the water's edge. Raingo and I decided to start back to the temple when a flutter of white darted through the greenery on the opposite side. It was a running woman.

We watched from a hidden spot.

It was Jalote. She reached the stair head, looked about to see if she was followed, and then took the descent two steps at a time. Somehow, she'd gotten out of the room where I'd imprisoned her. But what was she up to now, running down a flight of steps that led nowhere save to the water?

She sprang upon the platform. Her eyes scanned the rim.

"Oh, I say!" Raingo gasped.

Jalote poised herself on the edge of the platform and dived in. Her lithe body arched through the sunlight, cleft the green water and sank. For an instant she rose, then dived again, and from our high position we could see her swimming under water toward the sheer wall twenty feet away from the platform.

We saw her and then we didn't.

Without rising to the surface or changing her course straight into the submerged wall, she vanished.

"I'll be blowed!" Raingo muttered. "She's gone!"

"Yeah, through an under-water hole, I'll lay you ten to one on that!"

"But why?"

"Maybe these limestone walls are honeycombed with natural tunnels—or passages cut by the old-timers. They make swell hiding places. There's a well in Yucatan with an under-water door to a cavern."

I noted the location of the girl's disappearance as best I could. It was in the wall nearest the temple, almost directly under the altar to the *cenote's* god. Possibly an underground room connected with the gizzards of the Temple of the Cow.

On our way back to the mound, I noticed a thin thread of cloud seeping from the vegetation on top of the temple. Smoke! There was a fire of some sort inside.

A fire inside the temple! The old Mayans worshiped the sun and fire. Perhaps there was a hidden altar. But I wasn't curious about going deep into the temple. The out of doors gave me more elbow room for fighting.

A girl vanished into the well, a fire in the temple—there was nothing mysterious about these facts. I had an explanation at hand, even if it wasn't the right one. But my mind went back to the missing Bat Buul.

I figured he was the keeper of the flame his primitive little men worshiped. He was sacred for he tended Kukulcan's fires. Jalote was a lawless wench, but she bowed before the power of a god—so long as she believed in him. I'd had a sample of that.

Thus I reasoned: Jalote and Salvidar appropriated the Temple of the Cow for their own ends. They were trading on old *Mayaa*, on pagan beliefs, to make their uprising a success. Indians from

the south were headed for the temple to be blessed by the warrior-god before they set about sweeping Central America clean of white skin.

Jalote was lawless, but she was superstitious. Therefore, I told myself, she didn't dare kill Bat Buul. The wrath of the gods might curse her plan if she did that. Instead, she had him trussed up somewhere till she'd won the throw of the dice for an empire.

He was inside the temple somewhere, or beneath it. He could be reached from the jungle door, or via the passage in the waters of the well.

If that were true, the girl had gone to the high priest. She was wise to me. Some new angle was on the make. Maybe she'd use Bat Buul against us. Still, I couldn't forget that Julio Yberra said the old priest would help me—would know how to use the ring.

And that meant but one thing: Bat Buul was for peace with the white man. He'd never O. K. an uprising that meant bloodshed. He was reconciled to the fate of his race—would do his damndest to preserve peace between redskin and white man.

What I did or said wouldn't hold water without Bat Buul's O. K. He was the man these Mayas looked up to, no matter how I impressed them with my magic. I had to reach the high priest.

As we neared the temple, we saw the village assembled in front of the main door. Salvidar was free of his guards, haranguing the men. I didn't like that picture one bit. It looked like trouble.

We were seen and the crowd moved toward us, reverence and friendliness gone from their faces. They eddied about us like rivulets of water and closed in a circle. Their quiet stare was very uncomfortable.

"False gods!" a voice shouted. I couldn't understand Salvidar's lingo, but it sounded important. The redskins were soaking in every word. I gathered it didn't mean beer and skittles for us.

The spokesman who presided at the ordeal came up. "*Ahoni*, how can you be gods and still lose life?"

I didn't get the drift.

"The red men who came with you are dead."

I got that all right! Jalote had probably polished them off. And the spokesman said as much. They were found in the chamber with their hearts pierced, a knife still in one of them. The girl must have had the weapon hidden on her person.

Salvidar plowed through the crowd. He faced us, his stony face only lighted by burning, hateful eyes. "They lie to us, men of *Mayaa*." An accusing finger was leveled at me. "His ring is false. Destroy them. Itzamna commands it—or his wrath shall be upon you."

Itzamna demanded the death of Kukulcan's messengers. That bewildered the men. I held the Viper on my finger for them to see and respect. Some one spat upon it.

"How is Itzamna greater than Kukulcan?" I asked. "Beware the anger of Kukulcan, whose fires grow faint on your altar."

As one man, the crowd turned its eyes to the top of the mound. We all stared at the thin spiral of smoke climbing into the skies. My crack about faint fires bothered them a little.

"If you make war on the white man," I said, "that fire dies. And with it, all *Mayaa* dies. Ah Puch will stalk through the land. That is Kukulcan's punishment!"

"Close your ears to his words!" Salvidar screamed. "He is a white man who has come to save his people with trickery. They cheated us out of our lands with tricks and lies. They made slaves of us. Their day is ended. Believe this white man and *Mayaa* dies a slow death!"

"I hold the true sign of Kukulcan," I said, tapping the obsidian ring. "The

woman Jalote bowed before it, tore from her finger a false ring. You saw that. There is to be no war with the white man."

"Our warriors are in the Cache valley!" Salvidar roared. "They await Kukulcan's blessing. Sound the *tunkuls!* Bring them here! *Mayaa* will live again when white blood goes away!"

The man with the *caluac* was wary. He shut his ears to Salvidar and asked to inspect the two rings of Kukulcan. I showed him the one on my finger and let him look at the one Jalote gave up. He noted a difference in the two but remained puzzled. There was but one ring in the old legend.

"If Bat Buul, the *Ah Kin*, would return, all would be well," the spokesman said. "Him we believe. All others confuse us."

It was a tight corner. Faith in my ring was waning. Doubt held these primitives. I decided on a long shot. "I'll bring Bat Buul to you!"

There was a murmur of surprise. Salvidar bellowed:

"Ah Puch, the god of the dead, has taken Bat Buul to his world!"

The spokesman was surprised at Salvidar's words. The San Blas wished he hadn't uttered them. I seized on the opening.

"How do you know the high priest is dead?" I asked the white Indian.

"Itzamna knows all," he said weakly. He would not meet my gaze. Was Bat Buul dead after all? I was in a fix if he'd been rubbed out.

The spokesman turned to me. "*Uinic ah Kukulcan*, find Bat Buul. We trust him. We believe him, and him only. The white red man tells us he is with Ah Puch. If that is true, you who hold the sacred ring can bring him back to us." He squinted doubtfully at me.

What a challenge! If Bat Buul was dead, I couldn't work a miracle.

A shout sounded from across the clearing. The Indian crowd broke, scat-

tering. They pointed toward the jungle wall. Two men in tropical ducks and riding boots were approaching. I'd know one of them in hell—his hairless brawn. It was Carmichael and Rufino Estrado, the half-breed.

They were fifty yards away. I yelled "Hello!" and started running toward them. "Hey, Mike!"

Carmichael fell back. "It's Reynolds!" His gun came out at the same time as Estrado's.

Crack! Bang! Crack-crack!

Tongues of red flame leaped at me. Lead whined in the air overhead. An Indian was hit and he crumpled with a scream. Raingo, cursing, came up to my side blazing at the pair from his hip.

Carmichael ratting me? I didn't get it. He'd plenty of other chances to plug me. Why now and here?

"Don't!" I yelled to the Englishman impulsively. "Follow me."

We wheeled and broke down the avenue, away from the temple. The Indians were in a hubbub of amazement. Men they thought were gods were fleeing from "sticks that spat fire."

"Kill them!" Estrado screamed in Quiche. "Kill them!"

The air was disturbed by a moaning hum. Streaks of white paralleled our path. The redskins were using their throwing sticks. Arrows sped apace with us. Raingo gasped that he'd been nicked. I heard revolvers cracking in our wake.

We reached the rim of the *cenote*. The Indians had not followed, content to pelt us with jade-tipped darts flung from their *hulches*.

We ducked behind the ruined altar and perched on the edge of the platform. The green waters seemed miles below.

"You can't!" Raingo cried in horror, guessing my plan.

"We've no choice."

"Let's show fight—and save two bullets, Reynolds."

"Not me. Our white friends bring complications to put us on the spot. "I poised myself. "Here goes! If I don't bust my——"

I dived. There was a shriek of wind in my ears. The green surface veered up toward me. My fists were tensed to smash the waters. My body was as iron-rigid as I could make it.

The green stuff hit me a wallop!

I shot down into a green coldness that grew darker and darker.

CHAPTER XV. THE GOLDEN COW.

CONSCIOUSNESS was ebbing from my numbed body when I managed to curve to the surface of the well. It seemed bottomless—and now topless. Then the waters grew lighter. I popped like a cork on the surface. The rim and the sky were centuries above.

Raingo, dazed, popped out of the well a few feet away. I swam to his side and shook sense into him. We got our breaths and swam toward the point where we'd seen Jalote disappear under water.

As yet, there were no signs of life on the rim of the *cenote*. Perhaps Carmichael and Estrado figured we were laying for them behind the altar above.

"Tail me!" I called to Raingo. "You can see easily in this water."

I dived, swimming carefully toward the limestone wall. The hole, looming large and black, was easy to spot. In I went, scratching the shirt off my back against the top of the tunnel.

Then I felt the roof of the tunnel slide upward. My lungs were bursting when my head stuck out of the water in a gloomy vault. Raingo rose up gasping beside me, and we treaded water to get our bearings and second winds.

Light seeped into the vault vaguely through pores and gaps in the limestone. How high the chamber was, I

had no idea. All I wanted was a landing place to park my weary bones. Raingo was first to spy it and we swam across to the far side and slithered on a slimy platform of rock.

The stillness was intense. We could hear the beating of our hearts and the water softly dripping from our bodies. My first thought was for the guns. We'd ruined them in the water, I figured.

"You — always—jump—into—worse—trouble!" Raingo gulped with effort. "I say—this—is—a rum—hole!"

We lay back exhausted by the dive and the swim. But we were still a good jump ahead of those who'd kill us. I didn't feel any too hopeful about our plight; but at least we could take our own lives in a pinch, and not be slaughtered like dogs by Mike and the half-breed. We were still masters of our own misery—able to end it easily and quickly.

But Jalote!

She'd gone into this hidden lagoon. And she wasn't here now. There must be a way out—a tunnel leading somewhere. Where? Back to the death waiting above, no doubt.

I didn't get Carmichael's game at all. But I saw things more clearly. There was a method in his wanting to tag along to Central America. He'd been watching me. Then the phony death warning of parrot feathers. He'd wanted to scare me away from something. What?

I sat up, slapping my knee. I was hep. That plane we'd heard during the ordeal! It brought Carmichael and Estrado; probably they'd landed in a maize field and hoofed it over to the temple. Estrado knew the way; this old temple fitted into his labor racket. What a surprise it had given them to find me there ahead of them!

They guessed that I knew something, and their first impulse was to rub me out on the spot. I wasn't useful to their racket any longer. Nor was the ring,

the Viper of Kukulcan—at least, from their point of view. They had some new and stronger card to play.

I remembered, too, that the redskins didn't *hulche* them; they reserved that honor for Raingo and me. They obeyed Estrado's command to kill us as we fled.

Raingo listened to a bit of theory; he couldn't figure out the new angle either—why Carmichael and Estrado had turned up.

We decided to move. Our eyes were accustomed to the strange gloom, and I was certain that we stood upon the only landing stage in the vault. The tunnel used by Jalote branched from where we stood. Nor was it hard to find.

It ascended gently into utter darkness, and then I tripped on high steps. Some lost people had cut them into the limestone. It was like climbing a pyramid in Egypt to mount them.

I had my water-soaked gun out, wondering if it were of any use; I didn't dare fire it lest Jalote be alarmed if she were near by. We climbed, rested for breath and climbed some more. The steps seemed to lead under the Temple of the Cow.

We crossed a level stretch and felt space about us. Raingo was making a scratching noise behind me. Then a light sputtered from his cigarette lighter; the thing worked after its bath.

We were in a huge chamber of limestone. The floor on either side of us was strewn with human bones. Skulls were neatly piled in the corners. The bones made a path from the tunnel we'd left to another.

What was this, an old Mayan burial room? A place of sacrifice? I didn't stop to ponder.

Voices echoed from the tunnel ahead of us. Raingo doused the light and, holding hands, we crept forward cautiously. The steps again. Lots of them. The voices—or voice—came nearer!

I recognized Jalote. She was being

shrill and harsh. Her words came from a room off the tunnel, and as we rounded a corner, I saw a patch of light falling upon our path.

"You must do as I say!" Jalote shouted at some one in Quiche. "You have no choice." There was a mumble of protest, soft and feeble. "*Tlapiane*, I am not afraid to kill you. Nor to torture you." She laughed wildly. "Can you say 'No' to this?"

There was a piercing wail of pain. The girl was bedeviling some one. Again and again, the wail came.

"Agree, Bat Buul, or I give you the knife once more!"

There were murmurs. Jalote gave a joyous cry. "Good! You love life more than you love the temple, Bat Buul. I knew it. Itzamna and I will come for you later. The *tunkuls* will be sounded. Men of *Mayaa* will come from the river and you shall bless them. In Kukulcan's name, you will make them warriors of old. Then they shall go forth as a scourge to men of white blood. No more will they be slaves on the plantations. The land will be ours. There will be no more white men to bleed us for our labor."

She seemed quite worked up. Obviously, Bat Buul had given in to her demands—under torture. But her act betrayed a weakness in the game she pushed. *She could not unleash the Mayan hordes upon the white man without Bat Buul's O. K.* His words were needed to pull off the uprising.

I wasn't too late. And Bat Buul, by his protests, was for peace.

"I go now, Bat Buul," Jalote said. "Soon I return with Salvidar. We shall bring you before your people. If you betray us, you die by the knife—slowly—and the men of *Mayaa* will go into battle without Kukulcan's blessings!"

Her shadow appeared in the doorway. For a moment, I feared she might return to the well by the stairs that held us. But we saw her leave the room. un-

aided by a light, and go off into the tunnel above us.

We waited a long time. She didn't come back, so we crept to the door and peered in. A torch was caught in a wall hook, lighting a heap of rags. I made out a man, bound hand and foot. His ears were bloody.

Bat Buul met us with terrified eyes. I knelt beside him while Raingo cocked an ear in the tunnel.

"*Ahtohil*, I am a friend," I said, undoing the thongs that squeezed his ankles together. "I come with a symbol of Kukulcan. The gods guided me to you."

"*Ahoni*, you are a white man?"

I let him see the Viper of Kukulcan on my finger. He stared, closed his eyes with a sigh and stared again with unbelieving gaze. "You are from the gods even if your skin is white, *ahoni*. You wear the ring of the legends. I know it well."

Then, before untying his wrists, I explained how I'd come to him from Julio Yberra whom Jalote's mob had murdered. He was impressed by the *quetzal* that crashed in the old *cenote*. Much of what I said went over his head. But I saw that he was kindly and that superstition told him I might be a god.

"This ring," I said, "is to be used for peace between the white and red brothers. Evil men who love gold would use it to cause bloodshed so they could steal the plantations. They have promised *uinic ah Mayaa* their old civilization—but they are false. They only want the gold in the plantations, the gold in coffee, sugar, bananas, the gold in the fruit of the soil."

"I know, white god," Bat Buul said. "I have heard. My people cannot make war. It means the end of *Mayaa* if they drive away the white man who will not be driven away. For centuries, the gods have frowned upon us; but, now that I see the Viper of Kukulcan,

I know they smile once more. I am your slave, white god."

Oh, boy! What a loophole! I jumped at it pronto. He was an honest old codger and I couldn't help but believe him. He was for peace.

"I will take you back to your people, Bat Buul. You will tell them the gods will curse them if they make war. Send *holpopes* to the *uinic ah Mayaa* gathered at the river, telling them to return in peace to their plantations. There must be no trouble between red man and white man."

He nodded slowly. "I do not love the white man, but I do not hate him enough to bleed my people to be rid of him. I do your bidding, Wearer of the Viper."

I freed him. He sat up and drubbed the blood from his ears which Jalote had slashed in her torture. Neither of us mentioned her.

"Come," Bat Buul said; "I lead you to the temple. And I go to thank Kukulcan for sending me a sign."

Trustingly, we followed him on up the tunnel. He was surprisingly spry for his age and his imprisonment. Perhaps Jalote looked after him, biding her time. We plunged over dark steps, twisted and turned in the limestone corridor. I wished we'd brought the torch, but the high priest had said it wasn't necessary.

A bend in the corridor, then a blast of heat, another turn and we stepped into a long room where a fire blazed at one end.

"Good God!" Raingo gasped. "Look at the walls!"

I did and I blinked. I touched them. My eyes saw rightly. The walls were of solid gold, embroidered with Mayan glyphs whose details were worn by rubbing and the heat. The floor was gold. The ceiling was gold. Even the flames seemed fabulously yellow.

The naked Indians fed the flames from a wood pile under a hole in the

roof. Closer scrutiny revealed that their eyes had been put out. These keepers of the sacred fire of the temple had been blinded to keep them from temptation; they lived in a room of gold and didn't know it!

Bat Buul bowed to the fire and then got down on his knees in front of a niche and touched his brow to the glistening floor. I peeped into the niche and beheld a crudely carved animal of gold—a cow.

Bat Buul noted my wonder and explained: "It is the beast of Kukulcan. Give me the ring."

I did. He carried it to the fire as though it were a rare egg, hooked it on a rod and stuck it into the flames. When he withdrew it, there were no signs of cracking or decomposition.

"It is the ring," he said simply, laying it at the hoof of the misshapen cow of gold. "I trust you."

I was damn glad of that. His testing the ring had made me nervous. Suppose it had cracked and fallen into the fire?

Raingo was beside himself. "I say, this room is worth more than the Bank of England."

"Forget it—till we get this job done."

"Gold—tons of it!"

"It's no good to us, Raingo. We're miles from a spendery—and at the moment, no life-insurance company'd give us a policy. Forget the gold."

Bat Buul summoned us to his side. "We go to my people now. I must be quick. Others would act without me!" He meant Jalote.

We left the chamber of the golden cow, turned up the tunnel and faced a slab of stone blocking our way. There were no hinges or knobs.

Then it moved, lifting itself slowly, I should hear a shifting of pulleys and stone weights high overhead. The *Ah Kin* had touched a secret spring.

We passed into a vaguely lighted corridor. The door did not close behind

us. The rooms we went by were treasure rooms. Gold floors winked at me, and I heard Raingo cry out in astonishment, but I warned him to say nothing. Bat Buul hadn't trusted us till he'd tested the ring; he might still have more doubts.

I figured now that we were near the top of the temple; we'd done plenty climbing. Bat Buul led us into another golden chamber, one with several doors. It was barren and cool. The old fellow seemed to be listening for something. I cocked an ear and heard nothing.

Raingo couldn't resist temptation. He pulled at a piece of gold and ripped off a glyph. The leaf was half an inch thick; the walls were gold-plated—even if not solid gold.

"It is not far to the outer world," Bat Buul said, "but I must wait. There is a woman who would make me give false prophecy. You are gods. Destroy her for me and my task will be easy."

I nodded wisely. That meant it was my cue to lay Jalote by the heels so that the high priest could do his stuff. But besides her and Salvidar, we had Carmichael and Estrado to reckon with. And they had good guns. Still, I'd come this far to make peace for the world's cup of coffee, and another scrap would—

"Stick 'em up, Buck!"

I spun around. Carmichael and Estrado were in one of the doors with torches and leveled guns. Raingo and I obeyed.

"Pretty slick," Carmichael sneered, "but not slick enough. Thought you'd cop this yellow stuff for yourself, and freeze your old buddy out."

"You crossed me up, Mike," I said quietly. "What's your end in this racket?" I nodded to Estrado's leering face.

"Same as yours, Buck. The gold! This dump is lousy with it!"

"Yeah? Think you can get away with it?"

"Sure. Estrado handles the redskins like they were kids. He's got Salvidar to tell 'em that we need the gold to finance the big war. We cart it away—and give the Indians the ha-ha."

"Sounds easy. But what about the war, Mike?"

Carmichael chuckled. "That's the redskins' bellyache, not mine. If they want to fight, let 'em. All we want is the yellow stuff."

"War means slaughter of white people, Buck."

"Yeah?" His eyes were bulging at the gold-plated walls.

"You tried to kill me to-day, Mike."

"I wasn't giving you a chance to get me, that's all. Gold makes men crazy and——"

"And splits up friends, eh?"

He sneered. "Don't get sentimental, Buck."

"Believe me, I can't—and won't. You knew in New Orleans that Estrado's mob was after gold, didn't you? You didn't put me wise."

"I thought you knew and were holding out on me."

I laughed and moved toward him, crossing in front of Raingo. It was a chance for the Englishman to act—and he sure did. His hands came down, he got his rod and blazed at Estrado.

The *ladino* bounced back into the doorway as I threw myself upon Carmichael's tonnage. We crashed to the floor together. Raingo went out after Estrado.

My partner, well fed, well rested, in the pink of condition, was a match for me—jungle worn, hungry and muscle weary. I felt my own weakness in his grip, but I fought with all I had in me. We locked arms and he tried to crush the wind out of me by rolling on top and thumping his body against mine.

I wiggled free but couldn't tear the gun from his fingers; it was all I could do to keep him from poking it into my

flesh and letting her rip! I felt as puny as a frog tackling a gorilla.

His gun hand flashed under my face; I sank my teeth in his wrist. With an oath, he dropped the gun and battered my mouth. Then we both dived for the gun. I fell on it and he on top of me, closing his fingers over my windpipe.

The living breath was choked off; exertion had emptied my lungs, and I couldn't get an ounce of ozone. My eyes bulged and my tongue fanned the air for a morsel. Carmichael was relentless.

He screamed and his grasp slackened enough to let me slump free. As I turned, I saw him batter Bat Buul who had dug at him with sharp finger nails. Then like a rhino gone mad, Carmichael hurled himself at me.

I used his own rod on him.

CHAPTER XVI. GUNS AND TUNKULS!

CARMICHAEL, with little uncertain steps, backed to the golden wall and leaned against it. His huge, fat hands clasped his stomach while he stared at me with blinking eyes and open mouth.

"Buck—you—you got me!"

"Damn right I did, you rat!"

"Buck—it's curtains—for me!" He bit his lip and slumped to the yellow floor. He wasn't frightened. He'd gambled for gold and life, and he wasn't whimpering now. But I couldn't forgive him for crossing me up.

Bat Buul watched us with veiled eyes. I wondered what had happened to Raingo. The temple was heavy with quiet.

"Buck—swear you didn't know—about this temple." Carmichael looked up at me, tensing his muscles to hold life in his punctured carcass.

"Yberra was the first to tell me about it. And I didn't think you ratted me till I got wise to the parrot-feather

warning. I didn't get your game, so I dropped you overboard, Mike. That's all."

"You didn't know the ring was the key to this gold—the jade in the other rooms?"

"Nope. Nor am I interested now. My job is to prevent an uprising. White men in Central America are in danger of a sudden massacre. To hell with the yellow stuff!"

He moaned. "God, I had you wrong. I was sure you were using the ring when I saw you to-day. I was crazy, I guess. I wanted the gold, too. Estrado and Roper promised—me—a cut!"

I felt easier. "So Roper is behind it, after all?"

"He's here. We came by plane from Antigua." He coughed. "Buck—it'll be easier—for me to go—if you say—everything's O. K. between us."

There was no doubt he was done for. I'd emptied the clip into him. And as I looked down at him, he wasn't the guy who turned rat for gold—but Big Mike, the fellow I saved from the mob back on Boul' Mich'. He was my war buddy.

"Sure. It's all O. K. now."

"Go'd makes men nutty, Buck. That's what it did to me. But if you can break from here—the plane is—in a maize field—about a mile to the north. There's a jungle trail. The take-off is easy."

"Where's Roper? How did you hook with him?"

"He's—he's with Salvidar. He reached me in New Orleans—the time you sent me to get a line on him. Five grand for myself. I was a fool—but he said you knew about the gold—would go after it—if you got wise to the use of the ring. When you held out on me—I believed him. I tipped him that we were sailing on the *Vargas*. I searched your bags. And I used the parrot feathers to throw you off sus-

pecting me, Buck. You looked at me so funny——"

"Then Roper wants this gold and jade. He's staging the uprising so he can get at the gold—to finance the red-skin war?"

"That's it. The plantation racket could never go. The marines'd be in here in a jiffy. The uprising was sales talk to fool the Mayan tribes. Buck, be careful. Salvidar is crossing Roper and Estrado. He thinks he can put over the uprising. The girl sold him on that."

"How come?"

He fought for breath and life. "Salvidar won't give up the gold now. And Roper is helpless without the trick ring. He needs it to kid the redskins."

"The ring is safe, Mike."

"Good! But you're not. Roper never dreamed you'd get here. We thought you croaked in the well. But now Estrado's reached him, I guess. He'll not let you out of the temple—alive. He'll torture the ring's hiding place out of you! You've seen his treasure house. You can't live—to tell!"

"Too late. Bat Buul has the ring. He's ready to call off the war. These redskins here obey him. As for the gold, I don't want it."

Carmichael flattened out. "To hell with rings and redskins and gold! I'm set—to go. Good luck, Buck. I deserved this——"

He did not speak again.

Raingo came back to the room. "The half-breed got away. But say, old chap, I've seen rooms filled with jade, piles of it. There's a fortune in this temple, Reynolds."

"Stow it! We've got to get Bat Buul to his people, before we're rubbed out." I explained Carmichael's confession. "You see, we stand between two fires. Roper and Estrado want the gold. Salvidar and Jalote mean to go on the uprising, to establish a Mayan empire."

Raingo grew impatient. "You think more about stopping this damn war than helping yourself to the gold——"

"Listen, Raingo," I cracked at him, "Carmichael thought more of the gold than the white lives at stake. Look at him now. Gold is no good to him now!"

He worried me. The yellow stuff was turning his head the way it turned Mike's. I had to count on Raingo. I needed his help.

"Help me now, Raingo. We'll settle this uprising business and get away with our hides. There's a plane a mile to the north. Then you can come back and help yourself."

"That's an idea!" He was pacified. "We'll need Bat Buul to lead the way. This bally temple is a labyrinth of halls and rooms, all lined with gold, some inlaid with jade. It's like *Ali Baba's* cave!"

I told Bat Buul what was what. The news left him unperturbed. "Come; I take you to my people, *ahoni*. The gods protect us."

I wasn't so sure about that, but we followed him. The way grew dark. Night was hovering outside. We crossed the house of gold and came to a large chamber. Bat Buul unhooked and unbolted a heavy wooden panel giving on a terrace.

We crept out cautiously. Below us in the temple clearing, the Mayan people were gathered. From the temple door, Jalote was addressing them. We listened, watching the faces bathed in the twilight glow.

"The sun sets!" Jalote cried. "It is the last day of slavery. The false gods are dead. I will lead you to victory. I am the Bride of Kukulcan. *Mayaa* shall return. Sound the *tunkuls*. Call the tribes from the river. Itzamna will bless them—will send them forth to kill the white man."

A voice interrupted her. "Where is the *Ah Kin*, Bat Buul?"

"The false gods with the false ring took him to Ah Puch," Jalote replied fiercely. "Itzamna is your *Ah Kin* now!"

"Let him bring back Bat Buul!" voices shouted. "We obey Bat Buul!" "You obey Itzamna!" Salvidar boomed, striding into view. "I am your god!" The white Indian seemed to impress them. But some still clamored for Bat Buul.

"Sound the *tunkuls*!" Jalote shrieked as though possessed with a hundred devils. "Call the tribes for war!"

"Sound the *tunkuls*!" Salvidar commanded. "Now I go to speak with Kukulcan. Let the *ahtohils* come with me."

Now was the time for Bat Buul to make his appearance here on the terrace above them. It would have the effect of a miracle. I turned to tell him—but he was gone. Raingo, as intent as I was upon the scene below, hadn't seen him leave us.

We ran back into the room. He wasn't there. I shouted his name. There was no reply. We lost ourselves in the maze, trying to find him.

Then I heard his voice far away. It took some time to follow him, to find him. He was at a stairhead leading to the ground floor.

"I was going to my people," he said simply. "Jalote's words have told me much. I shall deal with her."

There was a murmur from the stairway. Men were passing along a corridor under us. Bat Buul cautioned silence and then led us to another flight of steps.

We descended into darkness. I heard Bat Buul fumbling at the wall. A moment later, he had removed a covering over a wide hole and we were looking into a torch-lit chamber of jade—as if from inside the mouth of some monster whose jagged teeth were silhouetted against the light.

Salvidar, smeared with a phosphor-

escent paint, came before the mouth that hid us. The Indians gathered behind him, their bronze bodies seeming black against the soft jade walls. They knelt and watched him. I saw Jalote steal up to Salvidar's side.

The two of them bowed to the monster and its huge teeth. They were up to some hocus-pocus, I gathered.

Then a dull booming noise from outside. It grew louder and faster. The air was filled with the rumbling of drums.

Salvidar was being obeyed. The Indians were beating the *tunkuls*. The war drums were summoning the tribes massed at the Rio Cache.

"O Kukulcan," Salvidar intoned in basso profundo, "your people will strike the blow for freedom. They come for your blessings." He spoke Quiche rapidly. I missed a lot of his guff. "It is the time for victory?"

He seemed to be listening for an answer. Then he turned to the awe-struck Indians kneeling behind him. "Kukulcan spoke. He will bless us, *ahtohils*. The gods are with us."

Bat Buul spoke up from the darkness beside me. His voice was sepulchral. "Kukulcan waits. There must be a sacrifice."

Salvidar and Jalote almost dropped dead with fright. They gaped into the maw that held us. I was onto the gag now. The room we were hidden in was behind some sort of monster idol. In the old days the priests brought the people into the jade room, and others, secreted behind the mouth, spoke. The people, simple and superstitious, thought they were listening to Kukulcan himself.

"Let Jalote advance to my lips!" Bat Buul went on.

The girl hesitated. Two Indians got up and thrust her forward.

"The woman Jalote pleases me," Bat Buul said. "Let her be my bride."

Jalote screamed in terror.

Bat Buul boomed on: "Let her be cast into the sacred well. I shall receive her. Then Bat Buul will return to you and give you my word. Silence the *tunkuls* till the sacrifice—the wedding of Kukulcan and Jalote."

An Indian said: "Kukulcan speaks to us. I heard it all."

Another ventured: "It is the voice of Bat Buul, I think."

With a snarl of rage, Salvidar sprang away from the opening. A moment later he returned with gun in hand. He blazed away at us, through the monster mouth. Bat Buul fell heavily against me.

The Indians scattered from the room. Jalote scampered after them with Salvidar, shrieking. Raingo fired at them, but I stopped him. No use spoiling the bluff set in motion by the wily old high priest. Besides, Bat Buul was very still at my feet.

Raingo climbed through the mouth into the jade room. I followed, dragging Bat Buul after me. Salvidar's bullet had got him in the chest. A pot shot.

But the old fellow was still conscious. "Salvidar understood," he murmured, "when my voice was recognized. It was a trick." He sighed. "I think Ah Puch is reaching for me."

I stanchd the flow of blood. But the wound looked ugly and he was an old man with an old man's waning strength. What a break! I needed Bat Buul alive to prevent the uprising! It was up to me to get him before his people as quickly as possible. Before he died, he must make good the words the Indians had heard from the monster mouth. He must appear before them *alive* and call off the war.

Raingo called from the doorway: "It's quiet out here. They've left the temple."

I looked around. The monster mouth was part of a finely carved stone tiger's head. The tiger was one of Kukulcan's

many symbols. And this was the room where he used to speak to his people, used to command sacrifices.

"Hurry, white god," Bat Buul whispered painfully. "Take me to my people while I have breath to speak."

I picked him up; he was like a sack of small bones in my arms. Raingo went ahead. We pushed along in semi-darkness. The war drums continued to beat. As yet, Bat Buul's command in Kukulcan's voice had had no effect upon the *tunkul* keepers.

We debouched into a vault, and over a far door for which we headed I noticed an uplifted stone. It was held to the ceiling by vine ropes and crude pulleys. As we started for it, Bat Buul shook his head and pointed to another door.

"The door with the stone leads to a doorless room," he said. "Through the other lies our path."

Rat-tat-tat-brrrrr-rup!

Machine gun bullets rained over us from the door we almost took by mistake. I threw Bat Buul into an arch and fell upon him. Raingo cried out and fell to the floor.

"My leg!" he gasped.

The machine gun raised its voice again with another burst. Gold leaf was chipped from the walls over our heads. Raingo flattened himself on his stomach and reached for me with outstretched arms. I risked a dose of lead to pull him to temporary safety.

Bat Bull still lived despite his fall, but life was ebbing fast. We could never cross the path covered by the machine gun.

A voice hailed us. It was Roper's. "The game's up, Reynolds. You're cornered!" His doll-like face with the misplaced eyebrow appeared for a flash, leering.

"Don't be too sure, Roper!" My eyes were studying the uplifted slab that served as door to the machine-gun nest. A ridge led from the top of the arch

that protected us to the network of vine ropes and pulleys.

"We want the ring, Reynolds!"

"Come and get it."

Estrado poked his head out the opening. I let two shots fly at him. "They've got guns!" he cried.

"You've got the ring, Reynolds?" Roper asked. The poor fool still put stock in the ring. But the Viper of Kukulcan was safe in the chamber of the golden cow. It had served me with Bat Buul—but Bat Buul was useless unless he lived a little longer.

Then I remembered Jalote's fake ring. It was still in my pocket, perhaps. I fished for it and found it.

"I've got the ring," I called back to Roper. "What do you offer for it?"

"Your lives. Throw it into this door."

I expected that reply. "I'd be a fool to trust you, Roper."

"Trust me—or we'll risk your aim and spray you!"

That was a possibility I didn't relish. I'd gotten this far with a half-dead high priest. Was it in the cards to go the rest of the way? The fate of countless white men in Central America depended on me. I went cold all over.

But my eyes never left the ridge running from the arch to the pulleys and ropes over the slab.

"I'll give up the ring," I called out. Then a whisper to Raingo: "Try to stand up." I helped him to stand on one leg.

"Throw it over," Roper commanded.

"When I chuck it," I whispered to the Englishman, "give me a boost to that ridge up there." He nodded.

The ring was tossed into the machine-gun nest. With a cry of joy, Roper scooped it up. And Raingo heaved me toward the ridge, then collapsed to the floor, moaning. The ridge was narrow, and clinging to it, I chinned my way to its surface. Then, catlike, I crawled toward the ropes.

Intent upon the fake ring I'd thrown them, the treasure thieves were well back in the room, muttering. It seemed hours before I was halfway to the ropes. Any moment I might be discovered and riddled. Once my gun almost clattered from my pocket.

Then I reached the side of the up-lifted stone door. I could see its thong hinges, the guys that held it raised.

Below, I heard the machine gun scraping over the gold floor. From where I was, a bird's-eye view revealed Roper and Estrado bringing the gun into position—to rake the arch. The double-cross was what I expected.

"It's the ring, all right," Estrado said in Spanish.

"The key to the gold!" Roper cried. "The Indians'll eat out of our hands now!" He had the gun trained on the arch. They were going to wipe us out—for the gold in the temple.

My eyes followed the complicated ropes. One of them ran from the ceiling to the outermost lip of the heavy slab. My gun came out. Leaning over the stone door, I put the muzzle against the supporting vine thong.

Rat-tat-tat-brrr-rup!

I fired at the key rope.

CHAPTER XVII. KUKULCAN'S BRIDE.

THERE were two crashes. The stone door swung into its slot—the doorway of the machine-gun nest. I crashed to the golden floor in front of it.

Faint screams came from behind the mighty slab. Roper and Estrado were bottled up in a golden chamber. If what Bat Buul said was true, there were no exits from that room now. It would be a golden tomb for the treasure thieves.

But what the hell! Roper and Estrado, in starting the Indian uprising, were a menace to the white men in Central America. They faced an awful death. Still, they had a way out; they

could machine-gun themselves out of their misery. There was no mercy in my heart for them.

They'd dropped the fake Viper of Kukulcan. I found it on the floor just outside the closed door and pocketed it.

Bat Buul! Did he still live? Everything depended on him now—on getting him to his people.

I ran to the arch. Raingo was holding the old high priest's head in his lap.

"Kicked in?" I asked.

"Search me, Reynolds. Sometimes I feel a flutter of his heart—lots of times I don't."

Bat Buul didn't seem to be breathing. But he opened his eyes with effort. I sighed with relief.

"Hurry, white god," he whispered in a feeble voice. "Ah Puch is at my side. Hurry! Take me to my people. The way is not far."

It was a miracle that he lived—a bullet in him—and battered by his plunge into the arch for protection.

I had to leave Raingo. He couldn't walk with his shot leg.

"Go on," he said. "I'll drag along after you."

Tenderly, I picked up Bat Buul and cradled him in my arms. He slipped a trembling arm around my neck.

"I shall fight Ah Puch a little longer," Bat Buul whispered. "But hurry! I am not strong."

We plunged into a dark corridor. The air grew cooler. I sensed that we were nearing a door to the outside world.

Now I could hear the pounding of the *tunkuls*. They dinned the night with a pagan beat. It was the signal for the river tribes to come to the temple for Kukulcan's war blessings. Bat Buul's trick in the tiger's mouth had not succeeded. Salvador's orders prevailed against the voice of the Mayan god. He and Jalote had the upper hand with these primitives.

A turning. A patch of starlit night dead ahead. I was at the end of the

labyrinth and my dying burden was heavy in my arms. Bat Buul still lived. I could tell by the fluttering of his eyes.

"Hurry," he whispered. "Ah Puch's hand is upon me."

I rushed forward and then halted as though stopped by a barrier. Salvidar stood against the patch of night—my goal. His gorilla bulk was hunched, facing me.

There was a spat of red flame. The hot lead seared my side and I crumpled with Bat Buul, using my body to break his fall. Lying very still, as though wounded or dead, I watched Salvidar.

His huge torso, moving toward me like a panther, grew into the size of a mighty *Golem*. I could hear his labored, nervous breath. Bat Bull rolled off me to the floor. My knees slowly doubled under me, poised for a spring.

Salvidar stood over us. He recognized the high priest, muttered his name and seemed frightened. Kneeling, his long white arms reached for the old man to see if life was still in him.

I sprang upon his back. The gun banged to the floor. Salvidar shook me off as though I were a fly, battering me to the wall.

It was man to man now—a weak white man against an Indian orang-utan filled with colossal hatred for my race. I swung for his jaw, but he closed in on me, crushing my body to his own iron thews. I felt a fiery, destroying force surge within him. He meant to kill me if it was the last thing he did.

I couldn't break his grip. My arms were pinioned to my side and he proceeded to pound my skull against the golden wall. Consciousness played hide and seek with me; my head went numb.

Then with a mighty, last effort, I kicked upward with my knees. He gasped with pain, and in the brief instant that his hold slackened, I pushed my body from his. A weak uppercut to his jaw didn't jar him in the least.

He hammered at me with his fists that felt like anvils thundering on my face.

I fell back, dazed. I couldn't hit him, couldn't reach him. With a swift lunge, he threw himself upon me and his fingers closed on my throat as mine locked about his windpipe. Our sweaty faces touched, bloodless and tense; each breath hissed death for the other.

Salvidar's pressure was merciless and strong. I felt the strength flee from my strangling fingers. The cords in his throat were like iron. And tense my own neck muscles as best I could, Salvidar's steel fingers crushed them slowly toward my windpipe.

With what little breath I had, I shouted for Raingo. He might be near by, crawling after me. He had a gun. And in the midst of calling his name, my wind was shut off.

Hazy darkness veiled my eyes. I couldn't see Salvidar, I couldn't see the starry patch of night beyond him. Blood and the beat of the *tunkuls* that sounded death for the white man in Central America roared in my ears.

In a final burst of puny strength, I clawed at the white Indian's throat. He coughed and gasped. I'd found his vulnerable spot; the iron muscles collapsed. The man gasped and squirmed in the grip of suffocating death.

But his hold never relaxed on my own throat. Heavily, we crashed to the floor, his tonnage on top of my starved body. My fingers seemed to sink deeper and deeper into his neck.

Then I found I could breathe. By turning my head, my neck revolved easily in Salvidar's strangle hold; his pressure had expired. An upward thrust freed me from his grip and his hands fell away.

Luck and his terror in the face of death had helped me. He was dead.

I crawled from under his body and sprang to Bat Buul. The high priest couldn't speak but his heart still beat feebly. Picking him up again, I stag-

gered to the doorway, tripping over Salvidar's body. The opening, ten feet away, seemed ten miles away. I thought I'd never reach it.

Then I was standing under the diamond-studded heavens. A semicircle of torchlights hemmed me to the doorway. I saw Jalote.

The girl screamed. I saw upraised *hulches*. There was a singing of jade-tipped darts in the sweet, cool air. One of them plowed like biting fire into my side.

I pitched forward into a silent, numbing void. My last thought was of Bat Buul tumbling from my cradled arms.

The sun was high in the heavens when I opened my eyes. For a moment, I wondered if I was among the rubbed out. But then I recognized a temple room—the one I'd been assigned to the night we reached the place. I was alone and my side ached like the devil.

Somehow, I managed to sit up. There was no one in sight. My head was filled with the *tunkul* beat. Good Lord, could I never rid myself of the awful sound?

I listened. It wasn't my head after all; *tunkuls* were being beaten. The rhythm was not the same, but slower and not so loud; it was steady, timed to pulse beat.

I crawled to the doorway. Every movement jabbed a knife into my side and I started to bleed again. But I had to find out why the *tunkul* beat was changed.

I reached the edge of the terrace, and my strength failed. From where I lay, I could see the clearing below and the avenue to the sacred *cenote*. The place was jammed with redskins, not only the primitives but the *rio* Indians summoned by the war drums. Over all hung a pall of silence.

Then, from the door below me, I saw a dozen bronze figures emerge. They wore long, beautifully embroidered gar-

ments and their heads were covered with symbolic masks wrought of solid gold. Their stride was slow and they swung down the avenue toward the well.

What I saw next caused me to cry out in horror. A litter came from the temple door and upon it sat Jalote, erect and as regal as an empress. She wore a white *huipil* covered with chains and amulets of gold and jade. A crown sat upon her jet hair.

My cry caused her to look up at me. There was a triumphant smile upon her lips and a soft, tender light in her eyes. But she said nothing and lowered her eyes.

The litter moved into the clearing and was surrounded by the dozen men in golden masks. One of them bowed before Jalote. The *tunkuls* went mute as he lifted a commanding hand.

"Hail, Queen of *Mayaa*!" I recognized the spokesman who challenged me to bring Bat Buul back from the dead. "We beg of you to ask Kukulcan to smile upon us—his humble people."

Jalote said something I didn't get. Her gestures were royal and proud.

The spokesman again: "Kukulcan will bless his warriors. They shall enjoy victory. There will be rejoicing in *Mayaa* this day."

The *tunkul* beat started up again, slow and steady. The litter moved down the avenue of redskins, now followed by the golden masks. There was something awful about this sober, quiet ceremony. Kukulcan was to bless his people for war upon the white man!

I'd lost out! Bat Buul was dead. His people obeyed Jalote, the woman of evil. There would be an uprising. Central America's coffee would go to ruin. And my reward for my troubles was undoubtedly death by torture. I'd played the rôle of a false god to dupe these simple souls.

Still, I had a drop of life in me. Better death by my own hand than Indian

torture. I pulled myself together and found that I could stand up. Stumbling toward the stairs, I descended. There was no guard.

At the foot of the flight, an embroidered blanket, blue and flaming red in the glorious sunlight, covered what looked like a human form upon a couch. I had to step over the thing to reach the clearing.

The Indians saw me but made no sign of recognition. My mind was made up. I'd rush them—die fighting. It would be quicker than torture. A sudden knife thrust—or the swift jade teeth of *hulched* darts.

As I climbed over the couch, the blanket slipped. Bat Buul's face, serene in death, smiled at me. Well, I hadn't expected to see him alive again, after the battering his dying bones got. He'd died within sight of his people, and Jalote got the lucky break. He'd died without bringing Kukulcan's message of peace to the tribes.

Raingo was probably dead in the temple, or a prisoner. I was alone.

Starting for the ranks of redskins, I saw them move toward me. Instead of laying hands on my weak body, they pushed me along with them. We were teeming down the avenue toward the *cenote*, toward the altar of the well god.

I found myself at the edge of the platform on the rim of the well. This was a break. I could chuck myself into the water. The fall would smash the life out of me.

The *tunkuls* grew louder in beat.

A fire was burning before the altar. I smelled incense. The men in golden masks escorted Jalote in her dazzling costume from the litter to the platform. Somehow, I was stirred by a new beauty in her. I couldn't move.

The spokesman cried out, extending his arms to the blue skies:

"Kukulcan, smile upon your people! Jalote, your queen, begs it of you! Her warriors seek the sign!"

Balls of incense were lighted. While this was being done, Jalote's arms were lifted to the heavens and her lips moved in prayer. The *tunkuls* went faster, wilder.

A huge golden girdle in the form of a feathered serpent—a belt-sized Viper of Kukulcan—was fastened about her waist. Her eyes met mine over the shoulders of the men fixing the girdle. She smiled and her lips formed the words: "*Americano mio!*" Then she laughed softly.

The golden balls of incense were hurled far out into the well. What was this? I was beginning to understand something!

The crown of gold was taken from Jalote's head and a wreath of flowers fixed to her jet locks. Two Indians made a cradle with their hands and arms and Jalote sat upon it. They moved to the edge of the platform.

This was horrible! It was human sacrifice!

The men began to swing Jalote's golden-girdled body to and fro to the rhythm of the *tunkuls*. The spokesman uttered a soft command. The drums ceased—as Jalote was hurled far out into the well.

I saw her catapult through the air, dive for the green waters far below, smash with a splash and disappear, weighted down by the heavy golden belt. Jalote had gone to be the bride of Kukulcan.

The Indians lining the rim of the *cenote* stared at the green waters, breathlessly. Did they expect her to rise again? Fools! Murderous fools!

A cry of joy went up, filling the sunlight with pagan ecstasy. The *tunkuls* pounded happily.

I saw the wreath of flowers floating on the green surface—intact. That was the sign. Kukulcan had accepted the beautiful Jalote as his bride. The human sacrifice had not been in vain.

The spokesman commanded silence.

His voice rang out lustily over the maw of the *cenote*. "Kukulcan is pleased. He has taken our woman to wife! There shall be peace in the land of *Mayaa*. Go, warriors. Go back to your villages. The blessings of peace are upon you. Accept the white man for your brother. It is Kukulcan's wish—brought to us by word and sign!"

I staggered forward. The spokesman bowed to me.

"It is peace, then?" I cried. This all seemed like a nightmare—witnessing a human sacrifice, a ceremony a thousand years old.

The spokesman smiled. "It is peace, white god. You brought Bat Buul to us—stole him for an hour from the awful arms of Ah Puch, the god of death. He gave us Kukulcan's word. The ring is safe with the sacred cow. Kukulcan commanded peace, not war, for his people. The tribes came to the *tunkul* call and heard the sacred word from Bat Buul's dying lips."

"But—but Jalote!"

"It was Bat Buul's wish that she be the bride of our ancient god. To-day, Kukulcan received her—the most beautiful girl in all *Mayaa*."

I understood. Damn clever, that Bat Buul! He'd made the girl eat her own words. Hadn't she boasted to the Indians that she was Kukulcan's bride? But there was only one way the marriage could be consummated—in death!

The girl who'd tried to start a war to build a new Mayan empire on white men's blood—died for peace between red man and my own race. The cunning Bat Buul had made of her punishment and death a sign from the gods. She lived in evil and died in glory.

My luck had held. I'd gotten Bat Buul to his people before death grabbed him. That's Irish genius for you!

Raingo's voice came from the crowd. The Indians opened a lane and the Englishman was carried to my side on a litter.

"Lord, Reynolds, I thought you'd kicked off, as you say! You shouldn't be up with that cut in your side."

"Where've you been?"

"These blighters carried me out to Roper's plane. I had a look-see. The ship's in good shape. We can get as far as Flores on Lake San Andre, I'm sure."

"Good; the sooner the better!"

"I say, I understand your war is called off. These fellows got me out of the temple and I found you bathed in gore. They seemed friendly, so I had them put you to bed while I fixed up the cut. Arrow, wasn't it?"

I nodded. "No post-mortems, Raingo. The uprising is no go. The world will get its morning cup of coffee, after all—and probably be none the wiser about this little drama behind it all."

"Right-o. We'll take off whenever you say, old chap. I'm anxious to promote an expedition to come back here."

"Haven't had enough excitement, eh?"

He shook his head, grinning.

I asked the new high priest for the obsidian ring; Kukulcan, I explained, wanted it back in his Mayan Valhalla. He didn't want to give it up, but, after all, Bat Buul had convinced him I was a god, worthy of obedience. There was a brief powwow among the *ahonis*; then he went to the chamber of the golden cow and forked over the Viper of Kukulcan to me. It had to be returned to Randolph—though I'd been prepared to give him Jalote's fake if I couldn't get the original; for I was damn tired of scrapping.

Two hours later, Raingo and I, after a bumpy take-off from the maize field, were winging our way in Roper's plane over the torrid Peten. I felt myself slipping into a drowsiness born of exhaustion.

There was to be no war. My job was done; Randolph would be satisfied.

His coffee was safe. So was white life in Central America.

Jalote! I saw her before me. What an extraordinary female! Beautiful but evil. Perhaps more ambitious than evil. Roper wanted the ancient treasure; she wanted to be queen of *Mayaa*. The cards were stacked against her and she went to her death like a regular fellow, without a whimper. She *was* game!

I remembered her soft, orchid-tinted flesh that I'd held in my arms. I saw her eyes alight with hatred and love for

me—with the desire for my death! I tasted her warm, sweet lips!

Jumping Judas! I might have loved her—might have tamed her. Hers was the sort of fire men dream about. But the luck of the Irish doesn't include everything.

The spell of the motor's hum, as Raingo cut for Lake San Andre, put me to sleep—before I got too sentimental.

Randolph got the Viper of Kukulcan back. I'm having Jalote's fake ring made into a watch fob.

A new story by Sean O'Larkin will appear soon.



PHOTOGRAPHED WITH THE PRESIDENT

WHEN large and important delegations of citizens, school-teachers, scientists, or athletes make the pilgrimage to Washington and go to the White House to shake hands with the president, they usually have their pictures taken, with Mr. Hoover standing in the exact center of their front row—but do *not* shake hands with him.

Naturally, that thrills all the visiting patriots. Instead of going back home and merely stating that the president grasped their hands, they bring forth a copy of the picture proving that, because of their prominence, sagacity, and heavy political influence, Mr. Hoover dropped his pen, deserted all official business, and rushed out to the back yard to get, in the form of a photograph, an everlasting memento of their call.

So far, so good. But ruthless and blood-curdling as it may be to reveal the truth, the fact is that this photographing of the president with large groups of callers is an efficiency device. When Mr. Hoover went into the White House, somebody remarked that preceding presidents had lost a lot of valuable time in shaking hands daily with long lines of sight-seers and delegations.

"I know a better game than that," said one of his secretaries. "We'll cut out most of the handshaking; and, instead of it, we'll line up each big delegation back of the White House offices, get them all set for a photograph, and then rush in and notify Mr. Hoover that everything's in readiness for his appearance. He will step out on the lawn, take his indicated place in the foreground, have the picture snapped and, after a pleasant word or two to the leader of the visitors, return to his desk."

They tried it out, and it worked so well as a time saver and efficiency trick that it is now a part of the routine of handling White House crowds.

The RAP

By
LAURENCE
J. CAHILL

These Hands, Once Weak, Lily
White and Sensitive, He Had
Changed Deliberately into Two
Powerful, Relentless, Crushing
Paws! Why?

IT would have fooled anybody but Deagan. A cold, wet sound—like a stone chucked through thin ice into river mud. He recognized it. That is why he didn't stop to wonder, but flung out flat on the sidewalk even though he barked his shins and hurt himself generally.

The bullet had come from across the street and pitted into wood, taking a line of flight that must have killed Deagan had he taken another step. But he lay against the base of a building, a basket of cut roses spilled at his side.

If Deagan looked foolish he felt nothing of the sort. Children playing in the gutter laughed at him, for it struck them as a curious way to behave. In early evening, with the blue of daylight still lingering, a young man walks along about his business—that of a florist's assistant—and suddenly throws himself face foremost on a hard pattern of brick and asphalt. Passers-by suspended everything to gaze at him, noted another *wet* sound like the last—and there was a chipping of the build-



ing a foot above the sidewalk, three inches above Deagan's head.

Bullets—Maxim-choked firing. The old whine and the old familiar spatter. Echoes of the past. Deagan wasn't altogether surprised; but in spite of that his nerves were suffering a bit. He should have been prepared. Any business taking him into the South Side was bound to bring him up against the old gang. They hated him, mistrusted him. Once he "belonged." Now he was an outsider. The boys would never forgive him. Ten to one they'd get him.

Deagan lifted his face cautiously and pulled one knee forward in the first move to rise. He hadn't lain full length

for more than ten seconds. Already a crowd had gathered across the street, watching him. None of the old gang was in the crowd. Who had fired the shots? "Chick"? "Spotty"? Or Joe Bonanito himself?

Getting methodically upon his feet, Deagan replaced the flowers in the basket he had been carrying. During this task his eyes glanced along the front of the tenements beyond the other curb. Nothing was to be seen. Deagan was ready to start forward again.

As he edged smoothly along to the next corner, his back flat against the wall of houses behind him, his right hand slid in between belt and shirt. And then he remembered that he was not armed. He had given that up. He had given up the old life. It had been a bold decision—and now he knew it for all it meant.

He whipped around the corner without looking at his shifting feet, without taking his eyes off that doubtful area across the street. Then he turned and ran at top speed.

He covered a crooked one hundred yards in about a quarter of a minute, for Deagan was fast. Panting hard for breath, he came to the door of the house where he delivered the basket of roses. Here a wedding was going on, with a boisterous, merry, cheerful noise that was pleasant to hear. It would have been pleasanter to join the party, to cleverly lose himself in the happy company, indoors and out of sight of the guns of his enemies.

But a surge of indignation made Deagan's courage stiffen. He had run far enough—enough to succeed in finishing his errand. If he was trapped here in the South Side, doomed to die before he escaped, he'd go down game. No running up alleys like a rat. No hysterical cries for mercy. Until they discovered him he'd walk homeward, trudging the outside edge of the pavements like an honest citizen.

What would Danny Hurley say to this? Grizzle-headed old Danny Hurley, ex-convict, who ran his florist shop as square as any man, and who had given young Deagan his first chance to make a living since Deagan himself left the big prison.

Deagan pictured the old-timer waiting for him. Danny Hurley had warned him not to go into the South Side; advised sending a messenger boy instead. Deagan had laughed.

He wasn't laughing now. There were whispering voices somewhere across the way on the other sidewalk—footsteps tracking after his own. They were looking for him. They'd get him. They had hated him ever since he left prison and refused to go back to the old game. Deagan's glance slanted over his shoulder, but he kept his head rigidly forward, walked steadily and without pausing. Nearer and nearer the dead line he was getting, approaching the well-policed, orderly center of life.

Night falls swiftly in city limits—and with the dark, or the dangers in the dark, human senses are usually sharpened. Deagan felt the beat of every passing second.

Another two blocks—he was going to make it, was almost out of the district. His hands swinging empty at his sides, no weapon to fill them with anything like battle strength, he now saw that he was definitely being overtaken by men coming up in this weird chase—men who were yet no more than gray shadows.

Deagan's feet quickened toward the avenues of white lights that looked like heaven. Half a block— A spurt of flame in the gloom behind him and Deagan heard the *spat* against the masonry of a building at his shoulder.

His enemies had failed. Deagan cleared the dead line with hurrying heels, and was as safe as other men. Cops held up traffic as he and peaceful folk passed by. No gray shadows to bother him—nothing but a troubled memory.

It was only when Deagan stepped in the door of Hurley's flower shop that he noticed red on his coat sleeve. Blood. Just a scratch.

Danny Hurley was busy. Pulling on a linen duster over his coat, Deagan concealed his injury and stuffed a padded handkerchief up the sleeve to stanch the slight flow of color.

"Hello, kid," said Danny mildly.

Then the front door opened again. Joe Bonanito, the South Side gang leader, stood in the shop and grinned generously at the man he came to see. Bonanito was fat with the fat of armored muscle, tough and efficient. His body was nearly as mobile as his eyes—greenish eyes, little and alert. He ignored Hurley entirely.

"Well, if it ain't the Slipper," he said quietly. "Slipper Deagan, who used to crack open safes like nobody's business—nobody's business but his and mine. This is the first time we met since you got out. But some of the bunch have seen yuh, they tell me. They don't like you, Slipper. They think you ought to be turned into cold meat—because guys that go straight always blab all they know."

Deagan wet his lips with a roving tongue. Otherwise he was still and tense as steel. He saw Bonanito's first-ranking gunmen, Chick and Spotty, blocking up the door.

"I know yuh, Slipper," commented the gang chief leisurely. "This waterin' flowers an' makin' daisy chains is just a bluff. You got a case of shaky nerves up at the pen. Slow about gettin' back. We'll fix that." Bonanito's merry eyes from that moment were like glass. "Get it, Deagan. It's the job on the Seaboard Trust Company we used to gab about. It can only be done by the best tappers in the country. Y' know that. And you're the boy to handle the drills. The Slipper, who could always slip in and out so quick and easy. I'll tell the gang about it. We're all still friends. A

hun'erd thousand dollars in centuries in the vault—and it'll be there until tomorrow noon. The tip is right on ice. I want to hear yuh say you're ready."

Deagan shook his head slowly.

Danny Hurley patted him on the back. Danny knew when not to butt in with his tongue, but his wise old eyes blazed like lightning.

"What d'ye mean?" croaked Bonanito with a voice like a raw change of temperature. "You ain't lost your guts like they say you have?"

There was silence for an instant.

"I'm off the crook forever," answered Deagan through dry, stiff lips. "Buckin' the law is never going to count me in again. And there won't be no talk about it. It was sometimes fun to open safes that nobody else could dent. But I'm seeing different now——"

Bonanito interrupted: "Shut up, you damn fool! Shut up! Yappin' to the boss like that, a little rat of a can-opener like you? Watch the door, Spotty; I'm goin' to bust——"

"Nix," advised the man just spoken to. He and his companion, who had been lounging across the threshold like a bad letter "x," assumed attitudes of carelessness. "Bulls," they said briefly.

Bonanito's heavy arm, drawn back and bunched to give Deagan a maniacal punch, hesitated long and dropped.

Danny Hurley had been ready, with all his old muscle and stamina, to measure himself at the gang chief's fat throat if the gamble became necessary.

Bonanito joined his henchmen, sputtering back at Deagan:

"This ain't over, you welsher. I know what to do wit' you."

The screen door of the florist's shop slammed, but the words still knocked in Deagan's ears. He wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. Such a threat had sent men flying from the South Side to the ends of the earth, to Europe, to Mexico, places as unfamiliar to them as death but enormously easier to bear.

"Don't mind him, kid," counseled Hurley. "You told him you was through with crooked games. He seen you meant it. You ain't got nothin' now that he wants."

The old man's voice was earnest, but unconvincing. Deagan hardly heard him.

Ex-jailbird, ex-night prowler, one of the greatest cracksmen on the books, now a florist's assistant trying honestly to buy into a small but profitable business, Deagan wondered if his luck, sagging suddenly and ominously, would bend him with it.

Again the door opened, and two newcomers walked in. Plain-clothes police was written all over them, and it was plain they were brothers. One's hair was gray with streaks of white, the other's was still black.

"Good afternoon, Deagan," greeted "Whitey" Kyle.

Standing alone, "Blackie" Kyle—a captain in the central office squad—broke his proverbial silence with three syllables: "'Lo, Slipper."

Deagan nodded, felt Danny caution him with nudging fingers.

"What was Joe Bonanito doing in here?" asked Whitey.

"I turned him down," said Deagan frankly and quickly.

They didn't believe him; you could see that.

Whitey smiled indulgently. "Bonanito's a busy guy. When he ain't runnin' beer he tries musclin' the trade unions for dough. He'll even stick up one of his own gambling dives when the percentage is too lean. Or he might blow a safe. And it seems to me that used to be your business."

Deagan didn't respond in the slow-picked phrases of a criminal. His answer was brisk, as that of a straightforward citizen:

"You saw Bonanito take a punch at me. I told him I was satisfied to be let alone—and it's what I'm telling you."

"Tush-tush. We didn't come in here to be treated rough." Whitey borrowed a match from his brother, and began to pick his teeth. "We'd just like to know what you're doin' besides peddlin' flowers—and our eyesight is gettin' lousy. We didn't see Bonanito delivering no punches at you. You're in a bad way, Deagan. A few days of this kind of ploddin' is all you can stomach, eh? Well, the Big Family will be ready to welcome you back up the river—it's Old Home Week up there fifty-two times a year."

"If a few of you bulls were laid away a fellow like myself might——" Deagan was restrained by Hurley's weight pulling on his arm.

Blackie Kyle yawned. "Come," he said to his brother.

"Sure," assented Whitey. "Meet you later, Slipper. You're right, we ain't so smart. We can't name what safe it's going to be. It just happened that we saw Bonanito and you layin' out the ground. But we'll be there when the trick is pulled."

With that the Kyles left.

Deagan was staring over the spot they had occupied. Smart—the police? Too smart, and not smart enough. They were crafty and stupid in a breath. Not a glance at Danny, had they given. Ignored him entirely—old-time yegg that he had been. They knew when age had him licked. But they didn't know Deagan, didn't know the man he had become, and was trying to be.

"Don't mind them, either—with heads flatter than their feet." Danny would have smoothed him down, but it was too late.

Deagan was confused. Danger—he was in the gravest danger.

The Kyles didn't worry him. Perhaps they would a man of lesser nerve, but not Deagan. They had sent him up for his first and only stretch. He could understand how their cold brains worked; it was always a dick's dearest

wish to get a repeat conviction. Let 'em try.

"You're in clover, Danny," Deagan said hoarsely. "You've turned over and they've let you alone. It's your gray head that does it, but I sorta wish mine was gray, too. It will be quick enough, at this rate."

"I know, you're excited. But just the same," wheedled Danny Hurley, trying to be as tactful as his blunt education permitted, "just the same, I wouldn't go wanderin' around outside to-night. Let Bonanito cool down a ways. That's sensible. Sleep here instead of going home. Do that. You don't want to *ast* for trouble; nobody does. Unnerstand?"

"I get you," conceded Deagan dryly.

"It's just sense," Danny remarked, attempting to sound casual. "That's all. And now I'll got out and get you a supper at one of these ex-lobster palaces around the corner. One o' them picnic meals you get in hot cardboard boxes. We'll eat here, and talk it over."

"All right," agreed Deagan.

With feverish thoughts to keep him company, he stood at the screen door and looked out. All quiet—other stores in the neighborhood were vacant until morning. What was keeping Danny Hurley this long?

Deagan tried to reason himself into a peaceful state.

Joe Bonanito was the unknown quantity.

Deagan realized he was becoming brittle and unstrung with guessing. He worked, unpotting a few plants for shipment. But first he thrust a revolver into a convenient pocket—a small gun made for desperately rapid shooting. That done, he had broken the first tenet of his oath. An ex-criminal armed has one foot already within the underworld.

Fear bothered him not so much as his conscience. The uncertainty of himself. Might he be a coward for taking Danny's advice and staying out of sight?

And when a customer telephoned and required a funeral wreath sent directly to a wake on Rivington Street, Deagan accepted the order and arranged it himself. He penciled a short note for Danny, assuring him he would be back within an hour. He left the shop.

The house on Rivington Street was a mean dwelling with a scraggly piece of crêpe on the door, an address miles from the South Side—where Deagan might have hesitated to go.

He rang the bell. "The florist? Come in," said a mumbling voice. Deagan entered. Hands closed all over him, frisked the gun from his rear pocket. He was shoved down a tenement hallway and into a room lined with gangsters. At a table before him sat Joe Bonanito, grim and smiling.

"Sit down, Slipper," jeered this king racketeer. "Glad you changed your mind and come all the way over here to see me."

Deagan reserved his speech, relaxed, and composed himself to breathe evenly.

"Of course, a lot of guys would think they was decoyed if they came here like you did. But not you, Slipper. You finally figured out, just like that, that a hun'erd grand ain't nothin' to pass up and never was. It's too easy for a guy like you. Specially as your cut is twenty per cent."

For another interval Deagan kept his silence.

"Now you ain't going to be dumb about it. You got a few brains. You was pretty cute in the old days, I remember. It won't be no risk at all, in case you're kinda gone yellow. We'll all be around yuh. Plenty o' time, you'll have, to crack the box. And for that matter we'll do the crackin'. All what you'll have to do is plant the drills—make the leads."

So far Deagan had said nothing, and he stayed with this policy until the show-down.

"Fi' minutes work for you. Ain't

that a pipe for twenty grand? You ain't no fool to say 'No.' Not the Slipper. You'll do it, hey?"

Deagan felt that his tongue had thickened and was in the back of his throat. But he said: "No."

Bonanito shifted his feet under the table until, though sitting down, he was poised on his toes.

"Lemme see your hands, Slipper. I ain't goin' to eat 'em. Just got a yen to look at 'em. Long and thin, ain't they, and soft as any moll's. Clever, eh? Can feel the tumblers through armor plate. Wish they was mine." Bonanito spat on the floor. "You know, Deagan, it'd be tough if an accident chopped them fingers off. Or they was burned right down——"

Deagan's breath whistled back in his lungs, but he stood immovable.

"Goin' to open that box, Slipper?"

"No."

"Give 'im the works," ordered Bonanito.

Hours passed before Deagan's flickering consciousness found itself. And then he only knew that he was on the rear seat of an automobile being driven through the city with the water front on his right. Bonanito sat beside him, and between him and the other door was Spotty. Four more were in the car. What kind of a ride was this? What place would they select in which to tumble him, dead, into a gutter? His hands—he thought of them suddenly. They were shoved into his coat pockets—Bonanito and Spotty crowding against them so he couldn't lift his arms. But it seemed his fingers were all right.

On Seaboard Boulevard the car turned, shuttled for position and backed into an alley. A scout from the nearest corner came in, leaped on the running board. A short conversation with Bonanito and all piled out of the machine but the driver, who sat prepared for directions.

POP—6

A side door of the Seaboard Trust Company stood open in a minute. An accomplice let them in, and Deagan, held viselike, could only lockstep with the rest. Some night watchman had accepted a comfortable bribe. Everything was rehearsal-smooth.

Before the vault they stopped, a collapsible screen was laid, and small spotlights tilted upon the floor.

Joe Bonanito stared hard at Deagan, the thrill of chance overcoming his suavity. In his fat iron grasp was a small acetylene torch, turned down to a flame of wicked blue.

"Want me to push this against your fingers?"

Deagan could not move to attack—foolhardy as such a move would have been against a gang chief. Both of Deagan's ankles were gripped by strong hands and his shoulders were held down. But he could yet talk.

"Crack the safe, you stupid lunk. Do it with your melonite and your scraps of railroad iron. But leave me out of it."

Bonanito barked an oath and punched Deagan in his mouth, and the next instant whipped the torch into use and seized Deagan's wrists. The two struggled, others at one and the same time holding Deagan and pleading caution.

With unnatural energy Deagan blocked the handle of the torch, tumbled it out of Bonanito's grasp. Both yelled in pain as the hot jet swept by them.

"Look out!" shouted some one. "The cops! It's a double-cross!"

Bonanito knocked Deagan aside and scrambled backward to his heels, to his feet.

The Kyles entered at the head of a force provided with a variety of police artillery. In the resulting gun fire Bonanito escaped unseen. Deagan was found stunned in front of the vault, the acetylene torch turned in his hand and playing on the locks.

"Well," preached Whitey Kyle. "I guess it's up the river for a rest cure."

Later in a precinct station Deagan put up a fierce, unreasoning battle for freedom, but the odds were in favor of bull-necked patrolmen and nightsticks.

"Cut it out, safe-cracker," they counseled. "You're a game guy, but there's no surer way to wreck yourself. And you ain't got the hands for fighting. Soft—meant to tap tumblers. Try that on your cell door when you join the Big Family."

"Who tipped off the Kyles?" asked Deagan suddenly, forgetting everything else.

"Danny Hurley, of all guys. That's funny, ain't it? We figured he was a pal of yours."

Deagan nodded without a word.

In the State penitentiary Hurley came to see him.

"You know what I did, Slipper, don't yuh? You ain't sore at me?" quavered the old man.

Deagan shook his head. "If you hadn't done that, Bonanito would have killed me. Your story and a lot of other gossip got that jury cockeyed. They didn't know what traffic lights to follow. A minimum was all they allowed the judge. It might have been twenty years."

"Aw, it ain't right, Slipper. No, it ain't. I've reformed. But I might even get religion if things like this didn't happen. Lookit Bonanito—struttin' around free as spit on the wind."

"Alibied, eh?"

"Sure. They never— Why, he was in Hongkong or some place."

Deagan chuckled. "You feel pretty bad, Danny."

The old man stared at him unhappily. "Don't go to crazy laughin'. I'm tellin' yuh."

"Put that worry off. I've got plans. That's why I'm feeling this way."

Hurley peered intently. "What do you mean?"

"Time cut for good behavior. I'll be out. And within an hour I'll get Bonanito."

To Danny Hurley this was like a bolt out of the blue.

"And I don't mean with the gun, either. With these, Danny." Deagan extended his hands. "These lily claws. There's something to make you disgusted."

Hurley gaped the words before they reached his tongue. "Takin' the rap has made you crazy. You're mad."

"Right. I'm good and mad, Danny. And to-morrow I'll be madder. Figure that out for the balance of this stretch."

Much admired by the population of the prison for his renown as a strong-box breaker, Deagan was soon left alone, shunned as a tiger.

Visited by Danny Hurley, Deagan refused to give up his designs on Bonanito. They braced up his courage, gave him something to think of, and tempted him with the future.

"Look at my hands, Danny—notice how they're changing."

His old friend and partner regarded the flesh that had baffled safe makers. No longer were the nails manicured to a purpose. The cushions of the thumbs were but two enormous blisters caloused and broadly flattened.

"The machine shop's doing that, Danny. I get the toughest jobs in the place—I ask for them. There's stuff developing in these arms that's going to be used only once—and once will be enough."

"Listen to me, Slipper," gulped Danny. "Forget Bonanito."

Deagan laughed—but the line of his mouth had nothing to do with it.

"You got me afraid for yuh, Slipper," protested Hurley.

"Keep the shop running," advised Deagan. "The centennials will be in bloom when I get out. And come in again."

His dry, flippant manner vanished

after these interviews. Back in his cell, he became morose, solitary—the tiger.

What would he do to Bonanito? Not kill him—that would be inviting the rap again, and the chair. He would never make that mistake. The first consignment to prison had been his own fault—with three years in which to realize this. This, the second time, was the responsibility of Bonanito, the fault of one who had deliberately forfeited years of another man's life, crushed a hard-won record for honesty, and left perhaps not even a remote possibility of that record ever being regained.

Deagan's jaws ground again. Who was any one living to do a thing like that to him? Certainly revenge was not to be shirked—it was as if he owed to everybody else the promise that Bonanito should not get away with it.

Killing wouldn't do it. That was the method of crooks—to burn an enemy down behind the safety of a gun. It was a cheap way of paying off. An enemy should live—to regret.

Hands. Those were the tools of vengeance Bonanito would remember—hands that he had meant to frighten with his orders, that he was going to destroy because they disobeyed. Two hands, trained, could hurt Bonanito more than all the slugs from a sub-machine gun.

Danny Hurley persevered. Distorting the truth to maintain his stand, he desperately held out that Deagan had no grudge against Bonanito. It was the fortune of war, of the racket. Deagan's safety was his only thought, his safe delivery from prison when his time was up, and their starting again in some town far from the South Side and its affairs.

"No use, Danny," was the cold, set answer. "I'm not fooling you. I don't like to think of it. I'd rather be rid of Bonanito and all his outfit without ever touching him. Besides, I want to get out and play a straight game again

as soon as I can, as if nothing happened. A run in with that gorilla will mean more trouble—maybe the rest of my life in this lock-up. But I can't sidestep. There'd be something wrong with a guy who got shipped in here like I did, took the rap for no reason, and did nothing about it. You know what I've gone through, what happened in the house on Rivington Street. You don't need to tell me what you'd do in the same case."

Danny Hurley shrugged this fact aside, but never quit. "Bonanito is more of a gorilla than ever. He's bumped off anyway two guys since you been in here."

Laughing, Deagan threw his head back—exposing an uncollared neck, strong and rugged. Hurley noticed that the line of his shoulders was sloping but heavy.

"You've seen Butcher Dawson in the exercise yard, the man who killed one cop and crippled another after they already had him down with one cuff on him." Deagan smiled. "We were wrestling yesterday, and I threw him every time. He has the back, the beef. But that isn't everything——"

Deagan grasped the chair he was sitting on, by thumb and hooked forefinger, held it out at arm's length and then showed Hurley the hand that did it. It was no longer a common human hand, it was a leather glove almost rock gray in color, so massed with callouses that no veins were apparent in the palm.

"Work has done that. I'll never be able to pick a safe again. As for feeling the tumblers, I couldn't even feel the flame of a slow match. But I can make another man feel—this."

The cant-hook fingers curled together in a grip, and old Danny Hurley shuddered.

"I'm afraid—and I don't know who for," he admitted.

Deagan laughed again.

But when the time came for his re-

lease, when good conduct had secured his parole, he lied to Danny Hurley. He told his partner he was due to be out on the six o'clock train of a Friday evening. At seven o'clock that morning, however, he was receiving a last-minute warning from Whitey Kyle, who addressed him in the warden's office.

There was something very terrible, strange, in Whitey's face.

"You say you were framed, Slipper?"

Deagan locked with him eye to eye, and nodded.

"Well, I don't think so. Anyway, I'm giving you a tip you'd better use"—the detective's face twinged with effort—"and that is: keep away from Bonanito. You all slink to him like rats running to cover. Get out of the city, Deagan, and never come back."

A reply that boiled like a torrent flooded into Deagan's tongue, but there he held it.

"Thanks," he said to the clerk who gave him the five-dollar bill committing him to freedom again. He ignored Kyle, and with a handshake said good-by to the warden. At seven ten he was walking briskly down a street running alongside the penitentiary. At seven fifty he figured that he had doubled and redoubled on his tracks so often and so craftily that no bull could possibly have followed him.

Passing through the semirespectable outskirts on the North Side, he circled the Rivington Street block many times. Calm with months of planning, he stepped up into the door of the house where last he had seen undertaker's crêpe.

He rang the bell and stood with hands loose at his sides. The door opened on a double chain and a formidable face looked out. Cap pulled over his eyes, glance turned covertly toward the street, Deagan slid out a password that meant consultation with the great Bonanito.

The man on the door let him in. Standing in the gloom of the inner hall

Deagan said something else. Straining forward to catch the remark, the door watch received a short jab on the chin that crumpled him out quietly upon the floor. Deagan continued along the hall and rapped properly upon the panels of the door at the other end. He was surveyed by another face crooked around the jamb. The face was wrung with pain as Deagan's methodical fingers found their way unerringly to the throat. From this man, unresisting a minute later, Deagan took a gun.

It was well, for in the next room he met and renewed business with Joe Bonanito.

The gang chief was sitting at a table, facing the entrance which Deagan used. Busy with papers telling the cost and gain of his rackets, Bonanito for an instant failed to see the visitor. When he looked up he made no sound or wasted move—so well drilled were his reactions.

Bonanito at last smiled. So he greeted his one-time star cracksman—"Slipper" Deagan, who stood on the threshold, hands in his pockets.

"Well, the good guy is back," crooned Bonanito, "the nice kid who thinks banks should be opened only by cashiers."

Bonanito chuckled, eventually was still, and even the smile faded. He had been taking in Deagan's general appearance, and with his shrewd little eyes wandered back to Deagan's face.

Suddenly Bonanito reached for the drawer in the table before him.

"Stop! Stick 'em up! Up high above your head!" Deagan ordered.

Deagan walked forward, stooped across the table while the other stared, almost touched Bonanito with his breath, his teeth, and removed the gun from the table drawer. The ready gun from Deagan's pocket was pressed against Bonanito's plump shirt front.

Weighing both guns in his hand, Deagan finally tossed them into a corner be-

hind him. One of them went off with a deafening explosion, burying its mark in the wall. None, Deagan knew, would hear the sound outside. A heavy dray traffic on cobblestones would easily drown a single shot within those four walls.

"Now," said Deagan, "you can try anything you like. You've noticed I'm different. You didn't know what it was, so, yellow like you always were, you grabbed for a gat. You'll never get it. I'll stop you from reaching that corner. And—it's your move, Bonanito; I'm waiting."

Bonanito snarled, half in amusement, half in impatience, and stood up. Walking part way around the table, he suddenly stopped. He recognized the sudden quiet; not a stir from his guards. Where would they be? Had Deagan fixed—

Bonanito sprang at the man out of prison. They collided solidly, neither gave an inch, and five feet from the corner they grappled.

Deagan's nerves sang to him. Force and power, years of grueling, brutal labor, heart-toughening matches with "Butcher" Dawson, days of waiting, poured into his arms.

He absorbed the fabled strength of Bonanito and laughed, silently, then aloud. The gang chief was rugged, stronger than Butcher Dawson, but Deagan was quicker and more wiry than either. His thick, scarred hands tested grips with Bonanito's hands, broke Bonanito's fingers. His leverage twisted Bonanito's fat arms until the other's ponderous ability rushed into use with less and less speed.

Deagan laughed and swore. "Strain 'em, Bonanito. Tighten until your back cracks. This is a pile easier'n jimmyin' safes. Don't get scared. I won't kill you. That would be a soft sneak for you."

Although he was sweating, Bonanito fought valiantly. But Deagan was like

a cat—a cat with ninety-nine lives and the planning brain of a devil.

"Hey, Spotty!" shouted Bonanito hoarsely, no longer disguising his want of help.

Deagan talked in spite of his laboring, husky breath. "How do you like it, chief? Getting groggy and stupid? Going to get even some day? Going to make the Slipper take the rap again? Still going to interfere when guys decide to go straight? What'll you do when I let you go? Fill a car full of Tommy guns and rake my place with lead from front to rear? You'll get somebody else to do that trick. All your fat fingers are broken now. And you were for breaking mine once."

The room evidenced the passage of a cyclone. Walls were battered and hugely dented. Chairs were strewn around into simple kindling. The table was smashed flat underfoot.

Bonanito, a pulpy and inhuman sight, scrambled and slipped, padded the floor in front of Deagan's knees, saw his chance and sprawled along into a corner. In the wreck of one of his hands he gripped and managed to hold a revolver. Deagan fell on him, but the grip on the gun was maniacal. His last advantage, Bonanito snapped the hammer with an uncrushed thumb.

The powder stung Deagan's eyes, made him cough. The echo shook and pounded his ears, but he was aware that he had succeeded in buckling the muzzle of the gun back and away from him. Bonanito had unconsciously destroyed himself.

The silence that followed only lasted a moment, when Deagan heard the footsteps of some one dashing into the house.

Deagan realized he was not far from exhaustion. There was a swaying in his body like the ringing in his head. With the best intentions his knees couldn't support him now if he tried to walk. And here came reënforce-

ments for—for what had been Joe Bonanito.

Victorious, Deagan's resolution was equal to standing—and his cruel hands gripped into fists again.

Treading over the stunned guard outside the door, Danny Hurley entered.

With a gasp of surprise and dread, Deagan motioned him off, exclaiming: "Go on! Run like hell out of here! You see what's happened. Beat it!"

Hurley saw that Bonanito was forever quiet, and stiffened all down his back with the shock.

"Good God! You done that?"

Deagan shook his head. "The gun was his—he fired it."

Hurley blubbered with emotion. "Aw, kid, you shouldn't 'a' came here. I had a hunch you was foolin' when you said you'd be out to-night. So I got over to the pen this morning—just when you was gone. Anyway, I knew you'd come here. Gee, I knew what you'd do!"

Deagan wiped his face with the remnants of his shirt.

"Turned out wrong, Danny. I didn't kill him, old-timer; we know that."

Danny Hurley blinked. "It's funny, Slipper. You know, yesterday——"

"Never mind talkin', Danny. Beat it. Don't you understand? You'll be held for murder!"

Hurley blinked a second time. "That's right. It's—it's the big rap." He stared hollow-eyed at his partner. "Say, Slipper, I was right. You've queered yourself. All your cards are played. You punished Bonanito—and let yourself in for the big rap. The rap again. Y' can duck it."

"Get out of here. G'wan."

Hurley shook his head.

Deagan started toward him, stumbled, and but for the battle-smearred walls would have fallen.

"I'm stayin', kid." A familiar stubbornness was in Danny's face.

Helpless fear in his eyes, Deagan held

himself up to his height. "Run, Danny. For me—'cause I'm wanting you to. I ain't goin' to see you go to the chair. I know I was right to beat Bonanito up. There's nothing to worry about over that. But an accident won't send *two* of us to the death house, if I c'n help it or——"

"Cheese it. The back door. It's our only ticket, Slipper——"

"Face this way. And keep apart."

Whitey Kyle spoke, empowered with a police Colt.

Hurley sighed mildly, but his old face was like ashes. Deagan slowly raised his hands.

"Huh! Kind of sudden, seein' you here." Kyle's expression was unreal and terribly fixed, as Deagan remembered it in the warden's office. "Who have you killed, cracksman?"

From the still form on the floor his glance shifted to Deagan and Hurley. In that glance he included them both. It meant a joint fate.

The detective strode over to the corner, studied the victim sidelong. Kyle's astonishment was remarkable. "Joe Bonanito! By the living——"

"Cut it short, Whitey," advised Deagan. "Hurley had nothing to do with it. Let him go."

Whitey Kyle took the few return steps. His face was still strange, ever struggling.

"Got 'im, did you, Slipper? I trailed you here. I don't know why I warned you at the pen, but somehow I figured to give you a break. Maybe there was something to your story this last time I pulled you in. Anyhow, you got the break. And then I followed you because with half an eye I could see the warning was no use. It was in your look. I wanted Bonanito—and you were going to meet him."

Whitey Kyle's mouth twitched as he took a new breath.

"I lost you for half an hour when you covered your tracks. I picked you

up again. I was after Bonanito, following you as a guide. And you finished him. Yesterday he killed my brother Blackie—shot him in a silk loft he was cribbin', got him in the back. You know, Slipper, this would go a long way to prove that Bonanito stuck you up in the Seaboard job—framed you. Looks very much as if you did that stretch for nothin'." He looked at the last of the gang chief. "Was it self-defense? Speak fast!"

Deagan swallowed and began to reply. But Kyle interrupted impatiently as

he replaced his revolver in its pocket. "I'm in a hurry to get back to headquarters. Got to do a day's routine—like putting out a dragnet for Bonanito's killers."

He halted in the door.

"You said in court, Deagan, that you came out to this section with a funeral wreath, and you were trapped?"

Deagan nodded.

"Well, you and Hurley'd better go home and make that wreath all over again. I'll see that Joe Bonanito gets it. And I'll pay for it."

Another story by Laurence J. Cahill will be published soon.



NEW LIGHT ON NATURAL HISTORY

SKELETONS recently found in the State of Sonora, Mexico, may upset the theory that the Gobi Desert was the first part of the earth to be inhabited by those fabulous monsters, the dinosauri and triceratops, the "dragons" of ancient mythology. An expedition of American scientists recently conferred with Governor Elias of Sonora to gain his permission to search for more bones.



"JUST LIKE A HUMAN BEING"

CONGRESSMAN JOHN GARNER, of Texas, the Democratic leader in the House of Representatives, was remarking to a group of his colleagues in the cloakroom that dogs are often as intelligent as men.

"When I was a kid on our old farm down in Texas," he continued, "I had a dog named Pete. Pete wasn't a blooded animal. He had no pedigree to brag about. He was just a boy's shaggy, ugly old purp. But smart? Man, that dog was a genius!

"One of my jobs was to milk the cows and carry the milk up a long hill to our kitchen. So one day I put the handle of a milk bucket in Pete's mouth and, by pantomime, whistling, and verbal commands, gave him to understand that he was to be thenceforward the milk delivery boy. And how he did deliver! He took that bucket up to the kitchen porch, set it down, scratched on the door until somebody opened it, picked up the bucket again, and went in with it.

"Pete each morning and evening saved me three laborious trips up and down that long hill, and I loved him for it. On the second morning, however, I saw that he was getting his own reward for the work. I happened to be watching when he made his first trip to the kitchen. Reaching the porch, he set down his bucket, took a prudent look around in all directions, and then sank his muzzle to the bucket, lapping up half a dozen big, refreshing drafts of that milk. I'll leave it to you, gentlemen, if that wasn't just what a human being would have done. At any rate, it was what I had often done. Maybe, come to think of it, I'd corrupted Pete's morals."

Paul Tricot, *Capitaine*, Fourth Regiment, *Legion Etrangere*, *Marches!*



A TALL, bulky figure filled the canteen doorway and for a moment blotted out the morning sun. A half dozen men in olive drab, their blouses unbuttoned for comfort, looked up from the tables where they sat, some with grins on their faces and all with nods of approval. The newcomer was Tricot!

Tossing a battered scarlet-and-gold kepi on a table, the big man wiped his brow with the back of a hairy hand. A soldier-waiter took his order—*Period*. Contrary to the popular notion, there are no women employed in the canteens of the Foreign Legion. As in all military establishments of its kind, enlisted men perform the duties of bar-men, waiters, and clerks.

Too OLD

By Captain
Leighton H. Blood

A nattily dressed, middle-aged sergeant passed Tricot's table and was halted by a detaining hand as large as a picnic ham.

"Have the *Agence Havas* bulletins arrived yet, *mon sergent?*" asked Tricot in a voice which showed that he was irritated.

The sergeant smiled and withdrew from his blouse pocket a long, mimeographed sheet of paper—the daily, official *Agence Havas* dispatches for the French troops in Morocco. Just now they were important, for Abd El Krim, after soundly whipping the Spanish, had turned his attention to the French.

"Sit down," invited Tricot, taking the paper. "You will have a slight libation with me, Von Klaus?"

He indicated the round quart bottle

of absinth on the table before him. Without comment the German poured some of the liquor into a goblet and filled the remainder with water. Tricot was eagerly reading the official announcements on both sides of the paper.

"Bah!" growled the big man. "It is as I thought. The Berbers are trying to join Krim by way of the Tash de Taza. If we lose Taza"—he glanced up at Von Klaus and hesitated—"if we lose Taza then France might as well say adieu to Morocco," he finished.

The German said nothing.

"Come, is that not so, *mon sergent*?" demanded Tricot.

Von Klaus smiled and nodded his head.

"As you say, my dear captain, if the Berbers contact with the Riffians at Taza it looks bad for France."

Tricot reached his great hand out for his glass and took a deep drink. It was quite evident that inwardly the great Basque was raging over something. He turned to the German again.

"That's right," he almost shouted, "sit there and smile! No one will ever tell you that you are too old to fight!"

Von Klaus shrugged his neatly tailored shoulders and continued to smile. He admired Tricot, as did every one who knew the big man.

"You see, I am but a simple sergent, my captain, and therefore I am easily replaced," said the German in a quietly ironic voice. "But I am sorry if some one has said such a thing to you. You, my captain, are a soldier!"

Tricot snorted at this, but underneath his apparent disdain he was pleased. Von Klaus, in the World War, had been a major in the German army, and he did not call a man a soldier unless he meant it.

"You know what they told me not an hour ago?" demanded Tricot. And then he answered his own question: "My own colonel said to me—and mind that I have always considered him a true

friend—that I was of more value training recruits for the Riff than at the front!" stormed the big man. "I, Tricot, after more than twenty-five years of service in the *Légion Etrangère*, most of the time as an enlisted man and a sergent like yourself, Von Klaus," he added proudly. "It was only the Great War that made an officer out of Tricot. And now I am too old, they say!"

He sat back, his bulky, six-foot frame filling the chair, and regarded the German. They were both in their middle years, hard, tough, and military. Von Klaus wore a small, waxed mustache, while Tricot's face was adorned by a great pair of handlebars of coal black mixed with gray. Their faces were sun-blackened and lined. They understood each other, did these two.

"So!" said Von Klaus, raising his eyebrows significantly. "Perhaps a way could be found. Nothing is impossible in an army; nothing whatever in the *Légion Etrangère*!"

Tricot sighed—a sigh that was more like the snort of a locomotive—and shrugged his great shoulders. Hadn't he been scheming for months to find a way to get to the front and action? His eyes wandered again to the *Havas* mimeograph which he had laid down on the table. Idly he started to read the long list of army promotions. Then he saw something that made him sit bolt upright in his chair.

"Look, Von Klaus!" He pointed with an excitedly wagging forefinger at the paper. "They have made Frydenberg a general of division! He has been given command at the front!"

"Yes," replied the sergent without changing the level brusqueness of his voice. "I saw that. He is a former legionnaire, is he not, *mon capitaine*?"

Tricot did not reply at once. Instead, he carefully mixed himself another drink and then deliberately lighted a cigarette. His shaggy, black brows were knitted into one line as if he were think-

ing out some difficult problem. Then a smile broke over his scarred face.

"He *is* a legionnaire," said the big Basque with great sincerity. "Did I not teach him as a *bleu* at Sidi Bel Abbes? Later he was my *copaine!* My best friend! My buddy, as Americans say. Ah! Now, M'sieu' Krim, you shall see what you shall see. A trained legionnaire in command. Things will be different now."

Von Klaus ground out his cigarette under the heel of his boot and looked across the table with his hard, blue eyes at the officer.

"Is it not a bit late to put a new man in command, even a great one, *mon capitaine?*" he asked quietly. "Even now the Berbers in the Grand Atlas are preparing to swarm down on us through the Tash de Taza."

This was all too true, and Tricot frowned at being reminded of it. That pass at Taza was the key to drive France from Morocco, and he knew it, as all the old-timers did. After a long minute he leaned forward and pulled at the lapel of Von Klaus's blouse and spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"You are still sergeant of communications, *mon enfant?*" he asked. "You could send a little *message militaire* for poor old Tricot who is too old to fight?"

The German studied his companion hard for a minute, as if trying to fathom the thoughts and motives behind the eyes of the great Basque. At last he shrugged his shoulders in a noncommittal way, as if he understood but did not care to have any part in a plot of which Tricot was the father.

"It is impossible—against orders," he said crisply.

"But you said, not a minute ago, that nothing whatever is impossible in the legion," retorted Tricot. "You will send a message for a man who is too old to fight, to his dearest friend?"

The German lighted a cigarette and considered. He knew without being

told that Tricot wanted him to pass a message over the wire to Frydenberg. It was against regulations—the colonel only could countersign such a communication. Without doubt it would mean his sergeant's rank if there was an inquiry. But what of that? This Tricot was a soldier and a man! Why should he not go to the front if he desired? All these thoughts went through the mind of the former German officer.

Von Klaus looked up and a slow smile came into his blue eyes as he nodded his head. Tricot, the big Basque, stuck out his right hand and grasped that of the German in a great, friendly grip.

"*Merci beaucoup, mon enfant!*" he said.

The man behind the paper-strewn desk was big and his hair was red. The uniform he wore was still adorned with the *galons* of a colonel, although he was deferentially addressed as "*Mon général.*" Time enough to put on the insignia of a general when Krim had been laid by the heels and the horde of Berbers flowing down through the Tash de Taza, halted. The prospect of it all was not very promising or pleasing just then.

"I will see Captain Tricot," he said in a stern voice to a staff officer who stood before his desk at attention.

A minute later the giant Basque filled the doorway into the room. Like an automaton he walked to within a centimeter of the proscribed distance before the desk called for in regulations, stiffened to attention and saluted.

"Paul Tricot, *capitaine, Légion Etrangère!*"

He spoke the words proudly. To the general behind the desk they were full of meaning, and warmed his heart. He, too, sat more stiffly in his chair. He nodded toward the staff officer, who silently left the room.

The general stood up from behind his desk and walked forward. His right

arm shot out and encircled the burly shoulder of Tricot in the embrace of a friend who has faced death with another.

"*Le gros Basque!*"

The exclamation came softly from the lips of the general and his eyes had lost their perpetual hardness. For perhaps half a minute they stood there looking into each other's eyes. One would know that they were thinking of other days and other contacts. The general had come to the legion from a monastery where he had been a monk; Tricot, his first drill sergeant, from the Pyrenees. For years they had shared and shared alike, and then the general, a born tactician, had gone ahead, with the Basque content to remain with his beloved legion.

"*Eh bien*, it is well to have a true friend by my side again," said the general at last.

Tricot grinned. His handlebar mustache quirked up and the scars on his face seemed to dance.

"Old Tricot would not let his *copain* down!" he chuckled. "*You* should know that!"

The general's face drew itself into a frown, and he let fall his arm and stepped back a pace.

"Consider," he said gruffly, "that you have broken to little pieces the book of regulations, sent me a *message militaire* uncountersigned that you wished me to give you a command at the front, ignored your own colonel, and then, when those failed, persuaded a poor aviator, whom you doubtless got very drunk, to fly you here in a military plane. At this very minute you are being posted as absent from your regiment."

He paused for a moment and wagged his red head as if despairing the smiling face of Tricot.

"You have done everything you should not, you crazy Basque!" he almost shouted.

Tricot's grin broke into a laugh and he shrugged his massive shoulders.

"*C'est la Légion* (that is the legion)," he said.

Then the general did a very unmilitary thing. He winked very, very broadly, and laughed, too. "*C'est la Légion!*" he echoed, which is always the Foreign Legion's answer to any problem which they do not wish to explain. He grabbed hold of Tricot's right hand and shook it briskly up and down, his face one broad grin.

Fifteen minutes passed, which is a long time in a first-class war for a general commanding and a mere captain to be closeted together, while men of high rank, brigade commanders, chiefs of air service, and others fumed and fretted and cursed Tricot of the *Légion Etrangère* who was taking up those precious minutes.

"You will have to do the best you can," the general was telling Tricot, unmindful of those outside. "The men at your disposal I would not send out to fight women under most circumstances."

"I comprehend," said Tricot.

"All I can spare will be a battalion of *Chasseurs d'Afrique*, a battalion of Algerian Zouaves who are, of course, hopeless, and a composite of Senegalese, who will only be good at close quarters, as you know. Also three companies of the legion—or rather what is left of three companies, and"—he hesitated and looked hard at Tricot before he went on—"two battalions of the *Bat' d'Alf'!*"

Tricot nodded. His face had become grim and set.

"*Bien, mon général,*" he answered quietly. "I shall carry out this plan or the legion will be rid of Tricot!"

There was determination in the big man's words and the set of his jaw, and the man behind the desk was pleased. He knew that Tricot meant that if he did not succeed it would mean that he had died trying. Having been a monk

it was natural that he had a religious thought about Tricot:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

And the monk who was now a general was the *copaine* of the big Basque! Tricot was offering his very life to save the situation that had been placed in the general's hands. The redhead bowed a little as if to hide eyes that were a bit filmed. Then he reached for a pen and wrote briskly.

"Here is the order," he said, handing the paper to Tricot. "It is most unusual, placing a captain in charge of so many troops, but it is *my order* and in my own handwriting. It had better be obeyed!"

The last was not meant for Tricot. The general knew that the Basque was fearless, but all men were not like him. The tone of his voice bode drastic measures for any one who disregarded the order or its bearer.

The two faced each other again and shook hands, quietly, firmly, and without another word or so much as a salute, Tricot strode from the room. As the door closed the general's face relaxed and a look of grave concern came over his features. Was he sending his dearest friend to certain death? Then it became stern again, and he briskly pushed a button on his desk. The war in the Riff *must* go on! As for damming the tide in the Tash de Taza until troops could be released from the Riff—that was up to Paul Tricot! A hopeless, desperate chance, but one that had to be taken. No good troops could be spared for that job until those blockhouses Krim's men had surrounded had been relieved.

Tricot looked over the motley array of black, white, and brown men that were, for the time being, his command. Like all legion officers he was trained to command anything from a platoon to a brigade, and he could do each with

equal ease. But what an outfit this was!

The three companies of legionnaires, still game, were in tatters, and some of them were shoeless. They had just come from four months of steady fighting in the Riff.

"Tell your men to 'find' clothes and equipment if it cannot be issued," he told the legion lieutenants. Other arms of the French army call the "finding" by the *Légion Etrangère* such names as "larceny" and "robbery," and it is a notorious pastime. The officers and men grinned. They all knew or had heard of this smiling-faced giant who was to lead them. Tricot, to them, was a live legend, one of their own kind.

The Senegalese were all right if they would only stand up under rifle fire, but hand to hand is the only game they are good at. The *Chasseurs* might do with the legion alongside. As for the Zouaves from Algeria, conscripts for a year—Tricot wiped them off his slate as hopeless save for guarding supplies. That left two battalions of the *Bat' d'Af'*.

The *Bat' d'Af'*, as they are officially called in the French army, are the *Bataillons d'Afrique* to the civil population of France and a dread institution. Criminals too incorrigible for the French prisons are deported to two places—the *Bat' d'Af'* or Devil's Island. The latter is correctly the French penal colonies, French Guiana, South America, although commonly called Devil's Island, after one of its smaller prisons made famous by the Dreyfus case.

Only in dire necessity are the men in the *Bat' d'Af'* ever armed and given live ammunition and used as fighting troops, although they are drilled harshly as part of their penal servitude. It is too dangerous. But when the very life of the French régime in Africa is threatened, such as in the Tash de Taza affair, they are put in the lines to fight.

"You understand that we are going

up into the Pass of Taza and hold it," Tricot was telling the dozen officers grouped about him. "Any man—or any officer—who fails to stand fast will be shot by the legionnaires. That is all. We will proceed. The *Bat' d'Af'* will lead off, with a company of Senegalese as a point."

The other officers, save the lieutenants from the three tired companies of the Foreign Legion, all outranked Tricot, but they had read the order. It was explicit. It was short and to the point. This giant Basque was the supreme commander in this forlorn hope, and they all seemed to feel that it would fail.

The Senegalese started out gayly, as black soldiers usually do, and then the line halted. Tricot investigated.

"The men in the first company refuse to move," a captain of the *Bat' d'Af'* told him.

"Refused!" madly thundered Tricot. "Where are the dogs?"

They were an evil, snarling mob when Tricot came upon them. With fifty rounds of ammunition in their cartridge cases, rifles and bayonets, these criminal scum of Europe had decided they would make a break here and now. What was to stop them?—their leaders argued.

"*Cochons!*" growled Tricot in a voice that was the awe of legion parade grounds. "March, swine! Forward, or I, Tricot of the *Légion Etrangère*, will tear you to bits!"

This sounded like bravado, but it was giving the big man a chance to single out the leaders of the revolt. It was easy. From the ranks of the criminal company came a laugh and a curse.

Those who saw that fight tell of it to this day. Like a panther the giant Basque made one spring, grabbed a rifle from a startled burglar, and was in the midst of that company. Right and left and up and down he swung the gun, its stock splintered to bits. He knew this

sort of fighting, for in twenty-five years in the Foreign Legion he had been up against hand-to-hand conflict before.

It was fully a minute before the startled criminals recovered from the shock of Tricot's charge. Then, a snarling, cursing mass, they gave way, but only so they could bring their rifles into play. Tricot, a swathe mowed around him, continued to wade in.

"*Aux Légion! Aux Légion!*"

As he swung Tricot bellowed the successor call of the Foreign Legion like one of the great bulls of the Basque country. Far away, it seemed to him, fighting now for his very life, he heard it taken up faintly.

There were a dozen prone men of the *Bat' d'Af'* lying around him, and others were shouting for them to give way so that they could shoot this giant officer. Undaunted, Tricot pressed on. The officers of the criminal companies stood back aghast, too stunned to do anything.

"Prepare to fire by volley!" Sharp and clear it rang out. There was no mistaking that command.

A score of the *Bat' d'Af'* who had been vainly trying to bring the whirling, fighting Tricot within the sights of their Lebel's, turned at the sound of the voice.

Kneeling in firing position into which they had dropped a second before, was a platoon of legionnaires. Beside them stood a stern-faced sergeant. It was he who had given the order.

It was only a single platoon of ragged, half-starved men, with tough, sun-baked faces. A handful compared to the *Bat' d'Af'*! But the *Bat' d'Af'*, whose members consider themselves the toughest hombres alive, have a healthy, justified fear of the Foreign Legion. They paused, then huddled together.

"*Bien!*" cried Tricot, tossing away the smashed rifle he had been swinging. "Now you have come to your senses! Must we kill you and not the Berbers? Suit yourselves, my prized ones. If you

fight well in the Tash de Taza it will be a pardon for many of you. If you do not go forward, well, my legionnaires will——”

He left his sentence unfinished. The men of the criminal battalions understood. It was no threat he was making, they knew. It was a promise a man such as this one would carry out.

Other legionnaires were arriving now on the run. They had been marching directly behind the *Bat' d' Af'*. Officers and sergeants had their automatics out. Every man's face was hard, cruel, and set with the light of battle. All they knew was the fact that somewhere a legionnaire had called for help. That was sufficient. Death to any one who picks on the legion!

A group of the *Bat' d' Af'* were talking quietly together. Tricot eyed them, and waited. One of their number, a fair-haired Norman, detached himself, came forward and saluted smartly.

“We will follow you, my captain,” he said simply. “You are not like the officers to whom we have been accustomed. The legion understands our plight. The others say that a man who is not afraid of the *Bat' d' Af'* single-handed is the one they will be glad to fight for.”

Tricot grinned. He was in tatters, and had lost his kepi, but that did not detract from his appearance; rather it aided it. Like all legion officers he wore no Sam Browne belt or campaign ribbons. Outside of his cuff rank markings he might be taken for a simple sergeant.

“Good!” he exclaimed heartily. “I am glad. You will not go where I would not send legionnaires or go myself. Many will die but it will be better, I think, than your present position.”

“Yes,” replied the criminal, “death will be a great relief to many of us.”

Tricot shrugged his shoulders. The *Bat' d' Af'* is no pleasure resort where criminals are pampered. If a man is

lucky enough to live five years in the *Zephyrs* he is considered inhuman.

“And for what did they send you here for?” he asked.

“Murder,” said the man simply.

Tricot smiled. “*Bien*. Then you know firearms,” he said. “I give you a chance to kill Berbers now, and after, if you live, you may return to France.”

The spot Tricot chose to defend was at the very top of the pass. In order to gain his objective it was necessary to fight a dozen small bands of advancing mountain men. The Senegalese gave way at the first long-range rifle fire, just as he had expected, but his heart lightened: the *Bat' d' Af'* stood fast!

They made the divide and under the experienced eye of Tricot dug in amid the red shale and rocks of the mountains. It was a thin, tricky line, but purposely so. The legionnaires were scattered by platoons throughout the two battalions of the criminals—for morale, a psychologist would have told you. Safety first would have been Tricot's reason.

In a deep, sheltered *whadi* the Basque assembled the Senegalese. This valley was right behind the first line, but Berber bullets would go harmlessly overhead until the tribesmen were on top of the black men from Senegal. For five minutes he talked to them, calling the Senegalese by the nickname given them by the legion, and which they adore as from one fighting crew to another—“Johnny.”

Now in hand-to-hand fighting not even the Foreign Legion wants to try conclusions with the men from Senegal. In that the black man is superb. His one and only failing is fear of long-range fire; he must be able to see the face of his enemy. Two things he loves with the affection of a child, his officers and the men of the *Légion Etrangère*—the latter probably because the legionnaires never make fun of their black

brothers at arms, and both are fighters by instinct. Given an order by a white officer and a close-up of their enemy, the Senegalese will die with their boots on. If that officer happens to be of the *Légion Etrangère* so much the better.

"When they come, Johnny, you will fight?" Tricot asked them easily. "My legionnaires will fall back upon you and you will be side by side."

Five hundred grinning mouths answered. As many hands dropped to razor-edge blades. A sea of red *tarboushes* nodded.

"*Bien!*" smiled the Basque.

Through his binoculars Tricot watched the advancing Berbers in dirty, browned *jellabeas* and burnouses of camel's hair. The mountains seemed to swarm with them, and their clothing merged with the red and brown earth and rocks, making them poor and tricky targets.

"They think the battle won already," observed the Basque to a major of the *Bat' d' Af'*. "See, commandant, they bring their women and children."

Behind the tribesmen could be seen the figures of women and small children, some driving camels ahead of them and others strings of heavy-laden donkeys.

"This will not be nice," decided Tricot audibly to himself. "The women are far more cruel than the men. May the good God give strength to any wounded who fall within their clutches."

It is a Berber custom, when the women are along, which is frequently the case save on an isolated raid, to turn the wounded and the prisoners over to them for torture. The men are cruel enough, but the women, more inventive, apparently enjoy to a greater extent seeing a prisoner put on the rack.

"The women will be treated the same as the men," was the curt order passed along by Tricot just before the first rush.

To the legionnaires this was reasonable, but to the hardened men of the criminal battalions something in warfare they did not understand. After the Berbers had been driven back to positions below the men defending the pass, there to snipe and await dusk for another rush, Tricot passed along his lines.

At each company of the *Bat' d' Af'* he explained what a wounded man could expect. That, he told them, was why he had given orders to shoot any of the women who followed up the advance of the tribesmen.

"Say to yourselves that you are shooting at the gendarme who caused you to be sent to the *Bat' d' Af'*, or the *juge d' instruction* who held you for the as-sizes," smiled Tricot. "Forget that they are women. In reality they are devils. Ask the legionnaires. They can tell you."

So far the casualties had been light, but Tricot knew that when the main body of mountain men arrived things would turn in their favor. Although it was late in the season he had no hope that the weather would come to his aid. In the pass at Taza, which is at a great altitude, military operations can only be held a few months of the year when the snow has been melted away. The high peaks, however, are always snow-capped.

The dusk rush was repulsed but only after several hundred Berbers had managed to take up positions close to the defenders of the pass. As the evening wore along Tricot called a conference of the ranking officers and sketched out to them his plan of defense. It seemed a hopeless and mad proposition, but few of them dared question. There was something about the voice and actions of the big Basque as he talked that told them that he was doing the only thing possible under the circumstances. They all knew that twenty-five years' service in the *Légion Etrangère*, including four

years of the World War, came as near to teaching one what fighting was all about as anything could, and this man seemed a crafty leader. And above all, the general commanding had explicit faith in him.

"You, *mon commandant*," said Tricot, turning to a major of the criminal battalions, "will hold the second line and fall back only as I direct. The *Chasseurs*, which will be with you, will kill any of the *Bat' d'Af'* who leave the first line unless so ordered, and that order signaled back to you. *Your men will turn their own machine guns on French troops! Do you understand?*"

The major, wide-eyed at the sudden harshness in Tricot's voice, nodded his head. For the time being the criminals were French troops. There was a deep silence, as Tricot looked around to see that all understood.

"I do not have to give such an order about the *Légion Etrangère*," said the Basque in a proud tone. "The legion has *never* retreated except under explicit orders of its own officers. As for the Senegalese, if they fall back it will only be after their particular mission has been complete. Let them through, and you"—turning to a young captain of the Algerians, who had been listening intently—"you, *mon enfant*, will reform the black men."

The young officer nodded. It was evident that at least he was mightily impressed by the big man who was leading them.

"Some of you appear to think that we cannot stop these Berbers," summed up Tricot in a hard, rasping voice that snapped out like the lash of a whip. "This is no tranquil business, this fighting that is coming. It means death to many of us. Just remember that the Frenchmen in Fort Douamont did not question whether they could hold Verdun. They held it! We will keep these Berbers out of Taza! They must not be allowed to consolidate with Krim!

That is all, my comrades. As for Tricot, I will stay with the first line, for this is a business that I know. If I should be killed, the officers with me will carry on in plans that I will have given them, and they are to be obeyed. This defense will not be of the kind proscribed in St. Cyr, with the commanding officer in the rear. It will be a defense of the *Légion Etrangère*. It is understood, then, that these Berbers *will* be stopped!"

He scanned the faces of the little group of ranking officers about him. They nodded their heads.

"*Très bien*," smiled Tricot. "*Bon chance* to you all!"

The *Bat' d'Af'* broke shortly after sunrise the next morning, and started pell-mell toward the rear, throwing their packs and rifles away. Tricot saw them going and that they had left his legionnaires, scattered along the thinly held line, in the lurch. The legionnaires were standing fast, redoubling their fire to make up for the deserters.

A grim, terrible look came into Tricot's face as he waited, watching the criminals as they scuttled rearward. Already his heliograph corporal was flashing back the word to the *Chasseurs*. He knew that the major back there was fighting a battle with himself over firing into men wearing the uniform of France. But a panic would be fatal! If he didn't kill those *Bat' d'Af'* the contagion of the rout would spread to the *Chasseurs* and the far-from-brave Algerians. Looking through his binoculars the Basque watched the fleeing criminals.

"The message has been received, *mon capitaine*," said the signal corporal.

"*Bien*," answered Tricot. "We will see if these *Bat' d'Af'* officers are as hard as they claim or if they will obey commands. I am sorry they have to do this, but it is the only way. These poor *zephyrs* are better dead than in those hell battalions."

From a distance in the rear a machine gun suddenly started its staccato chatter. Then another and yet another joined in. Through his glasses Tricot saw that the major was obeying his order. First a barrage ahead of the fleeing criminals. If that failed to stop them they were to be shot down.

A machine-gun barrage in rocky, shale-covered ground is more devastating than artillery, for the hail of bullets sends millions of rock splinters through the air like shrapnel. The *Bat' d' Af'* halted, uncertain. Ahead of them was certain death from French machine guns. Behind them was a thin line of the Foreign Legion whom they had deserted, and thousands of Berbers beyond. Death in front and death behind!

Some of the *Bat' d' Af'* pushed on and fell under the machine-gun fire. Others dropped to the ground. It was then that Tricot went into action.

Making his way back, he went along the line, empty handed, into the ranks of these men he had ordered killed if they retreated, and ordered them back to support of the legion.

"If you retreat it is sure death," he told them simply. "If you stand with my legionnaires you have a fighting man's chance of life. You cannot get back. If you stick in the lines I will do everything I can to bring you out safely. Killing me will not alter this. My orders have been given. Take your choice."

His words reassured many of them. He had no fear and seemed to know what he was doing. Perhaps they might live if they obeyed him. That curtain of steel and rock splinters was impregnable. It might also hold the Berbers. Tricot knew that wasn't so, but he did not tell the *Bat' d' Af'*. He wanted to use them.

At four o'clock that afternoon Tricot signaled back to the reserve an order to call back. He had been informed that the Algerians had erected a strong

point for him on a steep cliff that overhung the pass. He was ready to play his ace in the hole. During the day he had watched more and more Berbers swarm down from the mountains. There were twelve or fifteen thousand trying to push through that pass of Taza.

The *Bat' d' Af'* were back in the lines again, and they had learned many things from the legionnaires in the last hours. One was that this giant of a Basque was an idol among the men of the *Légion Etrangère*, and that when he was in action he was as crafty as the craftiest Berber. They were to fall back soon, and then would come the surprise that this Captain Tricot had planned. None seemed to know exactly what it would be, but all agreed that it would be good.

"They form for a grand rush," observed Tricot with a grim smile. "Send out the order to fall back slowly and guide on me."

The heliograph twinkled in the late-afternoon sun. Whistles blew as the first Berbers started for the long, thin line.

Slowly, and turning to fight every hundred yards or so, Tricot led his men back. The Berbers, observing the retreat, started on en masse. Into the *whadi* where the Senegalese waited came the brown ranks of the legion and of the criminal battalions.

Black faces grinned at the white men who joined their ranks, and horny black hands dropped to the hilts of their long knives. They saw the big captain of the legion and toward him they looked. This white man would tell them what to do.

There was a sudden lull as the troops gained the comparative safety of the *whadi*. Then came the Berbers, without order, rushing down the steep sides, unmindful at first of the five hundred black men who waited for them. When it was too late, with hundreds behind

who could not see the trap ahead, the Berbers tried to halt.

Tricot, standing like some great statue, his whistle between his lips, raised his arm above his head and blew the signal to advance.

It has been asserted that the war cry of the American Indian was a most dread sound. That may well be, but it could hardly compare with the cry that went up from five hundred black throats as Paul Tricot gave the order to charge and those Senegalese answered him.

Those cries would have curdled the lifeblood of any man. They were the primitive shouts of the jungle out for the kill. And now the kill was in sight. They could *see* their enemies. The men from Senegal have a fanatical love for their white leaders and will die to obey their orders if they can sight the enemy.

It was the unleashing of a human juggernaut. Forward they went, and into the mass of Berbers. Back went the mountain men, for they cannot, any more than can white, well-drilled troops, stand against the jungle men in hand-to-hand fighting.

Tricot was everywhere, shouting "Johnny!" at the black men, and slashing with one of their great swordlike knives that he had picked up from a fallen Senegalese. Only human exhaustion stopped the battle. Many of the black men were dead, but hundreds of Berbers had been killed or wounded, and for the time being, at least, the advance had been stopped. Now they were sniping from behind rocks at a good distance, which disconcerted the Senegalese, who fell back. But their work was done, and Tricot sent them back.

"Now it remains to hold that strong point," said Tricot to one of the legion lieutenants who came up for orders. "We will fall back, and I will occupy that place."

"But only a few can stop there," said the lieutenant.

"I am aware of that," smiled Tricot. "But if we hold out there only a very few will be able to get around the mountains toward Taza. The main body of my men will scatter out behind as a reserve in case those of us in this strong point are killed. That will be the only way they will get through," he added grimly.

It was not yet seven o'clock in the morning, but the general had been at his desk for three hours, after that much rest during the night. He glanced up as a knock sounded at his door and the chief of staff came in.

"You have the reports, *mon colonel?*" snapped the general.

"*Oui, mon général,*" smiled the other. "The last blockhouse has been relieved and was blown up at four sixteen this morning!"

"That is well," said the man behind the desk. "And in the Taza pass?"

He was looking intently at his chief of staff, and his eyes had a haunted look as if in fear of what he would hear.

"The Captain Tricot is still holding out," said the colonel. "It is most amazing, *mon général!* A few Berbers have tried to circle the pass but have been met by the *Chasseurs* in strategic spots that had been picked by this Tricot before he took over the strong point."

"Is that all?" The general fairly snapped out the words. He sensed that his chief of staff was keeping back something.

The colonel shifted from one foot to the other. There was some mysterious bond between his general and this Captain Tricot. He knew the antecedents of his commander, but he did not know the legion.

"The Captain Tricot signaled by blinker at three this morning that but four of them lived," he said quietly. "They are almost surrounded."

"*Mon Dieu!*"

The general leaped to his feet in one great bound, and was snapping out questions like the bark of a machine gun.

"The Riff blockhouses are relieved? Yes? Good! We have a fresh battalion of the legion just come from Bel Abbes. Krim can wait for a day or two now. The Basque has been holding that strong point for seven days and nights. Camions, quickly, for this battalion of the legion! Also my motor. I go to the Tash de Taza! I will set about Krim to-morrow. Come, go quickly!"

The chief of staff obeyed with alacrity. This red-headed one was on the warpath. Hadn't he relieved all those blockhouses that Krim had surrounded for weeks, and defied artillery and air bombs to move him? Done it in the good, old-fashioned way of sending in infantry—the *Légion Etrangère*! There was no longer any doubt in the mind of the staff officer that this former monk and legionnaire was a military genius. He had won where military minds sent out from France had failed.

"It would be nice if we had water, but we might as well say that it would also be fine to be strolling along the Rue de la Paix," said the dirty, blackened big man, lying behind the machine gun. "Is that not so, *mon enfant*?"

He was addressing a tall, fair-haired man who lay on the other side of the piece. This one nodded his head. His tongue was too swollen to speak. He wondered how this giant captain could still talk, for there was a great tear in his left shoulder where a Mauser bullet had torn away the flesh, and his side was bandaged. But still this man Tricot was carrying on.

"Of course, this has not been a very nice seven days here," went on the big man. "Many of our comrades are dead, but the good God smiles at us. And, then, sometime soon the legion will come."

The blond man on the floor had his doubts. This was a worse hell than the *Bat' d' Af'*, except for the dirty and bloody Tricot who seemed to understand everything.

"Have no doubt, *mon enfant*, the legion will come," went on Tricot. "If not to-day, then to-morrow or the day after. Is it not so, Johnny?"

He turned to a great, hulking black, bare save for a pair of pants, who sat back on his haunches, an open box of machine-gun ammunition before him. The Senegalese could still talk.

"*Oui, mon capitaine*," said the black in French, for he was a sergeant and a little above the average in intelligence. "They always come!"

"There, you see, it is like I said," reassured Tricot. "When the general has relieved the blockhouses in the Riff, then he will send the legion here. Until then we must hold this pass. It is all very simple."

The day wore on. Afternoon came and the strong point was deluged by a hail of bullets. Tricot, conserving his ammunition, fired only when he had a sure target. Inwardly he believed his hours and the lives of his two companions were numbered. One had died since he had signaled back just before dawn. He would signal again now.

Dragging himself to his heliograph he started to send. There was no plea in the message he was shooting rearward by the kindly rays of the sun. Simple fact.

"Three still remain——" he sent, and then the message stopped.

The tall, blond man who had been sent to Africa for murder, saw Tricot topple over, and crawled to his side.

"It is nothing," the Basque assured him, but there was crimson on his lips.

That, the man from the *Bat' d' Af'* knew, meant the bullet had cut things up inside the big man.

"Take me back to the machine gun," Tricot ordered: and, with the aid of

the black sergeant, the man from the *Bat' d'Af'* obeyed. The Basque was conscious but was suffering pain.

"It is nothing," he said. "Watch, and if they start to crawl up on us again we will drive them off."

The shadows started to thicken. Tricot closed his eyes. The criminal and the black man from Senegal watched from the *creneau* through which the snout of their machine gun poked out to sweep the trail below.

"*Fixe!*"

Tricot had opened his eyes and spoken. The two at the gun looked down.

"*Mais oui! La Légion!*"

The big Basque was smiling and pulling himself erect on his right elbow and listening intently.

The two could hear nothing. Their eyes showed that they thought that the Basque was in a delirium.

"Do you not hear the bugles?" asked Tricot. "Listen, it is the bugles of the legion! They play 'The March of the Legion'! They always come! Allah will take many of his faithful to him to-night in the Tash de Taza! The legion marches!"

Then they heard the clear, ringing notes of the bugles that set your spine crawling. Tricot sat up, a happy smile on his face, which was gray now under the deep-burning tan.

"The legion never forgets," he said simply.

The big, gray military car was drawn up under the shelter of a hill, and every once in a while spent bullets whistled overhead. A half mile away there was heavy firing, broken now and then by quick, sharp bugle calls in the night, and the blinking of electric flashlights sending out dots and dashes. Now and then one heard the shrill, hard cries of Berbers, mingled with the battle shouts of civilized men.

Beside the rough trail a man in a sky-blue overcoat paced up and down

smoking one cigarette after the other, apparently unmindful of everything about him. He was perfectly aware that a full battalion of the *Légion Etrangère* was in the middle of Taza pass now and he had no fear of the outcome.

Down the trail came four men with a stretcher. He halted them.

"He is of the *Bat' d'Af'*, *mon général*," said the sergeant who followed. "He was at the machine gun with the officer and a Senegal sergeant."

The general glanced down and saw that the wounded man's eyes were now open.

"It is well, *mon brave*," he reassured the man. "I will publish an order of the army restoring you as a citizen. You stood with my friend."

Another stretcher party detached itself in the dark. This time it was the black sergeant.

"You did well, Johnny," said the general. "The captain lives?"

The black man showed his teeth in a pleased smile.

"*Oui, mon général*," he said. "He is a friend of the gods."

"That is so," said the general seriously. "And your part, *mon sergent*, will not be forgotten."

He turned to the chief of staff who stood at his side.

"Take the sergeant's name and number," he ordered. "He shall be rewarded. The *Medaille Militaire* for such as these. Tricot has already won it twice, as an enlisted man. And now he is an officer, but we shall see."

Ten minutes went by and the general became nervous. Then his aid de camp came to him.

"The Captain Tricot comes now, *mon général*," he said. "He insisted that they not evacuate him until he saw that the legion had retaken the whole pass. That is done now."

They sat the stretcher gently to the ground, and the general dropped to his

knees beside the big man who lay there, a blanket covering his great frame.

"You are all right, *gros Basque?*" asked the general in a soft voice, oblivious of the group standing above them.

Tricot grinned and started to reply, then choked.

"Of a certainty, *La Rouge!*" he smiled. "Am I not Tricot? What would you? Do you wish me to die?"

"*Non, non, mon copaine!*" said the kneeling man, for he had dropped the years from his shoulders and once again he was a simple legionnaire beside his best friend, who was wounded and perhaps dying.

"*Très bien,*" chuckled Tricot. "Then I shall live."

"What can I do for you?" the general asked.

Tricot cleared his throat and called for a cigarette, whose end was immediately covered by crimson when he inserted it between his lips.

"I did the best I knew how," said Tricot after a few puffs. "The two who followed me to the end should be given every award. As for myself, I have too damn many medals. They weigh me down.

He contemplated the end of his cigarette, wiped his flecked mouth with the back of his hand, and looked up into the eyes of the man on the ground beside him. Suddenly Tricot's own eyes twinkled.

"Would you do your old *copaine* of the *Légion Etrangère* a small favor, *mon général?*" he asked.

"*La Rouge* will do anything for Tricot," said the other softly. "Name it!"

A great grin spread over the week's growth of bristles on the Basque's face and his famous chuckle broke on the night air.

"That is well," he said. "Listen intently to Tricot, then. Some fool said that I, Tricot, was too old to fight. *Eh bien,* so they ordered me to keep away from the lines and train the *bleus*. I wish that you issue an order that I am *not* too old to fight. That is all. Just show the army that old Tricot still lives and can do his part."

"It shall be done," smiled the general, holding Tricot's hand.

"And, *mon général,*" the wounded man added, as they picked up the stretcher again, "you might add that Tricot, the Basque, is *never* too old to fight!"

A new story of the legion, by Captain Leighton H. Blood, will appear soon.



EUREKA, CALIFORNIA

WITH the opening of the Pacific Highway, there passes one of the last reflections of the old West. Eureka, California, has remained for years practically as left by the gold rush. Protected on the west by the ocean, on the north and east by the mountains, and in the south by the poor roads, it was not touched by oncoming civilization. When the Redwood Highway was improved the number of visitors increased. But they were only visitors; they had little effect on the life of the inhabitants. Although a busy little town, due to the logging, fishing, mining, and production of power, the character has remained untouched.



The Necessary RABBIT

By J. FRANK DAVIS

The Perfect Crime at Last?

BEING at last definitely on his way to commit murder deliberately, coldly, and with his plans so made as to foresee every foreseeable contingency and to meet all the unforeseeable ones that might arise, Norman Trask, as he left the little suburban family hotel which had been his home for two years, did not allow himself to show haste or in any other way conduct himself otherwise than as usual.

In the unexpected and improbable event that attention might be attracted to him in connection with the killing, he

must have done nothing out of the ordinary that might feed suspicion.

He paused a moment at the door of the tiny office to speak to the hotel proprietress about the continuing September heat and make only the merest reference to the fact that, at the end of so warm a Saturday in town, he would not now be leaving the cool veranda if it were not that he had a small commercial errand.

"That's one of the outs about my business," he smiled, "that when you have to see a client at his home in the

evening, you have to." And Mrs. Snow, whose mind was principally upon the weekly bills she was making out, replied absent-mindedly that every business had its outs, and did he find his suits from the cleaners in his rooms all right? And if he saw Vernon in the yard as he went through, would he please tell him she wanted him?

Trask sauntered down the front steps and around the house, a pink-faced, honest-eyed, rather distinguished-appearing person who hardly looked his forty-five years, taking his usual short cut to the garage in the next block where he kept his car.

Vernon Snow was leaning over the pen which contained his six rabbits, and the promoter—he called himself an investment broker—stopped to give him his mother's message and make friendly comment upon the gratifying health and appearance of the rabbits.

The sun had just set and a pleasing coolness was coming into the air, and fifty yards away, across the side street, Miss Sarah McDaniel screamed from her veranda at a little boy who had thrown something at a cat that if she ever saw him do that again she would call the police.

"Ol' nut!" commented Vernon. "Always buttin' in, what ain't her business!"

"That boy a friend of yours?" Trask smiled.

"Naw," replied the twelve-year-old. "But she's always snoopin' at fellers. If it was a dog, she'd be all right. But what's a cat? They try to get at my rabbits."

The promoter went his way, still smiling. That was good, practical philosophy: to a rabbit owner, what's a cat? Jim Zeigler was the cat who was threatening Trask's rabbits—all his well-laid plans for the financial clean-up and get-away that now, with any reasonable break of luck, would come in a month. And absolutely the only

way to get rid of Zeigler was to kill him.

Trask viewed the necessity of this as wholly regrettable but not a thing to be either unduly excited or frightened about. On the contrary. It wasn't as though Zeigler were the first man he had ever killed.

He had removed "Gabby Steve" Broderick, back there in Stockton, close to twenty years ago, and had done it so cleverly that he had never even been questioned in connection with it.

Murder ought not to be done unless necessary, but it was safe enough for a sufficiently clever man who considered every contingency, left liquor alone, and kept his head and his nerve. Men who got caught did so because of their own mistakes, and mistakes were needless.

For example, it would have been a mistake right now if he had come through the hotel hallway with the pistol anywhere in his clothes; any bulge where so invariably well-dressed a man as he never allowed bulges might have attracted attention.

And it would have been a mistake—considering that he must dispose of it immediately after its use—if he had ever kept this particular weapon or any other of the same caliber in either his hotel suite or his office, where, however hidden, it might have come under the eye of some curious housemaid or prying clerk.

The automatic which he was about to use had been bought in New York a fortnight before when he had a perfectly legitimate business errand in that city, and from the moment of his return home had safely and secretly reposed beneath the seat of his car, together with exactly sufficient cartridges for one loading, wrapped with tools in an oily rag.

He had loaded it late last night, so no time would be lost this evening, and the driving gloves he had then worn and would now wear as protection against

the evidence of finger prints were carelessly stuffed behind the seat cushions.

He got his car out and drove toward Hamilton Park. Thomas P. Burrell, the old semi-invalid to whom he once had sold a few shares of stock, lived near Hamilton Park. This—and the fact that through the park ran a little winding river—was why he had selected that many-acred municipal pleasure ground for his final meeting with Zeigler.

Zeigler, the fool, had been utterly unsuspecting when they made the appointment. He would have been suspicious, no doubt, if he had been blackmailing Trask on any large scale; he had not, however, seemed to consider his request for merely sufficient money to live comfortably on as blackmail, but merely as trifling assistance which his old partner, now prosperous, would be glad to give.

His price had really been modest, and he was saying all the time that he would earn it if Trask would tell him how; and, of course, Trask had good-humoredly replied that he had nothing at the moment for him to do, but that he would keep him in funds if Zeigler would stay away from the office, never mention their old acquaintance, and meet him only in places where they would not be seen. And the other had appreciated the propriety of this and cheerfully agreed.

Zeigler was getting old and ambitionless, willing to live simply if only it could be safely; he had been well over fifty when they together had had taken that rap in San Quentin for the Fresno swindling job, and that was fourteen years ago. He had been the senior and principal in that job and had served eight years. Trask—although his name then had not been Norman Trask but Nathan Taylor—had got out in six.

And now, after all the years of getting a new start here in the East with no one suspecting his earlier back-

ground, Zeigler had accidentally discovered him and, quite as a matter of course, fastened himself upon him.

A good man in his day and line of work, Zeigler—when he left booze alone—but that day was gone. Now, even sober, he was valueless to Trask, and he had again started drinking, after what he had claimed to be years of abstinence. That was what had sealed his death warrant. Zeigler, in liquor, always had been recklessly talkative; now that he had begun drinking again it would be only a question of time before he would mention Trask to some one. This could not be allowed.

It was for talking too much that Trask had killed Broderick in Stockton; but Zeigler, of course, had never heard of his connection with that shooting. Nobody had.

Darkness had fallen when Trask came to a boulevard bordering Hamilton Park in which many automobiles stood along the curbs; he had timed his arrival exactly.

He left his car there and strolled into the park by a footpath, still wearing his driving gloves and with the automatic in his pocket. The path brought him out upon a tree-shaded automobile drive, close to the spot where he had told Zeigler to meet him and receive another hundred dollars.

This appointed spot was at the middle of a long, sweeping curve, where the approach of either cars or pedestrians could be observed for a considerable distance in each direction, and at this hour of the evening all that section of the park was usually deserted.

Zeigler stepped out from the shadow of a clump of shrubbery as Trask arrived, and remarked amiably:

"'Lo, Nate. Been a hot day, ain't it?"

"Nate!" The old name! Zeigler would not have used it, even when they were alone, if he were not under the old, tongue-loosening influence. The

odor of his breath came strongly and he carefully adjusted his feet to hold his balance; he was decidedly drunk. If he had been cold sober, Trask still would have killed him, of course, but his condition, emphasizing again the danger inherent in his continued existence, made it easier.

"Hello, Jim," Trask replied. "Let's get back out of sight."

Wholly good-natured and unsuspecting, Zeigler turned to precede him. Three seconds later Trask shot him, twice, in the back of the head.

Every detail of what to do next had been carefully worked out. Without a second's delay Trask dragged the body back into the thickest clump of shrubbery, and unhurriedly, almost leisurely, walked to the nearest bridge. This was the most dangerous spot in all his plans—the uncertainty as to how he would immediately get rid of the pistol. If any one should appear, he would toss it into the shrubbery, but even though he was certain it could not be identified as his property it would be better if it never should be found at all, and under the nearest bridge the water was deep.

Luck continued with him. He came to the bridge without having seen a soul, and stood facing the railing, looking down into the stream. Still no one was in sight, but he took no chances that some one of whose presence in the vicinity he was unaware might see him drop an object into it. He stuffed the pistol inside his waistband, let it slide down the leg of his trousers until it fell out at the bottom, and then with a slight movement of his foot slid it off under the metal railing. It made a splash that could not have been heard at a distance of twenty yards.

He took off his gloves now and put them in his pocket; that also had been a dangerous but unavoidable condition, that some one might see him before he could rid himself of the automatic and

wonder why any pedestrian should be wearing gloves on so warm a night.

He turned from his seemingly idle inspection of the water and, still moving without too great haste and meeting no one, went to where he had left his car. He drove three blocks to the residence of Thomas P. Burrell, with whom that afternoon he had made an appointment by telephone. For close to half an hour he earnestly tried to sell Burrell an additional block of stock. The old man was not greatly interested. Trask's mind refused to concentrate wholly upon his canvassing arguments, and he made no sale. This, however, was of no consequence; he had, if any one had seen him or should see him, established his reason for being in this vicinity.

He returned as rapidly as the traffic regulations permitted to his hotel, and spent all the remainder of the evening upon its veranda.

Other hotel residents were there present, and he did not allow himself to think any more than was necessary of what had been done, but kept his mind intent upon the conversation around him and participated in it, so that his manner, in case of later emergency, could not be remembered as having been unusual.

At eleven o'clock he went up to his two-room-and-bath suite on the second floor, and sat down to think it all over and consider carefully if anything had been overlooked or needed to be additionally planned.

Men who committed capital crimes without being caught at the moment often were apprehended afterward because they did something contrary to their usual custom. He must see to it that his routine of life for the next few days was no different from usual.

There now wasn't a chance in a thousand that any one might ever suspect him of any connection with the death, but if he should be questioned—if Zeig-

ler, for instance, had already chanced to mention his name and any one should come to him asking what, if anything, he knew about the man—his appearance of innocence must be perfect, with no act either committed or omitted to need explaining.

Had he done everything in connection with the call upon old man Burrell that he should—everything that he normally did in connection with a call upon a prospective customer? No. He had not yet made his usual memorandum of an interview and its outcome in the little notebook which he carried in his hip pocket, from which it would be transferred to the card file at the office. He crossed to the desk in the corner of his sitting room, getting out the notebook as he did so, and reached into his upper vest pocket for his fountain pen.

His finger struck its unprotected point. The cap, its threads long worn so that screwing it even the least bit too tightly would make it come loose, had let it fall into the pocket again. It had been doing that occasionally for months, but he had not bought a new pen because he so greatly liked the old one and beyond this cap looseness there was nothing the matter with it.

Ordinarily, when the pen and its cap parted company in his pocket, the cap still remained clipped to his vest. With a sudden spasm of fear Trask realized it now was not there, nor was it inside.

He could not remember that he had touched the pen since leaving his office in the afternoon. He certainly had not used it at Burrell's house; there had been no call to do so. Wait! Was he certain as to that? He had written figures upon a slip of paper to leave with Burrell, and while it seemed to him that he had used his pencil, was he really sure? Pencils and fountain pens are used automatically, and his mind had not been wholly upon what he was doing. The more he thought of it, the less certain he became.

The pen had no doubt become loose and dropped into his pocket immediately after he had last used it, wherever that was, but the cap with its clip could have been lost either then or later. It might now be on the floor of Burrell's library—but, for all he knew positively, it could have fallen when he stooped over to drag Zeigler into the shrubbery.

He forced himself very calmly to think over what this could mean at the worst, and his moment of panic passed. After all, even were the pen cap to be found near the body, there is nothing whatever about an ordinary pen cap by which its owner may be identified; he felt reasonably confident that such fragmentary finger prints as might be upon so small and rounded a surface would be valueless.

He had a momentary thought that, notwithstanding this, it might be a good idea if he threw the pen away and bought a new one, but he instantly dismissed it. If the cap had been lost at the spot of the killing, the police might scour the city for the names of descriptions of persons buying new fountain pens; many a criminal puzzle had been solved by just such seemingly hopeless routine detective work. And, if he threw the old pen away without buying a new one, that would be a most unnatural thing to do. He might have to explain why he was entirely without one, and even the slightest departure from ordinary custom must be avoided.

Besides, if the cap was at Burrell's house it would be found, and a telephone inquiry— No, he mustn't do that, because that would call attention to his having lost it, and it might be in the park. The thing to do was nothing at all.

He made a note in the little book of his interview with Burrell, and, as he could no longer carry it in his pocket, slipped the capless pen into a pigeon-hole in his desk.

He had tried so to handle the body

that no blood could get on his clothes; he wondered if he had been wholly successful. He undressed and inspected his dark suit minutely. There was one spot, a little stain not half an inch across, just above the cuff at the bottom of the left trousers leg. He took a washcloth, and with soap and water scrubbed it. It dimmed, but it did not entirely come out. He sat down in his bath robe to think this over.

What had he ever read about the perfect removal of bloodstains? He was quite certain that somewhere—in the account of some murder trial, probably—he had seen that ordinary washing would not sufficiently remove blood from a woolen fabric so that microscopical analysis would not identify it. This suit ought to go at once to a cleaner.

But no, that would not do. It would be a noticeable break in his normal routine. For more than a year Trask's suits had gone to only one cleaner, and they invariably were called for on Thursday and returned on Saturday; he had a sufficient number of suits so that no emergency had ever necessitated a change from this procedure. He must not call special attention to this suit by sending it on a different day.

He thought for a moment of wearing the suit on Monday, dropping in at some strange cleaning establishment in town and asking them to remove the spot, but dismissed the idea at once because again that would be a departure from his usual custom—and the police might be interviewing cleaners.

The suit must remain here in his closet until next Thursday, and then go, without any special comment, to the usual place. Until Thursday—five days—with blood on it—and the possibility that Zeigler might have mentioned his name to some one and that the police might come making inquiries. And blood can always be identified as such; also every expert chemist has ways of

determining whether or not it is human blood.

It was an hour later, while he was lying in bed sleepless, that he had his inspiration.

He had been racking his brain to remember all he had ever heard or read about murder trials into which bloodstains entered, and it suddenly came to him that an accused murderer—some man in Oklahoma, as he recalled it—had been acquitted because he was able to prove that on the day of the murder he had shot a rabbit and put it in his pocket. The experts had testified that the blood on his clothes might be human, but on the other hand might be rabbit. The two kinds of blood, they testified, are so similar that science cannot positively distinguish between them.

If he could kill a rabbit and let it be known, the stain, if it ever should be discovered, would be fully explained. And rabbits were at hand, in that pen in the back yard, six of them.

Trask carefully planned what he would do in the morning, checking it over again and again for error. Then, in time, he slept.

A Sunday paper, as usual, was outside his door when he rose. The killing of Zeigler was on the front page. The shots had been heard by a park employee, the body had been found, and a receipted board bill in a pocket had identified it. But nothing much was known about Zeigler, the story said. He had lived in his inexpensive boarding house for three months, seemingly without having or needing employment, and had made no close friends. He had spoken very little of his past.

It was the guess of Police Inspector Amos Cudworth, who was in charge of the case, that the thing might be a gang murder. Zeigler, perhaps concerned in some racketeering feud in another city, might have been hiding here; might have been traced by enemies and put on the spot.

Nothing about any fountain-pen cap—nothing else that might in any way connect Trask with the killing. He wondered for a moment if the thing he had planned to do to explain the blood-stains on his trousers really needed to be done. Immediately he decided that it did. He had thrashed that all out in his mind last night. Not to do it would be to take one unnecessary chance—how could he be certain that the police had told the newspapers all they knew?—and the perfection of his defense demanded that not one chance, however small, should be taken.

After breakfast, alone in the yard, he stood looking down into the rabbit pen. With no attempt at concealment, he opened the little gate, lifted out one of the rabbits by its ears, looked it over, and then killed it with his pocketknife.

There was no necessity of course, that he should actually get some of the blood on him; indeed, he was not sure that if he did so it might not be in some way determinable that there were two stains, one older than the other, which would defeat his purpose, so he carefully avoided it. He laid the dead rabbit on the ground, furtively breaking one of its legs as he bent over it, cleaned his knife as much as possible in the earth—it was not advisable that it should be too completely cleaned, seeing his use of it might need to be proved—and immediately entered the house. Losing no more time than it took to leave the knife on a shelf in his bathroom, he hunted up Mrs. Snow.

"I've got a bit of bad news for Vernon," he told her. "One of his rabbits broke its leg, and I put it out of its misery. I'll help him bury it, if he wants me to."

He added: "I hope he doesn't feel too badly. I'm sorry I had to do it, but there isn't anything else to do when these dumb things get as badly hurt as that. You can tell him I'll be glad to give him the money to buy another."

"How do you suppose it broke its leg, there in the pen?" Mrs. Snow asked.

"I wondered if perhaps a cat hadn't frightened it, and in jumping round it got its leg caught in the wire netting. Cats try to get at them, so Vernon has told me. We'll never know, of course. I saw that it was badly broken, and did what needed to be done; I hate to see an animal suffer."

"Who doesn't?" Mrs. Snow said. "You did just right."

They buried the rabbit before Vernon went to Sunday-school. The money that Trask gave him—sufficient for the purchase of a rabbit plus two of his favorite drug-store sundaes—materially alleviated his sorrow.

Trask, after the noon dinner—wearing a different suit, naturally—drove into town to his office to see if any important mail had come in the late Saturday delivery, as he did quite often on Sunday afternoons when he had nothing else to do. Returning at about five o'clock, he was told by Mrs. Snow as he entered the hotel that a visitor was waiting to see him in the reception room.

This was not usual, and he took a firm grasp on himself and arranged his face to hold its best frank-eyed expression as he entered the room. A thick-set, elderly man with white hair and a benign smile turned from the window to peer at him through round-rimmed spectacles.

"Did you want to see me? My name is Trask," the promoter said.

"Mine is Cudworth," the old man replied, rising. "There's a little matter I'd like to talk to you about for a few minutes."

Trask, as he heard the name, gave no outward sign that his heart had increased its beat. So Zeigler *had* mentioned him. "Will you come up to my rooms?" he invited.

"Well," the other said, "it's hardly important enough to put you to so much

trouble. However, we might be overheard here, and it isn't a thing you'd want talked about." Trask turned and conducted him up the stairs. He welcomed this slight respite; it gave him opportunity to get himself better in hand. In the sitting room of his suite he gestured Cudworth to a chair, took one himself, and waited politely for the visitor to state his errand.

Rather strangely, the old man showed something akin to embarrassment.

"It's a kind of a queer errand," he said, "and I wouldn't have undertaken it except that—I'm connected with the police department, Mr. Trask."

"Are you Inspector Cudworth?" Trask asked, adding, with a flattering intonation: "Anybody who reads the papers is familiar with that name."

"That's right; my job is inspector," the visitor said. "And it isn't an inspector's work at all to look up such little minor things as this. But the complainant—she and my wife were pretty chummy, years ago, and I can't refuse to do anything that she asks me to look after personally."

"The complainant?" Trask repeated, trying to make some sense of this preamble.

"Miss Sarah McDaniel," Cudworth told him. "She's a neighbor of yours. On Hampden Street, here."

"Oh, yes, I know her by sight. You say she has complained of something?"

The inspector smiled apologetically, blinking through his spectacle. "She is a rather peculiar woman," he said. "Perhaps you know that. She's getting along in years a little and she has—I guess maybe you might call 'em obsessions. She wasn't always that way—not back in the days when she and my wife were close friends. My wife has been dead a good many years. Well, that explains why Miss McDaniel asked me to make this little investigation myself, and why I couldn't refuse her. She says she happened to be looking out

of a window, and that she saw you deliberately kill a rabbit that was in the pen there in the back yard. And she thinks—a peculiar woman, as I said, with an obsession as regards cruelty to animals—she thinks you tortured it. Well, that's the story. I promised her I'd look into the matter myself."

Trask had to struggle not to show his relief. He smiled courteously.

"Why, certainly," he said. "I'm slightly familiar with Miss McDaniel's peculiarity; I've heard her hollering at the neighborhood boys. I was passing the pen and I saw that one of the rabbits seemed to be suffering. It was dragging a leg. I lifted it out and looked at it, and the leg was badly broken. So I put it out of its misery. I'm sure I did it as quickly and humanely as was possible."

"I naturally supposed there might be some such explanation," Cudworth said, "but you understand how it is when an old family friend insists that a fellow do something. Rabbits kill pretty easy, don't they?"

"I don't know as to rabbits in general—I never killed one before—but this one did, anyway. He hardly kicked. Oh, a little. Got one spot of blood on the trousers I was wearing, but that will clean up all right when the suit goes to be pressed, Thursday."

He wondered if it might seem unusual and unnecessary that he had mentioned the day, so added: "I always send them Thursday."

"Plenty of suits, I take it," Cudworth smilingly remarked, and came to his feet. "Well, I won't use up any more of your time. It was rather foolish, anyway, my coming out on a piece of investigation like this, but she asked me to and it wasn't much trouble; I live only about a mile from here."

Trask went down the stairs and to the front door with him. His relief at finding the policeman's errand so unimportant was almost overwhelming.

Every one who had read the papers that day must have noted that Inspector Cudworth was in charge of the Zeigler murder case. Would it not be the most natural thing in the world for one to mention it to him? He must not omit any action that would be natural.

"I saw by this morning's paper that you are working on that murder in Hamilton Park," Trask remarked casually as they came out upon the veranda. "Is there anything new since the paper was out—anything, I mean, that you can properly tell?"

"Not a thing," the inspector said. "I'm following up one thing and another, of course. As I said to the reporters last night, it looks like just another of those gang killings."

Trask wondered if he had shown too much curiosity. If he had, it had better be explained.

"I was particularly interested in reading that piece in the paper," he said, "because I happened to be right in that neighborhood at the time of the murder—if, as the paper said, the body was discovered within a short time after the man was killed." He might as well make it clear where in the neighborhood he was. "I happened to have a business call on Linwood Avenue—on an old fellow named Burrell who is a customer of my office." He explained further: "He is an invalid and has to be seen at home, and about the only time I can get clear to call on a man at his house is in the evening."

"I wish you had happened to be in the park instead of just near it," Cudworth told him. "Maybe you'd have seen something. Well, good day, Mr. Trask. Sorry to have had to bother you."

"No bother at all," Trask assured him. "Glad to have met you, inspector."

The old man went down the steps and climbed heavily into a little car, and Trask returned to his rooms.

Things couldn't have gone better. There was no reasonable chance now that he would ever be faced with a claim that he and Zeigler were acquainted—which he would deny, of course—but if this should come up, he already had established his alibi and at the same time his full explanation of the blood spot on his trousers, and had established these things, seemingly with no effort upon his part to do so, with the one man who would need to know them.

He very carefully carried out precisely his usual routine of conduct all that evening, and all the following business day. No new clues whatever as to the Zeigler killing were mentioned in any of the newspapers; the stories all continued to assume it was a racketeering murder. He arrived home at five thirty Monday afternoon, left his car in the garage, passed through the yard and around to the front of the hotel, and ascended, without meeting any one in the hallway, to his apartment. He opened the door and was startled to see Inspector Cudworth sitting by the window that was beside his desk.

"Howdy-do, Mr. Trask," the inspector said pleasantly, as he rose. "Seeing as I wanted to see you again and was up here yesterday, the lady thought it'd be all right for me to wait here. A little cooler up here than it is down in that reception room. Kinda stuffy down there."

"Why—that's quite all right," Trask said. "Glad you came up. Is Miss McDaniel still excited about that rabbit?"

"Knowing her, I suppose so," Cudworth replied, "but I haven't heard from her to-day. What I came for was to give you this."

He held out the cap of a fountain pen.

Trask stared at it, while his mind raced. Should he admit losing one, or not? Emphatically not, until he learned where it had been found. But as he

then might want to admit it he must temporarily evade the issue.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The top off a fountain pen," Cudworth said mildly. "Didn't you lose yours, when you were up there at Thomas P. Burrell's house?"

So that was where it had been found.

"Thank you," Trask said, taking it. "I did miss it, but I thought it must have been mislaid somewhere at the office."

"Naturally," remarked Cudworth, with a new and most disconcerting note in his voice, "seeing that you didn't take your pen out of your pocket at Burrell's."

Trask had to think rapidly. "Then it isn't likely this is mine," he replied, trying to be casual.

"The broken thread in it fits the pen in your desk, here," Cudworth assured him. "Of course, you know now where we found it."

"Why—no." Trask's throat was dry. "How should I?"

"All right, Bronson," said the inspector, not raising his voice, and a uniformed policeman slipped through the door from the bedroom and stood close to the promoter, his eyes alert for any threat of violence.

"You see," Cudworth explained to Trask, conversationally, almost pleasantly, "Zeigler had mentioned there at his boarding house, in passing, somehow, that he lived once in Fresno, California—I guess he'd been drinking and was careless—so we naturally wired headquarters there. And their reply told about his doing a stretch at San Quentin, with a pretty perfect description, considering the time that's elapsed, of this Nate Taylor that was his partner. That wouldn't have been much help to me if you hadn't mentioned being out in that neighborhood—gone quite a bit out of your way to do it, when I came to think things over in the light of that Fresno description." He explained: "I

naturally thought of everybody I had heard of as being anywhere near the park, to see if the description fitted."

"I'm sure I don't understand what you are driving at," Trask managed to say. "If you are implying I wasn't at Burrell's——"

"And that's another thing I ought to be grateful to you for," the inspector said. "Telling me about him made it possible for me to find out that you didn't get to his house—from the direction of the park—until at least ten minutes after the body had been discovered. You understand I'm not actually accusing you of being Zeigler's old partner, Nate Taylor; there'll be enough time for that after the finger prints get here—they're already on their way."

There was nothing to reply to this; denial of his identity would be useless. He must get a good criminal lawyer. Cudworth was rambling on:

"And I can see, with that stain on your pants, why, the rabbit was necessary—including killing it with a knife. That kinda puzzled me, yesterday, seeing the easiest way to kill a rabbit would be to crack it over the neck with a stick of wood, and plenty wood there in the yard, but your never having killed a rabbit before sort of explained that, and I naturally didn't give any more thought to it till this Fresno wire came. I can see now, of course, that you needed rabbit blood because it's so much like human, and the suit couldn't go to the cleaners till Thursday without attracting attention. Very clever. Very clever indeed, although if it hadn't been for the rabbit I'd probably never even have heard of you. But you couldn't possibly know that. We came here right after you'd gone into town, this morning, and found the fountain pen with the busted threads that matched——"

Trask dropped the pen cap to the floor and stamped his heel upon it. As it crushed to fragments he braced himself, expecting the crack of Bronson's

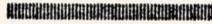
fist, but surprisingly the policeman did not move.

"Good work!" commented Cudworth dryly. "The evidence destroyed perfectly—except that naturally that wasn't your pen cap, but one that looked like it. The cap we found under Zeigler's body is at headquarters, with the pen. Those pants are at headquarters, too. With that spot on the leg all nicely analyzed."

Cudworth nodded to Bronson, who produced handcuffs.

"Are you claiming that blood on my trousers isn't rabbit's blood?" Trask demanded desperately. "You can't prove it."

"We sha'n't try," Cudworth replied, blinking amiably, "because you see there isn't any blood on those pants at all. That stain that worried you so is just a little spot of automobile oil."



EAST OF THE GRAND CANYON

By ROBERT H. LEITFRED

IF you leave the old National Trail at Williams, Arizona, and drive to the Grand Canyon, you'll find a good road. I'll recommend it to the most timid soul. I would also advise one to return to the main highway via the same route. In the spirit of nothing at all, we, the missus and myself, decided to get back by a road not on the map.

A thousand bumps afterward I had grave doubts. And as we crashed over a wash filled with boulders I was positive I had made a mistake. The road vanished. I rediscovered it sneaking up a cliff—an upstart of the San Francisco mountains.

At the cliff's top the road circled playfully downward two thousand feet in three spirals. Eternity yawned less than nothing from our right wheels. A good road for burros. Fortunately the car was on the down grade. Gravity was with us.

At the foot of a tortuous hill we were hailed by an old prospector beside a 1917 Ford. He had been there two days and was powerfully hungry. So were we. "I'll tow you up the hill, brother," I volunteered.

My second-best knickers became grease-covered making the connection. At the top of the grade I ruined them a second time unfastening the rope. The prospector did everything but kiss us. We said good-by in three languages.

Another tortuous hill. I stopped the car at the top. No sign of the old fellow. I backed down. Same reason as before. The bands still slipped.

"The towline stays on till we get to a garage," I muttered.

The rope broke many times during the next twenty miles. Uphill, downhill, around twisting curves, and all that time the wreck behind kept slamming my rear bumpers. And then the welcome sight of a trading post.

The old fellow opened up his heart and bags. Into our laps poured a flood of bluish mineral—turquoise. But gratitude knew no bounds. Into the trading post he must take us. Coffee and pie. A heavy silver bracelet set with polished turquoise for the missus. A tarnished Mexican dollar to replace my towrope.

"No one," spat the old fellow, "but a condemned fool would come over that danged road. Well, I'm thankful that ye are of the same intelligence as I be, else I'd be there yet. I'm obliged, young feller: That thar turquoise kin be swapped for pottery at an Indian trading post. Don't let 'em skin ye."

We still have the turquoise, the missus her bracelet, and me—I'm keeping the silver dollar "Mex" for a luck piece.

Frontier Phantoms

By

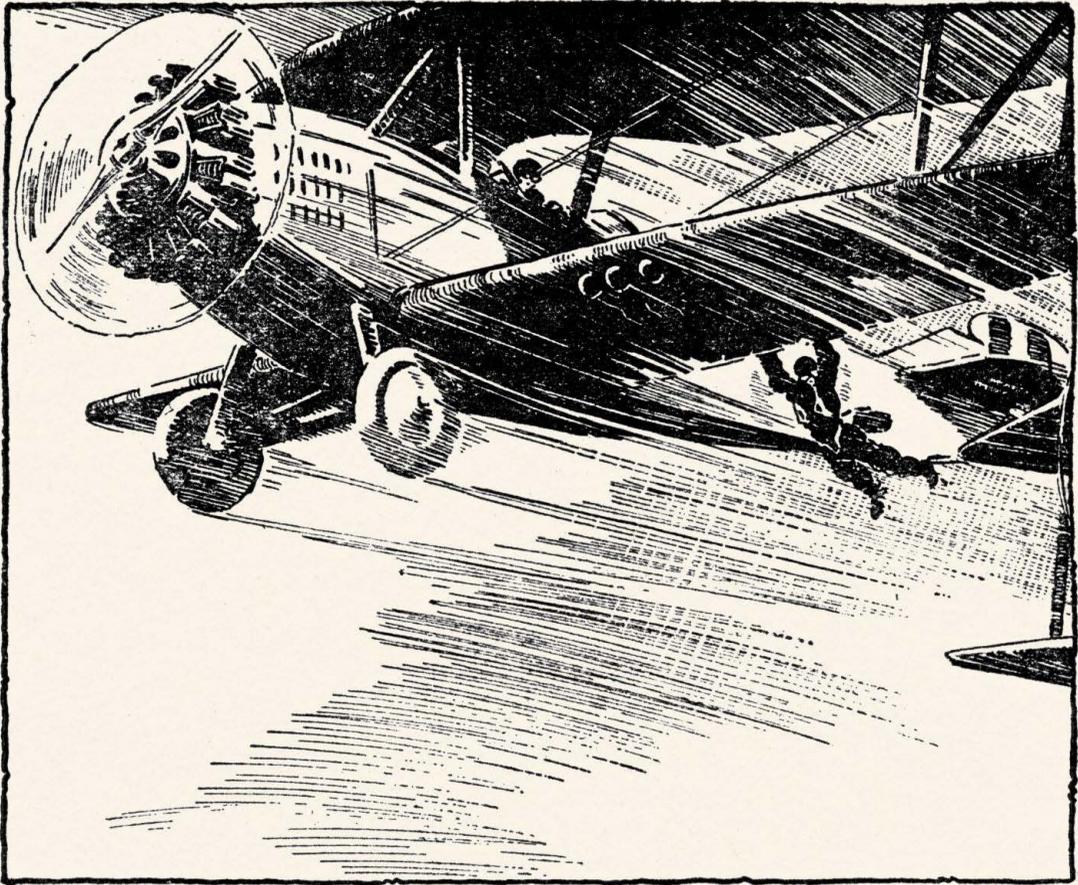
James Edward Hungerford

WHEN the round-up camp fire's gleamin'
An' the stars are swingin' low,
Sometimes sort o' get to dreamin'
O' the West o' long ago,
When the cowboy broncs went lopin'
Where the cattle used to graze
On the ranges, free an' open—
In the far-off frontier days!

As the leapin' flames are flarin'—
In the glow, I seem to see
Those old-timer punchers farin'
Down the trails that used to be,
'Fore the railroads came a-roarin'
Through the rangeland, on the fly,
An' the eagles swift went soarin'—
Where the planes now skim the sky!

Here they come!—with saddles creakin';
Spurs a-jingle an' agleam,
Specterlike, an' swiftly streakin'
Through the smoke wreaths, as I dream!
Stern-faced men, with eyes unfearin',
In a land that's still untamed;
Facin' danger, pioneerin';
Gone to graves unmarked, unnamed.

When the round-up fire is dyin',
Sendin' forth its fitful gleams,
On the night wind, softly sighin',
I can hear them *speak*, it seems:
"Pard, there'd be no highways, gleamin',
An' no shinin' railroad rails
'Cept fer us o' whom yo're dreamin'—
Us who blazed the frontier trails!"



ONE *Every* MINUTE

By THOMSON BURTIS

CHAPTER I.

SLIM EVANS SPEAKING!

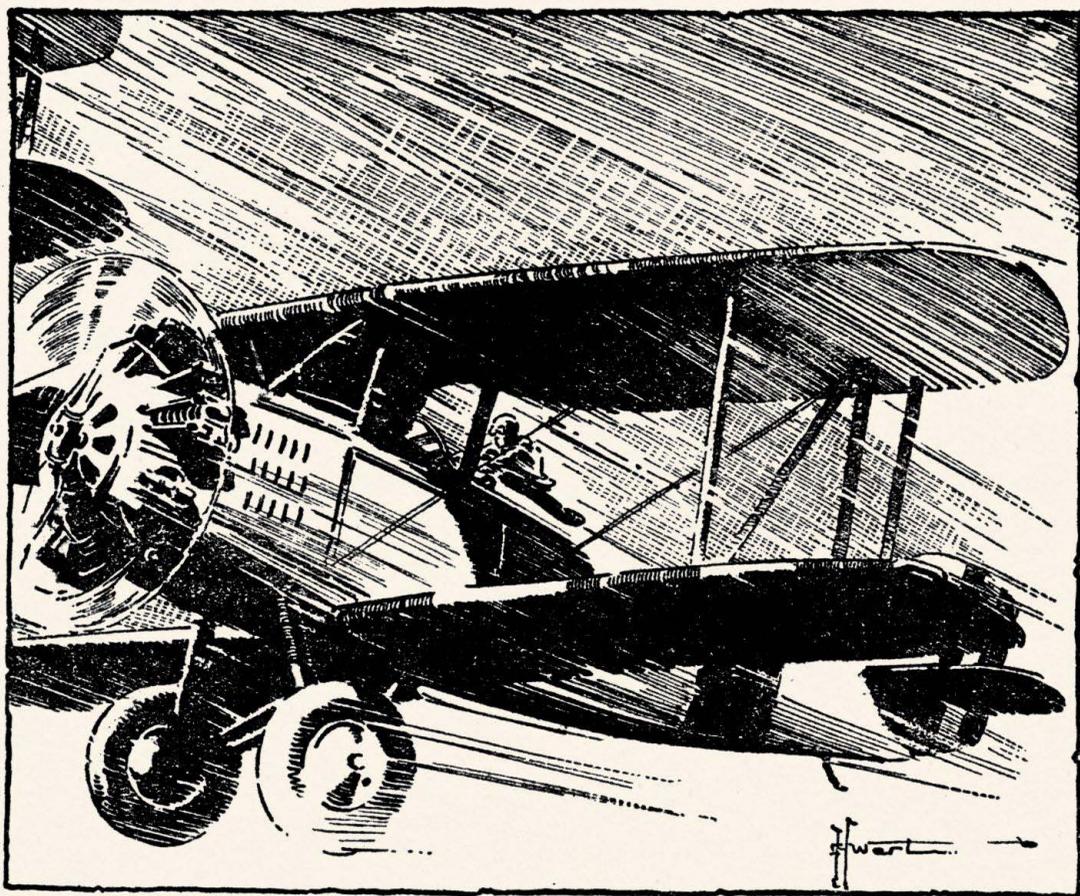
YOU might have called it farce—if I hadn't been forced to add a couple of spooks to the population of some spiritual village of the promised land before the shindig was over. On the other paw, you might have called it tragedy. But how are you going to play tragedy if you have to laugh at most of the clowns concerned in the action of the piece? Not the least of said funny men, I may add, was me, myself, in person.

Lieutenant "Slim" Evans of the army air service border patrol—who, when I have the honor to use my right name, I am—acted according to his lifelong motto: "Be sure to go ahead and then find out whether you're right."

I'm always wrong!

The whole thing was a question as to the exact point at which being an altruistic martyr and a so-called good guy leaves off and where being a sucker begins. There is such a thing as self-sacrifice, and there's also such a thing as a lack of spiritual guts.

I'm thirty-four years old—don't feel



In Two Parts—Part I.

Slimuel X. Evans, Long-winded and Interesting as Ever, Spins a Red-hot Yarn about the Border Patrol. Read It and Weep!

a day over fifty—and I have been bounced from a lot of the pillars to most of the adjacent posts during my stroll through this vale of tears. During this enforced tour of duty I've collected a slight suspicion that there are a lot of people in the world, who are eager to have you do most of the martyring while they do most of the merry-making.

I presume that what I'm getting at is as clear as the Einstein theory is to a cow. Before I get through, however, I plan to show you that these muddy meditations are to the point.

So heigh-ho, my hearties, and take a peek at Lieutenant Slimuel X. Evans, his oil-spotted boots draped chastely over a desk in the headquarters of the McMullen Flight of the border patrol, as he prepares himself to listen to a few paragraphs from a letter held in the hand of Lieutenant Texas Q. McDowell.

"It's from dad," Tex drawled. "The meat of the matter is that Dave Fitzpatrick has pulled so many wires that he's pulled himself right out of jail!"

"Do tell!" I answered him with a yawn.

The thermometer was precisely ninety-eight degrees and that section of Texas was a crisply baked biscuit.

"Does that come under the heading of important news?" came a level voice from behind me.

"I'll say it does!" Tex said with the smug satisfaction of the well-known cream-eating kitty.

The big fellow's wide-set gray eyes were glowing softly and his wide mouth had a smirk of satisfaction. Did you ever happen to meet up with a bozo who would deliberately put himself in a spot just for the fun of fighting his way out again? If you have, you know all that's necessary about the long-legged, gentle-voiced Southerner.

He waved the letter spaciously as Second Lieutenant Roof followed his own voice closely into the office. Roof was a new man on the patrol, having arrived in McMullen in a heap only the day before, but he was already referred to in private as "Tar" Roof. There was something about him, however, which prevented even me from referring to him as such in his presence.

"Listen," Tex commanded, pulling his Stetson low over his eyes and wiping the sweat from his brow. He went on to read as follows:

"Our friend, Dave Fitzpatrick, got out of jail day before yesterday and he had to pull wires in Washington to do it. I saw him in the St. Anthony in San Antone yesterday, but we didn't speak. He looks bad and uglier than ever, somehow. I don't know whether being in jail has taught him a lesson or made him uglier than usual. I would incline to the last opinion if my life depended on it. I hear that you boys did one thing, though. He came out of jail broke, which ought to cramp his style somewhat if he has any idea of being up to any of his old tricks."

"Somebody that you fellows put in stir?" Roof inquired casually, as Tex finished.

He was standing alongside the desk which was my foot rest—tall and slim and straight as a ramrod. That phrase

he had used—"in stir"—was about the sixth time in the last twenty-four hours that the argot of the big city slums had popped out of him. It was somewhat of a surprise to me to see the icily contained, taciturn recruit joining Tex and me so casually. I had got the impression that he was exceedingly expert at minding his own business and that he wasted fewer words than a political boss does votes.

"Right the first time," I informed him, gazing at his profile with interest. "He's the biggest fish we ever landed on the border. He was—maybe still is—powerful in politics, headed the biggest gang of smugglers and outlaws the border ever saw, and was the king cobra of the river!"

"The boss of the Rio Grande, eh?" Roof said quietly, and I couldn't tell for the life of me whether the slight movement of his lips was a sneer or a smile.

That face of his didn't tell much. It was lean and long and dark, with a narrow, square jaw, compressed lips, and an aquiline nose in its topography. There were exactly four wrinkles in it, and not another crow's foot to mar its smooth, hard expanse. Two of them ran from his thin nostrils to his mouth, and they weren't the ordinary wrinkles because the flesh didn't hang over them at all. They were like two regular curving scars. The other two were above his thick, black eyebrows. Those eyebrows and the eyes beneath them were absolutely straight across his face. They sloped neither up nor down. His mouth was also a straight line. The lines of his chin, mouth, eyes, and eyebrows were as exactly parallel as though his face had been laid out by a surveyor.

"Dave Fitzpatrick was pulling stuff twenty years ago that would make your cheap Chicago crooks sit up and take notice!" Tex told him with unctiousness. "More than that, we got the most exquisite delight out of jugging him because he and my dad had been enemies

since the night dad caught him cheating in a poker game thirty years ago!"

I might remark at this point that Tex's prodigiously mustached sire was one of the pioneer cattlemen and was worth a million bucks at the moment if he was worth a nickel. He still lived on a ranch in west Texas—and when I say "ranch" I don't mean "farm." If you traveled from New York to see him, you'd only be halfway to the ranch house when you hit the front gate. You could practically put the State of Rhode Island in one of his pasture lots.

"Do you figure he'll start working on you again?" Roof inquired in his incisive way, and a sort of slumberous glow came into his murky eyes.

There was one remarkable feature about the said orbs which you might notice now. They weren't shaped like yours, or mine, and it was lucky for his fatal beauty that they were set very wide apart. Instead of being football-shaped, as it were, they were biggest close to his nose. From there, the upper lids sloped away to join the straight lower lids at a point a considerable distance away.

They were like two long, narrow triangles in his face; the whites of them were so white and the eyes themselves so black, that they leaped out from his swarthy face like two lighthouses in a fog. Above them, his blue-black hair was parted squarely in the middle and couldn't have lain more smoothly and perfectly if he'd used a gallon of pomade a day.

I looked at him curiously for a minute as I noticed that suppressed sparkle leap into those noncommittal eyes.

"You act as though you hoped so!" I told him. "That's the trouble with this young blood, Tex. Just when we get this flight all set so that we tottering old veterans can sit around and listen to the rhythmic creaking of our joints, along come a lot of wild shavetails snarking and snorting and spitting forth

fire from their nostrils. One of them's likely to arrest somebody some day and spoil our rest——"

"Which mention of rest reminds me that I've got to fly down and survey Dumpy Scarth's wreck," Tex interrupted rudely. He got to his feet with the deliberated, relaxed ease which was characteristic of his movements. He moved like a stretching cat. "How about it, Slim? Want to come along? It's only a mile from Cara Alta and we can have a bellyful of beer."

"O. K.," I nodded.

Roof turned away abruptly, and I had the feeling that he thought he had been dismissed. Not that it would have bothered him. He wasn't that kind of guy. Just as the impression you got from his tight-skinned, high-cheek-boned face and slim body was boniness, so the feeling you got about his internal make-up was that he was hard.

"If you want to find out all about Dave," I told him as he went out, "look at the official reports in the office. Tex's story of the poker game where Dave tried to frame his dad might teach even you a few tricks!"

The night before, Mr. Tar Roof had demonstrated to all and sundry, that he was the coldest, nerviest, most deadly poker player that had raided our bank rolls for years. He had emerged from the game with everything but our collar ornaments—and a few of the lads had played poker once or twice before themselves.

As we ambled through the outside office and into the porch, I shook my head and a pelting shower of perspiration spattered on the floor. The heat waves above the small, sandy airdrome were doing a dizzy dance that made my head ache, and I knew that you could bake bread inside the big, sheet-iron hangars to the right and left of the field.

"The higher you fly, the better I'll like it!" I told McDowell. "Good Lord! Here's a guy that's hurrying!"

"He hasn't been here long enough," Tex drawled gently as we watched the scrawny little figure of "Squirrel" Seaver come hurrying around the corner of the building. He had also joined the flight the day before, along with Roof. Neither of them were dry behind the ears yet after their training up at Donovan Field.

"Listen!" he yelled, his freckled face sort of whitish and his washed-out gray eyes very wide. "Would you guys sign a five-hundred-dollar note for me?"

"Do you suppose he's drunker than usual?" Tex inquired oratorically.

I had seen some fluent and accomplished drinkers in my time, trenchermen of persistence and not easily to be discouraged. Nevertheless and notwithstanding, during the time that Squirrel Seaver had been there, he'd opened even my eyes. Never drunk, you understand. He just drank continuously and was an expert mechanic when it came to keeping a fine edge on.

"Why, we barely know you," I told him.

"Oh, I know I'm a new man and that this is lousy," he assured us desperately, "but I'm in a hell of a spot!"

He looked and acted it, too. Ordinarily his appearance was that of a sandy-haired rabbit with a little woodchuck blood in him, and his freckled face was constantly overspread with a sort of vapid grin which was the result of liquor. He acted usually, as if he didn't have a worry on his mind, never had had, and if one came along, wouldn't recognize it anyhow. He now proceeded to wave a telegram at us.

"An old battle-ax of an aunt of mine has got a hundred thousand dollars left in trust for me. But do you think I can get a dime, even of the income, in advance? No! And I've got to have five hundred dollars!"

"Go down to the bank and get a note and we'll sign it for you," Tex said as we started past him.

"Here it is!" crowed Squirrel, producing one all made out from his pocket. "Let's go over to my tent, have a drink, and sign it and——"

Tex shook his head solemnly.

"Fast work in twenty-four hours, Slim!" he stated.

We signed it in the office, which made the sixth note in the flight that I was on. I also had four of my own out. As near as I could figure it out, if every man in the flight had his salary doubled and didn't spend a cent for a year, we could combine our funds and make the first payment on a bottle of Coco Cola.

We strolled on over to the line—where the motor of Tex's De Haviland was put-putting along after the warm-up—discussing the peculiar and variegated natures of our two new men. I was arrayed like the weeds of the field in breeches, boots, and oil-spotted undershirt, to which I now added a seat-pack parachute. They had just become compulsory. Tex McDowell wore the same outfit, plus a khaki shirt that clung wetly to his body like a label to a can. As I jackknifed myself into the rear seat—I am six feet six inches long by approximately six inches wide—Tex observed:

"If our friend Fitzpatrick starts to work, we might do worse than sick Tar Roof on him!"

I nodded and, while Tex took a casual look at the instrument board in the front seat, I was compelled to admit that the self-contained Roof was impressive somehow. Funny what a reputation a guy can build for himself by keeping his mouth shut and minding his own business!

As Tex taxied out for the take-off, I could see Roof walking down the line of frame buildings on the southern edge of the field toward the two rows of tents which were the palatial living quarters of the border flyers. He was immaculate even to and including a black necktie

"He's so hard he can't sweat any more than a monument!" I thought. "God, that breeze feels good!"

Which it did as Tex shoved on the throttle, got the nose down and sent the ton-and-a-half ship roaring across the hard-caked sand!

CHAPTER II. KIDNAPED.

A FEW minutes later, we were oozing through the ozone at a casual hundred miles an hour, pointed on a bee line for that bucket of beer. The direction was west.

Three miles south was the Rio Grande so-called river. At the moment, due to the dry spell, it was a creek at its wider points and an infant brook most of the time. To the north was an ocean of mesquite.

Five thousand feet below us were straggling open clearings in case a few of those twelve cylinders ahead of us got temperamental. A Liberty will do that every once in a while, though not too often. During the life of the border patrol, which frolicked up and down the border from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of California, there had been ten lads knocked off by the mesquite to every one who stopped a bullet from some rustler, smuggler, or other racketeer of the wide-open spaces.

We were about halfway to the spot where Mr. Tex McDowell was supposed to gaze wisely at a wreck and certify that the ship had been ruined in line of duty, and just half a mile less than halfway to that beer, when I dropped off into slumber to the lullaby of the four hundred "horses" in front of me. I don't suppose I had had more than forty winks, when I was awakened with my teeth clicking together as Tex shook me. He pointed downward and I took a wall-eyed look.

Below us was a long, narrow, stubble field, and in the precise middle thereof,

there was the figure of a man lying flat on the ground. Doing a war dance around him like a sprightly hen on a hot griddle was another bozo who was waving something big and white as a signal to us. As I rubbed my eyes for a better look at this remarkable phenomenon, Tex cut the gun and nosed the ship down.

"We'd better have a look!" he yelled. "It may amount to something at that!"

His gray eyes were twinkling behind his goggles. The big Texan was as tickled over this postponement of our glass of beer as if he'd just had good news from home. He was just about the best flyer on the border, and my closest friend to boot, but his perennial search for excitement was oftentimes a pain in the neck.

"Hell, there's a shack a mile away over there! Why should we risk a crack-up?" I yelled back at him.

"Duty calls!" shouted the grinning Tex as he cocked up the De Haviland in a tight spiral.

There was nothing I could do about it, and as the ship, its motor turning at a thousand revolutions to keep it from cooling too fast, hurried earthward, I commenced to get interested myself. That guy on the ground didn't move.

Furthermore, a couple of other details which might or might not be significant, became observable to my jaundiced eyes. One of them was a riderless horse splitting the breeze toward the river while another nag peacefully nibbled at some bushes at the edge of the clearing. That bird on the ground must be badly hurt, and I wondered whether he had been shot. Even if he'd been pitched off the horse for some reason, there was nothing in that soft field which should've knocked him out for the count. Hailing a border-patrol ship probably meant that there was dirty work at the crossroads somewhere.

Consequently, I was all a-twitter by the time Tex brought the De Haviland

coasting down over the mesquite at the eastern edge of the field, and sat her down on three points within a hundred feet thereof.

The ground was fairly hard and the De Haviland rolled past the conscious and unconscious strangers at a fair rate of speed. I could see no blood or other sign of foul play in the reclining gentleman or the gaunt egg who was on his feet waving spaciously at us.

Both were arrayed in overalls, cowboy boots, and flannel shirts, but neither one of them, surprisingly enough, seemed to have a sombrero about him. Men don't ordinarily move in that section of Texas without one of those tents to deflect the sunlight from their domes.

Tex swung the ship around and taxied directly toward them. Just as we started for them, the man on the ground moved and sat up. The other man knelt beside him, and we got an excellent view of their backs. We got to within twenty feet of them and neither one had turned around. The signal man seemed to be whispering sweet nothings into the hurt man's ear as we clambered out of the ship and walked toward them, our parachutes flopping awkwardly at our thighs.

"What ho, and what seems to be the difficulty?" I inquired from a distance of fifteen feet.

The tall party was helping the short and stubby guy to his feet.

"What's the matter with 'im?" Tex inquired. "Is he shot?"

"Put 'em up—fast!"

My mouth fell open, my black hair waved gently in the breeze, and my eyes popped with a loud report. Those two guys had whirled around like striking rattlesnakes. Both of them had masks on, and they each had two of the most businesslike-looking cannon in their hands that I've ever looked at or into. Both Tex and I had army Colts in holsters at our sides, but they might as well have been popguns. We didn't have

a prayer. I just stood there gawking stupidly and wondering if I'd had that beer already, by any chance.

"Up with 'em! No foolin'!" grated the tall guy; and both our arms went up grudgingly.

Their guns held ready, they walked toward us in businesslike fashion. We had no more to say than a husband caught sneaking in the house with his shoes in his hands. I swear I couldn't believe what I saw with my own eyes. Eleven o'clock in the morning in the bright border sunshine and yet here were four unmistakable guns and two masked border birds were sneaking up on us in a highly significant manner.

Their masks were black cloth with eye holes cut in them, held on by elastic that went around the backs of their heads. Subconsciously, I noticed that the tall and rougher-looking party had a weather-beaten, sun-scorched skin and gnarled hands that meant a lifetime in open country. The sawed-off fellow looked Mexican. The tall guy was much older, too, with very thin, gray hair, whereas the other fellow's was thick and curly.

"How come you're buttin' in on this party?" the tall fellow snapped at me as he took my Colt.

His younger partner in crime was doing the same to Tex. The latter reminded me for all the world of a tiger in a bad temper, but so closely confined that he couldn't move to express his rage.

"What do you mean, 'buttin' in'?" I snarled at the big guy.

At the same second a thought hit me like a smack in the face. It hadn't been five minutes before the take-off that the suggestion had been made that I go along for the ride.

"Oh, nothin'," the older man returned. "All right, Joe; I'll keep 'em covered while you tie up McDowell."

He stepped back a few paces, very watchfully.

"Just what the hell are you guys up to?" Tex asked with deadly slowness.

The gaunt, gray-headed man waved his guns calmly.

"You'll find out!" he said with a grin that exposed discolored teeth of about the same size and architecture as those of a horse.

So much as was visible of his lantern jaw was covered with a gray stubble of beard. His long legs were bowed slightly and his gaunt shoulders bent. It was plain that he practically took a horse to bed with him to be comfortable. The younger fellow said not one word, as he took some twine from his pocket and proceeded to tie Tex's wrists behind his back. As I got a side view of him, I noticed that his skin had the complexion of an overdone olive.

"A spig for sure," I thought.

Tex looked at me with flaming eyes. There wasn't a thing we could do. Those guns had us covered every second, and there was something about the gray-headed outlaw that indicated that this was neither a picnic, nor yet a practical joke.

"Well, you took us in pretty!" I told him. "Now that you've got us, what are you going to do with us?"

"I'll be damned if I know just what we're gonna do with *you!*" the older man admitted.

For a moment, the four of us just stood there. Suddenly the older man exploded into a cloud-burst of Spanish. He was as sore as a bull with the banderillos in him, and I knew just enough Spanish to catch the burden of his blasphemy. He was damning the world and his bosses because I was there to complicate the quiet little party they had planned for Tex alone.

For the first time, the younger man spoke in liquid Spanish that came from him like fast-flowing goo. Tex and I exchanged looks that were meant to be significant. He could wrap his ears around a little Spanish himself, and we

digested a small part of the drift of the young guy's remarks. He was pointing out in about a million well-chosen words the facts that it couldn't be helped now, that they were both masked and that they'd be no worse off to go through with it than they would to call it a day. He also mentioned the possibility of keeping me from talking by killing me, which the other man was kind enough to argue against.

The young fellow had his guns back in his hands now, and I realized that not only was I about as welcome as a shark to a swimmer, but that I wasn't going to be tied up. To show you how goofy I am, I was sort of disappointed, in a way.

Meanwhile I was putting out more thoughts per minute than Carter does pills. What did these fellows want with Tex McDowell? It wasn't the border patrol that they were after; it was Tex McDowell. Who were the big shots behind them? How had they found out that Tex, all by himself, would be flying alone at just this hour this morning? Last but not least, what were they going to do with Tex now that they had him?

It was enough to make me writhe in ungovernable rage, and it sent the blood pounding through me like water through a broken dam to think that there was a house less than a mile away; that half an hour from now a patrol ship would come over and that we'd been taken in, sheepish and probably shipless.

The tall fellow, who had been so ironically self-contained at the start, was devoting himself to low and lofty cursing at his luck. His sudden break-out was plain evidence of the fact that he didn't like the smell of a fourth party being in on this. Suddenly he shrugged.

"Nothin' to do but go ahead!" he snapped. "Climb in the back seat, McDowell! Take off your 'chute, Evans. We can use that."

My eyes widened at that. So they *were* going to use the ship.

For a second, Tex hesitated, his eyes alight with a cold flame. As I've said before, he reminded me irresistibly of a tiger in human form as he stood there with muscles tense and face as grim as death. He even was tawny-looking with his tanned skin, brown hair, and khaki clothes. I knew that he, like me, would've given a year of his life to be given just one teeny chance to take a sock at somebody.

There was a second of silence. Then one of the Mexican's guns poked into McDowell's side with all the gentleness of Dempsey tagging somebody on the chin. The Mexican jerked his thumb meaningly at the ship. McDowell's face contorted slightly and the knuckles of his fists were white as he walked slowly toward the plane.

"I reckon one of you will have to lift me in," he said, his drawl so slow that there was a space between each word. Lord, was he sore!

The tall man lifted him in as if the six-foot Southerner were a baby. The motor was idling along gently, and without a word the Mexican climbed in the front seat and jazzed the throttle a couple of times. Unquestionably, he was a flyer.

I was approximately one jump ahead of a fit as the tall man picked up his guns and walked toward me. At the same time, the Mexican unceremoniously leaned over the back cockpit, removed Tex's helmet and goggles, and put them on himself. The outlaw gazed at me steadily through the eye holes of his mask, and when he expectorated spaciously, his eyes didn't leave mine. He picked up my 'chute.

"You're gettin' a break here, mister!" he said with the twang of the Southwest in his voice. "There ain't no use of tyin' you up, so you're left free and clear. There ain't no use of tellin' you what I'm goin' to tell you either, probably, but I'm tellin' you nevertheless!"

He stopped for a minute, gazing at

me steadily. So far as I could see, his eyes were a very flinty light gray and they bored into mine like a pair of gimlets.

"There ain't gonna be no mystery now about what happened to McDowell," he went on thoughtfully.

"What is going to happen to him?" I snarled.

"Everybody will know within twenty-four hours," he stated in a manner which was no comfort whatever. "Now you listen to me. There's nothin' to prevent me from drillin' a bullet through you, heavin' you aboard this ship and droppin' you out in the jungles of Mexico, understand?"

"Not one thing in the world," I agreed, choking slightly as my mouth got dry.

There was something about the comparatively casual way in which this roughneck talked that made it very clear to me that murder was not an important thing to him. Were it necessary and proper, he'd do it without a qualm. It was nothing of great importance one way or the other.

"I said you was gettin' a break," he went on quietly. "What I should've said was, it's up to you whether you get a break or not. As I said, we can get rid of you quick and easy and this whole thing can be as mysterious as we planned it would be. Now, I'm willin' to leave you here unhurt and untied and alive providin' you'll give me your word of honor as an officer and a gentleman that you'll do one thing. And I may add that your doin' it is the only chance in God's world for your buddy, McDowell there, to come out of this with any part of his health left."

You know about those nightmares when you can't move hand or foot and some unappetizing brand of destruction is swooping down on you. Well, that's the way I felt out there—helpless—as I felt a thousand things closing in on me and binding me tight.

"What is it?" I managed to gulp.

"As far as you're concerned, here's your story," the masked man went on, a rasping note in his voice as though his vocal chords were two pieces of metal clashing together. "Everything up to the landin' you can tell. You didn't get a chance for no look at me or the other hombre there. You climbed out of the ship, got hit from behind, and that, so help you, is all you know. You don't know what become of McDowell, what we look like, where the ship went, or a damn thing. You don't know nothing. And listen to me!"

He stepped forward and suddenly those mustard-colored tusks were exposed and the eyes that glared at me were wolfish.

"Don't kid yourself that what you tell won't be known. And if you do squeal, damn you, you'll be knocked off within a week, win or lose!"

As we stood there with our eyes locked, one thought was pounding through my brain. Ordinarily that threat could've been tossed over my shoulder with a casual "What of it?" and laid to a natural bluff. What made it strangely impressive was that I knew that they had inside information from McMullen or they wouldn't have been there and they wouldn't have been so surprised and discomfited by the fact that Tex was not alone.

There was nothing for me to say but what I did, which was:

"O. K."

For a second, he stood and looked at me. Then he backed away as he put one gun in the waistband of his overalls. He climbed into the back seat, faced Tex forward, and then placed himself facing the rear, back to back with the Southerner.

I stood there, miserably, my Adam's apple charging up and down my six-inch neck like a squirrel trying to get out of a cage as I gulped and gasped in helpless rage. The bandit put the

observer's belt around both Tex and himself as the Mexican turned the motor part way on and the ship taxied past me.

McDowell's eyes met mine and right then and there I felt just a little bit better. Did I see fear there?—I ask you. Did I even see hot-tempered wrath or sullen resentment?—I ask you twice. No, brethren, no. I saw the hint of a lopsided grin and eyes like a pair of torches burning out at me. I realized then and there that the damn fool was actually looking forward to whatever lay ahead of him!

That didn't help a lot, however, as I saw the ship turn twenty yards beyond me and point back at me for the take-off. Tex was not the kind ever to estimate the odds against him at their true value. He was just a nut for action. Personally, I saw a lot more than met the eye in what was happening. I'd have felt better if I had been the victim instead of just a helpless lunkhead standing there, no good to myself or anybody else.

As the Liberty burst into full cry and the ship picked up speed, trundling toward me, something seemed to snap inside me and all the dumb craziness I was born with spouted up to my brain and washed out whatever sense might be hiding there. After all, Tex McDowell was my friend and these bozos were kidnaping him.

I took two kangaroo-like jumps forward. The spig was just getting the nose down as the soft earth clung to the wheels and retarded the speed of the ship. As the De Haviland passed me, I was six feet away from it. I realized vaguely that the tail surfaces were coming up as I launched myself toward the fuselage in one last jump, my body turning sidewise as it went through the air in a mass of arms and legs. Up in the rear cockpit, the standing bandit was just a remote shape to me, and in my cockeyed condition I'd forgotten

that little lead bullets have the power to perforate the human carcass.

I hit the turtle-back fuselage so hard that the breath was knocked out of me. My arms were clinging to it lovingly as I strove to haul my feet upon it and stay aboard. I was going to kick hell out of those elevators to keep the ship from getting into the air.

For a second I was barely able to hang on and my combined breathlessness and uncertain hold prevented me from getting my feet up. It takes a lot of strength to lift my feet even under ordinary conditions.

Then, as I clung to the rushing ship and gasped for breath, it seemed that some unseen hand had brushed the fog away from my brain. I was staring up into the muzzle of a gun held at the bandit's hip. The next second, it spoke. I yapped loudly as a hot poker seemed to be rammed through my right forearm. My desperate hold was weakened, and at the same second, with his rudder, the pilot fish-tailed the ship. That maneuver tossed me off like a rider from bucking broncho. As I fell to the ground, the leading edge of the horizontal stabilizer bashed into the back of my head like a baseball bat swung by "Babe" Ruth.

The instant before that happened, however, a sort of impersonal thought darted through my dazed bean. In spite of what I had tried to do, which should've been a plain indication that I intended to leave no stone unturned, now or in the future, to ruin their plans, that bandits had deliberately avoided killing me.

That was as far as I got. The next second, I figured that the top of my head was being sliced off and my brain seemed to explode into a red ball. I was out for the count. I may say that I wasn't at all surprised later to find out that I was more good unconscious than I was conscious. Even I can't make mistakes when I'm stiff.

CHAPTER III.

EX-CONVICT.

I ARRIVED back at McMullen some three hours later by horseback, shank's mare, airplane, and every other variety of transportation except a velocipede.

After jolting a few miles on horseback, while seven hammers played the "Anvil Chorus" on my head with every step the horse took, I succeeded in flagging a home-bound patrol plane. None other than Tar Roof was chaperoning it, and he made a nice landing in a pasture lot to pick me up. He listened to my yarn with a murky glow in those black peepers of his, and at the end of it he said in that clipped, passionless way of his:

"McDowell's dad's got dough, hasn't he?"

I nodded.

"Fitzpatrick's broke, isn't he?"

"So Tex's old man says," I returned.

"Kidnaping," stated Roof. "Let's go!"

This we proceeded to do, and by the time we'd landed at McMullen the air of the wide-open spaces had cleared my head considerably and I'd lost that feeling that if I lived another hour I'd live forever.

Two facts stood out in my mind like a pair of flamingoes in a flea circus. One was that, in spite of a thousand good reasons why I should have been put out of the way by bozos who were capable of kidnaping an army officer, the most prodigious care had been taken to prevent my decease. That gaunt guy had winged me deliberately instead of knocking me off. It was only a flesh wound, by the way, that had no more effect on the use of my arm than a shaving cut would on the use of my tongue.

The other light that flickered forth from the fog of my brain was that somehow, somehow, and through somebody, these bandits had very accurate informa-

tion hot off the fire. The operations' order to the effect that Tex make that survey, hadn't been on the board for two hours. They knew he was going to fly over that spot and they knew he was going to be alone.

I walked with Roof toward headquarters, barking brief explanations to right and left as our trusty mechanics wanted to know why two men had started for a bucket of beer and only one returned. I plowed straight up the steps of headquarters and Roof lagged behind as if he wanted to come along but didn't care to without an invitation.

As I turned toward him, his face was turned slightly away from me, and he was looking at me sidewise out of those triangular eyes. From his high cheek bones, the skin dipped inward in deep hollows and then curved out again to cover a jaw that was very wide under his ears and very long and narrow under his mouth. He looked like an Indian as he gazed at me in sideward inquiry.

"You might as well come on in," I told him.

He nodded and followed me into the outside office where I beheld Squirrel Seaver chattering like his namesake to Harry Jelke.

Captain Kennard, our C. O., hailed me raucously from the inside office before anybody had a chance to talk.

"Hustle in and give us the lay!" he commanded in his deep, rasping voice.

"Come on in, you guys, so I won't have to repeat myself," I told Squirrel and Jelke, and in they filed.

This Harry Jelke was a big, blond, handsome guy, an ex-flyer who was a reserve officer living at the moment in McMullen. He'd made a bunch of dough in oil and had a couple of geologists, otherwise known as rock hounds, surveying the surrounding territory, hoping to get a drop or two of oil out of that part of Texas. He kept his private ship there at the airdrome.

"Well?" barked Captain Kennard;

and amid dead silence I slung my tongue freely to the right and left, sticking as closely to the facts as a yarn spinner of my caliber could.

I omitted the exact description of the bandits, explaining why I did so.

Captain Kennard, short and stocky, his mouse-colored hair cut in a stiff pompadour above a square face that was autographed by twenty-four airplane wrecks, listened in dead silence. His clear, gray eyes never left mine, and as I galloped on, his mouth, twisted out of shape by a couple of remarkable scars, got thinner and thinner.

Harry Jelke got more and more excited. His pink-and-white face went red and pale like a traffic light, and he was running his fingers through his wavy, blond hair at frequent intervals. Every once in a while he'd suck in his breath and then expel it with a noise that sounded like one of his oil wells coming in.

Squirrel Seaver acted as though he had a combination of St. Vitus's dance and the jittering leaps. His washed-out gray eyes had lost the hint of vacancy which liquor gave them and were glinting oddly.

"And thereby and large," I ended up, "you have a bird's-eye view and likewise the inside track. I presume they flew down into Mexico. They were after Tex McDowell and nobody else, and all I can tell you is that I didn't like the cut of either one of their jibs and I didn't like the way that spig poked a gun in Tex's ribs and I haven't got a great deal of confidence that he's going to come out of it in as good shape as he went in, regardless of what their scheme is!"

"And Mr. Fitzpatrick is out of jail!" mused the grim Captain Kennard.

In the background, Tar Roof, his arms folded, was leaning against the wall, his face an emotionless mask except for his eyes.

"Furthermore," I pointed out, "we

know from our experience years ago that there's nothing he'd rather do than get even with old man McDowell by ruining his son. He tried to several times, yet I can't believe that he'd work this fast if he worked at all——"

"We'll soon find out!" barked Captain Kennard, running his hand over his spikelike pompadour. I always had a feeling I ought to reach out and keep him from doing that to keep him from getting a splinter in his hand. "There isn't an enlisted man on the post who could logically be suspected of being in on the deal. I'll get the sheriff on the phone. We'll broadcast an alarm and then——"

"Pardon me, sir."

It was an orderly at the door.

"What is it?"

The orderly was highly excited.

"A man just drove up in a car, sir, and says he'd like to see you. He says he's Mr. Fitzpatrick and he looks like what I've heard about him!"

"Huh?" grunted the captain as if somebody had just socked him in the stomach.

Suddenly Jelke threw back his head and a neighing laugh which was twenty-five per cent hysterical, twenty-five per cent excitement, and fifty per cent pure enjoyment, bounced back and forth between the walls and ceiling and made everybody else more tense, somehow.

"This is going to be good!" he stated swiftly as his laugh died to a gurgling chuckle. "Captain, you're not going to keep me from being in on this, are you?"

"The more the merrier!" snapped Captain Kennard, his face as bleak as a Labrador landscape.

As for me, I moved to one side, my joints cracking like pistol shots and the hair on my neck bristling. So Dave Fitzpatrick was in McMullen and right here at the airdrome, was he? That was a horse with a very extraordinary color!

"Send him in!" Captain Kennard said quietly.

I noticed that Squirrel Seaver's lower jaw was quivering slightly and he looked more than ever like a rabbit. He was just a kid and new to the border at that.

Jelke, his trunklike legs spread slightly apart, his huge shoulders hunched slightly as he folded his arms, and his light-blue eyes like a couple of polished steel disks, looked like an all-American football tackle prepared for the onslaught of the enemy. He was a big guy with a great personality, who enjoyed life more than anybody I'd ever seen. Apparently this situation was a dish the gods had made especially for him.

Always in the background, dark and passionless, except for those eyes like twin searchlights in his face, was Tar Roof—somehow the man of whom I was most conscious all the time. He looked like some saturnine demon who might have arranged the whole thing and was watching it work itself out with considerable interest and not a little enjoyment.

The silent office was a tableau no cartoonist could have drawn, as we waited for the footsteps coming across the outer office to bear Fitzpatrick in. A chirp from a humming bird would have sounded like an explosion in that room.

Suddenly a short, massive figure filled the doorway and Mr. David Fitzpatrick, like some caricature of Buddha, was staring at Captain Kennard out of protruding, basilisk eyes. So far as he was concerned, there was no one else in the room except Kennard.

"I'm David Fitzpatrick, captain," he said, and his lips didn't seem to move at all.

It was as if his voice and words came from deep within him, unassisted by tongue or lips.

"So I see," the alert captain said slowly. "Have a chair."

Fitzpatrick was not more than five feet six inches tall, but he must've weighed two hundred and fifty pounds. He was dressed in a Palm Beach suit and his thighs were so huge that the pants were like tights as far as his knees.

His torso was like the half of a huge hogshead and his face, which might have been hewed out of granite, was big and square enough to suit his body.

He moved to a chair with the lightness of a cat, and right there I noticed that his eyes traveled to Roof and remained on him for a second, like those of a snake glittering at some prospective victim.

When he sat down he did not relax against the back of his chair at all. His knees and feet were close together, and he sat erectly, his two hands on the panama hat on his lap. He looked more than ever like some square Oriental image, and suddenly it seemed to me as if a cold dampness, that might have been a breath from the jail he just left, had settled on the silent office.

From my perch on the edge of Captain Kennard's desk, I had a better view of Fitzpatrick than was good for my appetite. There was nothing particularly remarkable about his smooth, fleshy face, except its stony grayness.

Your first impression was that his jowls were as pendulous as an obese bloodhound's and that he had a series of chins which apparently took the place of any neck. But right there the impression of fleshiness disappeared and you got the idea that, except for a little extra flesh on his chins and stomach, he was hard as a rock.

He had grown slightly bald in jail and his thin hair was a dirty gray. The one feature which was the clew to Dave Fitzpatrick and which had everything to do with the combination of fear and hate that a large-sized section of the border, particularly the patrol, had for him, was his eyes.

They were large and protruding and seemed to have no whites whatever. They were like two gray, highly polished stones set in his head, half screened by drooping lids that seemed to stick almost straight out to cover those bulging optics. His forehead was broad and low, his compressed gray lips like a healed scar across his face.

For the moment, he had that room in the hollow of his hand. There we were on our own stamping grounds, facing a man supposedly ruined, disgraced, and broke after five years in jail, but, believe it or not, if there was a single man in that room who wasn't afraid of something or other, you enjoyed your operation.

There was a long silence as if Fitzpatrick didn't care to talk and no one else could. It was Harry Jelke who broke under the strain.

"To what," he blared with an attempt at a little light humor, "do we owe the honor of this visit?"

Fitzpatrick's eyes turned toward him slowly as if on ball bearings.

"What right have you to ask—or to be here?" he asked deliberately.

That toneless voice without color or emphasis again seemed to rise from the depths. His question smacked Jelke right in the face, and the impulsive giant acted as though a hornet had stung him.

"More than you think," he said, his beefy face ugly. "And we don't recognize Dave Fitzpatrick's right to question anything around here!"

Not a muscle of Fitzpatrick's face so much as flickered.

"Hold your horses, Harry!" rasped Captain Kennard.

"If I've got to do that, I'd better get the hell out of here!" Jelke burst forth. "I've never told any of you this, but six years ago when the Ranger oil field was hot, Fitzpatrick's outfit cost me fifty thousand bucks, damn near killed my partner, and kicked me out of camp broke!"

"Well, what of it?" I slid in.

This was no time for airing any private feuds, I figured. If all the people in Texas who had grudges against Fitzpatrick should be given a minute apiece to bawl him out, he'd be booked solid for a couple of years. I figured there were matters of a more important nature to come before the meeting.

"Just this of it!" the shaken Jelke went on. "This is my first look at Fitzpatrick and it's enough! I've got the dough now, Mr. Fitzpatrick, and you haven't. If you make any false moves against these boys, my dough and my ship and all my time are going to help 'em get even and to get myself even with you!"

He stopped and strode to the door. There he turned, and suddenly he was grinning again without much conviction.

"Sorry to be melodramatic," he said, his face radiant as always when he smiled. "All of a sudden seeing him got to me. I'm beating it. Be back for dinner with you. And what I said goes as it lays! Give him hell, boys, and find out where Tex McDowell is!"

When he slammed the door behind him, I jumped two feet. Whatever warmth there had been in the room disappeared with him.

"Did something happen to Lieutenant McDowell?" came Fitzpatrick's voice.

"Yeah. Is it a surprise to you?" snapped Captain Kennard.

Slowly Fitzpatrick got to his feet, and for the first time, so far as I had observed, those heavy lids winked over those froggy eyes.

"I should've known better than to come here," he said without a trace of emotion. "Inasmuch as I'm here, however, I'll state my business. I've bought a small ranch within ten miles of McMullen, and propose to live there from now on."

He stopped as though expecting an answer. For one of the few times in

my life, I was speechless, although my Adam's apple was doing its monkey-on-a-stick routine up and down my windpipe.

"I'm an ex-convict and the patrol is my enemy. I'm here to lay my cards on the table and to demand that I be neither bothered nor persecuted because of my record, until there is a legitimate reason for the patrol to annoy me. No real reason for any dealings of any nature between us will arise."

He stood there like a fat image. Except when he made an actual movement to stand up or sit down, not a muscle in his body twitched. He was like a cold, gray mass of lifeless flesh.

"I had hoped we might come to an understanding," he went on emotionlessly. "I see that is impossible. I'm sorry. I trust you will not be sorry."

He turned and walked out. I'll swear I gave my tongue setting-up exercises in an endeavor to put forth a well-chosen word or two, but nothing came. We stared at one another wordlessly.

"I need a drink!" yapped Squirrel Seaver suddenly, and dashed out.

"Hey!" Captain Kennard hailed him. "After you get your drink, grab your ship and go on down and do that survey that Tex was supposed to do."

"O. K.," grinned the sandy little flyer. "My aunt's got dough. Maybe they'll kidnap me!" And he beat it.

The quick kick Squirrel had got out of Tex's disappearance had receded into the background of his mind, I knew. He certainly was a playboy of a peculiar and variegated nature. If he'd been in Rome at the time, he would've been having a drink and doing a dance while Nero scraped his fiddle.

Captain Kennard's troubled eyes rested on me.

"Do you think that Dave had anything to do with Tex McDowell?" he asked absently.

"No," I told him as a little stab went through me.

The thought of Tex McDowell out in the monte with that vicious little spig and that frozen cucumber who'd shot me, was not calculated to make Slimuel X. Evans feel comfortable.

"Neither do I," Captain Kennard stated, running his fingers through his bristles again. "Not even Dave Fitzpatrick would work that fast and take such a chance right out of jail!"

"Nuts!" It was an unemotional exclamation from Roof. The next second, without a change in his face or eyes, he went on: "Excuse me, captain. He hates McDowell's family, doesn't he? They've got dough, haven't they? He's got political power enough to get himself out of stir, hasn't he? This visit could be a grand-stand play, couldn't it?"

He moved toward the door and there was a litheness about his whipcord body that made his movements as sinuous as those of a lazily stretching cat.

"I'm just a first of May and maybe I shouldn't butt in," he said from the doorway, and the sardonic cast of his face was more pronounced. "But if we aren't going to have fun with Fitzpatrick and he hasn't already made the first move to alibi himself, then I'm the chief of staff. His kind never give up, and they don't take 'no' for an answer from anybody!"

He went out as the motor of a ship started idling and the very respectable whisky tenor of the refreshed Mr. Seaver came plainly to our ears. "Hi, ho, the whereio, the baby looks like me!" was the hang of his hymn.

Captain Kennard reached for a telephone.

"Well, there's no sense of our mooning around!" he barked. "Within an hour a general alarm will be everywhere, permission sought from the Mexican government for a search over their country, and if the red tape takes too long to unravel, we'll cut it. We can shoot the whole damn patrol out over Mex-

ico, and the big towns like Tampico will all be watched. What is it, sergeant?"

I turned around to see the portly form of Master Sergeant Clay in the doorway and to warm myself in the ruby glow of his bulbous nose. The grizzled old noncom had a beak that was like a beacon lighting the thirsty wanderer to any bar which the sergeant might be honoring with his presence.

"Could I speak to the captain for a minute?" wheezed Clay.

"Sure. Shoot!"

Clay closed the door, taking a careful peek outside just before he latched it; and came toward us in a manner that would put *Desperate Desmond* to shame. However, Master Sergeant Clay was no clown, nor was he given to dramatic debauches.

"I understand that Lieutenant McDowell was kidnaped this mornin'," he said.

"He was captured and carried off by persons unknown, at least," Captain Kennard told him. "What's on your mind?"

"Last night I got drunk with a couple of guys and one of them said a couple of things that might have some bearing on the case," Clay said candidly, his puckered eyes roving from Captain Kennard's face to mine.

"Sure you weren't too drunk to hear straight?" I asked, but I was leaning forward with no little hope in my heart.

"No, sir. On the other hand, I ain't positively certain that I ain't doin' a respectable guy an injustice in thinkin' what I think, so I ain't gonna say no more yet. But I was figurin' if I could have a pass off the post to-night, I could find out for sure!"

"You don't want to tell us who it is?" asked his commanding officer.

Clay shook his head stubbornly.

"A couple of civilians that ain't exactly McMullen men, and I ain't tellin' nothin' until I'm sure. I oughta be sure to-night."

"You've got your pass," Captain Kennard said as he reached for the telephone.

Clay hesitated and twirled his Stetson around with a pair of hands that looked as though they'd juggled rocks since babyhood.

"It will require buying quite a bit of liquor, sir, and I'm broke," he said. "Could I borrow a ten-spot from somebody?"

The captain grinned and threw him a couple of fives.

"Don't worry about paying it back," he rasped, his square scarred face relaxing. "The government will pay for this under a requisition calling for alcohol to keep a man's tongue from freezing."

The sergeant ambled out as the idling whisper of Squirrel Seaver's ship rose to a roar and Mr. Seaver took off. He flew straight for headquarters, zoomed at the last minute, climbed his ship over headquarters like a fly going up a wall, and started west down the border.

Captain Kennard was barking into the telephone now, so I strolled out and watched Squirrel Seaver shooting his ship on westward. The head of the midget was just visible above the cockpit cowling. His handling a ton-and-a-half ship was like a flea running a ferris wheel. There was something irresistibly funny about everything connected with that liquor-soaked little squirt.

It wasn't so funny, though, at five o'clock that afternoon, when he hadn't returned from what should've been a two-hour trip.

At eight o'clock that night, I landed in the quick Texas twilight. I was soaked with oil, and my forearm was running a race with my head to see which could ache the most. With the ever-present thought of Tex McDowell mixed into the stew to make it more bitter, the whole goofy layout took on the trappings of tragedy.

Every inch of the border between

Laredo and McMullen had been searched from the air by the ships of the two flights, and they had prowled thirty miles north over the mesquite and twenty miles south over the Mexican monte, which was an offense to Heaven, international law, and the roaring republic of Mexico.

"Not a trace of him, or his ship," the tight-lipped Captain Kennard told me. "We know that he landed at the wreck down there, because there were fresh wheel tracks and there was more blood on the ground than they spill in a first-class Mexican revolution!"

CHAPTER IV.

A DEAD MAN.

AT eleven o'clock that same night, the situation hadn't changed to the naked eye. I was on my way to Harry Jelke's house, obeying, with Captain Kennard's permission, a most mysteriously cryptic call from that genial, yellow-haired gentleman. It appeared that nobody but me would do and that nowhere but his house would be an acceptable meeting place.

And right there started a night which is going to assume great importance in the memoirs of Slim Evans, no matter what they may include from now on. The chapter heading for it will be, "The Thousand-in-One Nights."

Harry Jelke hung his hat in a pretty little bungalow about a mile south of the town proper, and far enough from the nearest houses—all of which were occupied by Mexicans—so that he was able to sing "Sweet Adeline" loudly without disturbing anybody. I'd had a few drinks and realized as I walked up the steps of the house that I would have another one in a minute, so I was feeling slightly better.

He opened the door for me, arrayed in a lounging robe.

"Hello, Slim," he said. "Thanks for coming over."

He led the way in to his somewhat luxuriously furnished sitting room and indicated a high ball on the table with ice floating in it.

"I presume you'll need it—if not now, in a minute," he said with a grin. "I was going to tell somebody about it before, but I didn't have the guts. Now that Squirrel Seaver's disappeared, I've just got to."

"All of which adds up to precisely nothing to me," I informed him as I took one querulous quaff. "Damn good liquor."

Nevertheless, I felt something important coming on as I continued:

"Why am I the fall guy? My health isn't so hot right now."

He slumped down in a chair and waved me to another. In that small room he looked as big as Carnera in a chicken coop.

"Because I know you better and for that reason trust you more. Besides that, Captain Kennard's official position might not allow him to keep his mouth shut."

"Well, shoot!" I told him, sinking wearily into a chair.

He glanced around the room as though afraid somebody might be hidden in the ash trays.

"The nigger in the woodpile at McMullen and the man who unquestionably has something to do with these kidnappings, is Tar Roof?" he said slowly, his wide eyes staring into mine.

"Yeah?" I grunted. "Just a pipe dream of yours or do you know something?"

"I know something and have known it since he hit the post yesterday," Jelke told me steadily, his fingers playing with a lock of his blond hair. "His right name is Tony Galini and, up to a year ago, when he got out of jail, he was one of the best-known gangsters in Chicago!"

I was sitting up straight now, my ears flapping eagerly.

"How come you know so much?" I asked him.

"In the oil game you meet many and many a criminal," he told me, which I knew. "Furthermore, I have spent quite a lot of time around Chicago. I saw him there nearly three years ago. Happened to be in court when he was sent away for a year for carrying concealed weapons. When I saw him up at Donovan Field a month ago, I got curious, wired Chicago, and got a copy of a newspaper with his picture in it. Look here!"

He picked up a paper from a table alongside him and threw it to me. I was staring at a two-column cut of none other than Tar Roof with this caption under it:

Antonio "Candy Kid" Galini, who was sentenced by Judge Roder yesterday to serve one year for carrying concealed weapons. Galini is the fourth member of the Zucca gang to have been sentenced in the last six months.

In another column there was some more dope about him, but I didn't take time to read it then.

"So that's our new flyer, is it?" I mused as I found myself galloping up and down the room.

"Furthermore," Jelke went on, "he knows that I know who he is!"

"And how does that come about?" I asked him.

"Because it so happened that I knew the judge that sat in his case and had considerable courtesy shown me by the court, including seeing Galini and others finger-printed, photographed, and all that stuff. He recognized me, not up at Donovan but down here yesterday, as quickly as I recognized him."

"It seems to make sense," I said, maintaining my race up and down the room. "Whether he's working for somebody else or himself, and regardless of who's with him, the chances are ten to one that he's got a finger in the kidnaping of a couple of wealthy guys.

Especially when you figure that somebody right in the inner circles passing out information! But Roof keeps insisting that it's kidnaping, and Fitzpatrick's behind it!" I pointed out.

"That doesn't cost him anything, does it?" Harry Jelke inquired satirically. "As a matter of fact, I think so, as we all do. It just helps divert suspicion from him and makes him one of the crowd. It doesn't mean anything."

"I get your point," I granted. "Sometimes the truth is the best way out of it."

"Exactly. Now here's the hell of it!" Jelke said, taking a thoughtful drink. "Galini, or Roof, whichever you want to call him, knows I know who he is. There's a gang at work, whether organized by Fitzpatrick or somebody else. If there were the slightest suspicion that I'd squealed, or would squeal, my life wouldn't be worth a uickel. And I want to live!"

"Silly as that may be," I informed him, "I can understand it!"

"So here is what I want to ask from you," Jelke went on, those polished-steel eyes staring into mine. "I'm sure this whole thing will be cleared up by keeping a close watch on Roof. It may take a little time, but he'll trip up soon and through him you can get right to the big boy. But he mustn't suspect that he's suspected. Get me?"

I nodded.

"If I could, I'd leave here," Jelke went on abstractedly, "and then you boys could go right to work on him without the penalty for it being me getting knocked off. But I can't for a while. My rock hounds are turning up some stuff which means I've got to be right here on the job. On the other hand, I'd be no part of a man not to give you this information."

"Well, where do I come in?" I inquired. "I know already it's in some peculiar way, and it's going to cost me plenty."

"I don't think so," he said. "You know all I know now. As I said before, Captain Kennard, being C. O., probably couldn't do anything but go the whole way, report to his superiors, and close in on Roof, let the chips fall where they may. I'm asking this of you as man to man: keep this under your hat without saying anything to anybody, except maybe one man you can trust to help you. Cultivate Galini or Roof as he calls himself, and work out the thing in your own way with nobody being any the wiser until it's cleared up. Then, nobody will have any reason to believe that I said a thing or had anything to do with it. I'll help out, use my ship, and do anything I can, as long as it never is known that I've squealed on Roof."

I got his point and it seemed to me a good one. Furthermore, he was right about a man in Captain Kennard's position. We gabbed about it for a considerable length of time and over several drinks, and I summed up the matter to him thusly:

"I'll get somebody I can trust to help me, not tell anybody else anything about it, and while everybody is going at the thing in the old way, I'll see to it that any move that will give Roof away will be known to only me."

"It's more important to me than you think," Jelke told me slowly. "I don't mind being knocked off a month from now half as much as I would to-night, say. How about your staying all night here? You look as though you'd been drawn through a knothole!"

"That's one of the best ideas you've ever had!" I told him. Several of the flyers had spent a night or two with him for various reasons—some because they couldn't go home and others because they didn't want to go. "I'll see whether everything's O. K. I don't suppose anything can be done to-night."

It was O. K. as far as Captain Kennard was concerned, and so within a

half hour, in spite of Tex McDowell and Squirrel Seaver and everything else, I was stretched out in bed. Knowledge of the impressive Roof's real identity was at least a lamp-post to guide a wanderer. I was entirely too punch drunk to be able to figure out the broader possibilities in a situation where big-city criminals had started to operate from within or without the border patrol, and I didn't try to.

I had no idea what time it was when I found myself wide awake. It seemed to me that some loud noise had awakened me. I heard a voice raised angrily from the first floor, then a crash and the unmistakable crack of a shot.

I found myself at the door of the bedroom, arrayed chastely in undershirt and shorts. The hall was dark as pitch. Steps led down to a landing, and a second set led from the landing down to the first floor. They were out of sight around the corner and the light coming from below the stairs only half pierced the gloom on the landing. As I leaped down to the landing, there came the noise of several running footsteps, and as I hit it, two men, undistinguishable in the darkness, came up the stairs from below.

One of them grunted, and the next second his head gave me a terrific butt in the stomach. Then both of them were swarming all over me in the darkness. I was gasping for breath, nauseated by the terrific stomach blow, but I struck out weakly. I had been knocked against the wall, and the three of us were a writhing mass of arms and legs, as I struggled to get loose.

If I had had my breath, I might have had a chance. There was something horrible about that panting struggle in the gloom with the thought of that revolver shot ringing in my ears, and I had the conviction that I was fighting for my life. Then we all hit the floor in a writhing heap and I felt fingers

closing on my throat. I was kicking and clawing and writhing weakly, unable even to shout for help. Breathless to start with, that horrible grip on my throat was now making my head swim, and I was going through the tortures of the damned as they slowly choked me.

I was completely done for. Vaguely I realized that some one grunted breathlessly:

"He's through!"

Then something seemed to raise my head, and one thing penetrated to my dazed brain. It was the shout: "One for the Kid!"

The next instant my head hit the floor like a ton of brick, and for the second time that day I was out for the count. I was not completely unconscious, but I couldn't move. I realized dimly that the men were rushing on up the stairs and had gone out by means of a set of outside steps which led from the second story.

"Are you all right, Slim?" came Jelke's voice solicitously.

It was as though he was miles away. He was still alive, anyway. I couldn't answer. When the light snapped on, though, it seemed to help bring me back to a state where I could make a pass at thinking. Jelke was walking slowly toward me up the steps. His left arm was soaked with blood, and he was trying to stanch it with his right hand.

I got to my feet weakly, weaving like a hula dancer, and my legs were jiggling.

"What happened?" I asked woozily as I made my way down the steps.

"I got visited!" Jelke said grimly. "Come on; we're driving in to a doctor's right away and then you're going on out to the field."

"Who shot?" I asked him as I took a sip of a drink that made me feel better.

"I'm not saying a word!" he answered slowly. "But who do you think?"

"Roof?"

"You ought to be a detective!" he said with a pale-faced grin.

There was no doubt that Harry Jelke had had a shock that night.

"Don't say another word until we get to the car."

I had pulled myself part way together by the time we started for town.

"Who were the other bozos who fought with me and why did they start coming up the stairs?" was my first question.

"Must have thought the noise would wake you up and you'd chase 'em," Jelke told me. "It was Roof and two men I've never seen before. They were there to warn me to keep my mouth shut. When they found out you were upstairs, they figured I'd squealed already, I think. I figured I had them dead to rights if I could get to my gun. I tried and Roof shot. I knocked him out the window and they beat it upstairs to take care of you!"

"Well, then there's no reason why we shouldn't go right to bat and take in Mr. Roof and find out who the unknowns are!" I told him. "You've been shot now, and the first thing to do is to get to the authorities——"

"Let's wait until to-morrow," Jelke interrupted. "I want to figure this thing out. You go on out there and see to it that Roof, if he's back there, doesn't get watched too closely, and his suspicions aroused. Keep away from him. This may sound funny to you, Slim, but do as I say, will you?"

I didn't see how I could do anything else, and I wasn't in a position to do any catch-as-catch-can arguing. I had the feeling that it was silly not to report everything, arrest Roof, round up the others, and third-degree them into talking. On the other hand, Jelke knew more about it than I did, and I was just a helpless bull staggering around a china shop, wondering how to get out of it.

"Don't bother to wait, and you can

use this car," Jelke told me as we drew up to a doctor's house. I had tied a handkerchief around his arm back at the house. I'll be out at the field to-morrow morning and we can get things moving. Meanwhile, not a word to anybody until you see me, except to see that Roof doesn't get away!"

As I drove toward the airdrome, four miles away, the cool night air kind of swept the bats out of my belfry and I decided that business was looking up a little.

"The gang just ran into hard luck by Jelke being around and recognizing Roof," I was thinking, "and this little soiree to-night just about cooked their goose. Maybe they'll be willing to call everything quits and be satisfied to get away with their necks. I wonder if Tex knows too much?"

I was driving along a lonely street through the Mexican quarter of the town, and had emerged onto a mile of open road while giving vent to the above profound cogitations. The lights of the field were less than a mile away, and I was dawdling along at a goodly pace while worrying about Tex McDowell down in the jungles of Mexico somewhere. It seemed certain that it was kidnaping for ransom in the case of both Tex McDowell and Squirrel Seaver, which would mean that Tex would not have been harmed if he'd been an ordinary captive.

Suddenly, as I came around a curve, the unusually strong lights of Jelke's flashy car momentarily hit an object in a field alongside the road. The next second, as the car made the turn and the lights focused on the road again, nothing was visible. My condition, however, was such that finding a herd of wild tigers in any bush would not have surprised me. I read shots into stones, bodies in babbling brooks. Consequently, I stopped and turned the car so that its lights would illuminate the same spot again.

A second later I was out of it, making high speed toward what looked like the body of a man in uniform lying on the ground.

It was. His head was bashed in and he was completely and irrevocably dead. And the man was Master Sergeant Clay!

CHAPTER V. TEX SHOWS UP!

IN three seconds less than nothing flat, I was escorting the corpse of Sergeant Clay toward McMullen at a rate of speed which would have won the Schneider Cup. As I remarked before, I was in such a scrambled mental condition that the sight of Queen Victoria on a velocipede wouldn't have seemed the least bit surprising.

As the car skimmed over the road toward the airdrome, with the gruesome remains of the sergeant a constant reminder of what was afoot, something happened to this human bean pole—as though his peanut mind had exploded and burst its shell. Whereas up to now I had been receiving physical and mental socks on the jaw, going down under each one, and wondering vaguely what to do about them, I now began to get good and sore.

Every once in a while, when things get too tough, I paint hair on my chest and endeavor to fight back.

Consequently, as I went booming through the night I was cursing my foes with heat and persistency, eager to get my hands on something or somebody—in fact, anything or anybody. What I wanted and what I made up my mind had to come, was a show-down—forthwith.

There could be but one explanation for the pitiful remains of the grizzled noncom beside me. His suspicions had been well founded, his curiosity had become too obvious and he had been put on the spot in the best Chicago manner. And if you don't think I shivered an

extra shiver as I thought of that narrow-eyed, tight-lipped Tony Galini, known to the flight as "Tar Roof," you're crazy. And if you don't think that I intended to mingle immediately with the gangster who had wormed his way into the air service, you're crazier.

I was a quarter of a mile from the airdrome, and the motor in front of me was making plenty of noise, when a new note seemed to enter into its drone. I took an observation aft, to see whether it was another car, but there was none. That new note grew in intensity until I was about to enter the airdrome. I was searching the sky tensely for the only possible explanation, and I found it: I damn near wrecked the boat as my popping optics saw the intermittent flames of exhaust pipes three miles south of the field.

I heaved the car to, alongside the guard at the gate.

"Hop in!" I told him, and never will I forget the young mechanic's staring eyes and white face as he leaped to the running board and gazed with horrified fascination at the slumped body of Clay. As I whirled into the line, I could see the officer of the day come bursting out of headquarters like a seed squeezed from a lemon. Behind him was an orderly who rushed toward the tents.

Two De Havilands had been left out all night in case of emergencies, with a mechanic for each of them. The ship in the air was diving now like mad for the airdrome, barely a quarter of a mile away, as I brought the car to a stop. And it was a De Haviland plane, at that.

"Tex McDowell has got loose!" I roared to the startled mechanics. "Get one ship going in case I'm wrong!"

As they leaped to obey, I transferred my attention to the guard.

"Go over and rout out Captain Kennard in case anything happens here in a minute. Tell him about Clay and also tell him this. Now get it!"

I was shouting as the roar of the

wide-open Liberty above the field drowned out any ordinary conversation.

"In case there's something phony about this ship and I chase it, tell him that he must watch Lieutenant Roof every minute! Understand?"

The gulping youngster nodded.

"Wait a minute!" I yelled at him as he started. "Get that!"

From a point three hundred feet high, squarely above the center of the airdrome, something white had dropped from the ship to the earth, and unless my eyes deceived me, the rear cockpit of that ship held none other than Squirrel Seaver. No one else could have been so short that nothing but the top of his head showed above the cowling. In a split second, the exultation I had felt a moment before changed to taut foreboding.

As a mechanic rushed for what was undoubtedly a message, I found myself running for the warming ship. One mechanic was running toward me with helmet and goggles. The seat-pack parachute was in the cockpit, but I didn't put it on. There were a dozen running figures over by the tents as I jazzed the motor. That ship in the air was Squirrel Seaver's plane undoubtedly, and in the front cockpit of it was one of the little flyer's captors.

The De Haviland was zooming now preparatory to its dash back over the Rio Grande and the young mechanic was thrusting a big piece of wrapping paper in my hand. In the light of the bulb on the instrument board, I read it quick and fast:

I am being held for twenty thousand dollars ransom. Get it from my aunt. Don't delay, because they mean business. Same outfit as Tex McDowell, but we're not together. Warn Tex's father to have cash ready. Instructions how to deliver it and rescue me will reach you to-morrow.

SEAVER.

That whole note seemed to register on my mind without it being necessary to read it. I sort of took a mental photo-

graph of it, shoved it into the mechanic's hand, and pushed the throttle on ahead. The centigrade thermometer only read sixty-eight degrees, and the oil pressure was down; but there was no time to monkey around.

The other ship was eight hundred feet high and a quarter of a mile south of me as I lifted the D. H. over the hangars on the western edge of the field and turned south with the twelve-cylinder Liberty doing all she could do.

I took a quick check-up. The gauges showed she was full of gas and oil, there was plenty of ammunition for the guns on the cowling before me, and that other ship would run out of gas first even if I couldn't catch up to it before then. If the Liberty stuck with me, I was going to chase that baby home.

As I roared southward, I took one last look at the field. Men were scurrying around like ants and somebody had already taken off in the second D. H.

"I'm going to have help!" I thought, and wondered who it was. He'd be a couple of minutes behind when the blow-off came, but nevertheless he would represent reënforcements.

I was wider awake than ever, and I had a second wind that was a bear cat. I wasn't tired and for a wonder I wasn't scared; I was just delighted. Here was something a man could get his teeth into. And I was so alert for any move on the part of the other ship that I made a cat at a rat hole look somnolent.

I was nearly a thousand feet lower than the other ship, and at any second I expected that its pilot would turn around, dive down and perforate me plenty. They'd made Squirrel Seaver fly up to help locate the airdrome, undoubtedly.

As I saw the Rio Grande like a silver ribbon against the shadowed earth, two things emerged into the forefront of my racing mind. One was that if I did catch up with the other ship, there was

nothing I could do about fighting it out. I'd sacrifice Squirrel Seaver, too. The second was that the pilot up there must be in a highly unenviable mental condition. If he flew straight ahead I'd find out where headquarters was and what it was all about. If he tried to lead me astray, he'd run out of gas, anyway. The only thing for him to do was to turn and shoot me down—and why he didn't do it, I couldn't figure out.

Of one thing I was sure: the second he started for me, my business was to run like hell and play a game of hide and seek. He couldn't chase me forever without running out of gas, and as soon as he turned to go south, I'd turn and follow him.

Consequently, I climbed desperately to get all the altitude I could and still keep them in sight. I had a pretty well-founded idea that I was the stupidest flyer in the army, but I'll be damned if that fellow didn't make me look like a master mind. Minute by minute I gained altitude on him, losing ground to do so, and with every passing second he was diminishing his chances for getting away clean.

"He isn't even climbing!" I thought as my altimeter plainly read "1200 feet," and I realized that he couldn't be more than five hundred higher than I. The river had slipped behind now, and international law was shot to hell as I sent my ship over the monte of Mexico.

I looked back of me. The third De Haviland was gaining on me. It must have been a slightly faster ship and with a little better motor. The fugitive ahead was evidently not flying wide open because my wide-open ship was gaining, sure as hell. No other ship had taken the air. After all, we were two against one already, and there was no need of the whole outfit going on a joy ride at three o'clock in the morning.

The river was out of sight now, and I was thinking casual thoughts about

how delightful it would be for the motor to cut out and send me down into the ominous chapparal below, when my mouth fell open and my eyes bounced against my goggles.

I was as high as the other ship now, and it was turning around toward me—and going into a dive as well!

For a second, I thought the motor had cut out and they were making a forced landing. Then in the bright moonlight I could see the circle of light traced by the metal tips of the propeller and realized that it was turning only fast enough to keep them in the air. I was completely at a loss, drawn so taut that I felt as though something in me would crack any minute. If his idea was to knock me down now that we were over Mexico, he was deliberately putting himself at a disadvantage by losing altitude.

What in hell he was up to was far too deep for the mind of a Utah country boy whose mental qualifications for the air service in the first place had begun and ended with possessing a black-sheep uncle who was a senator at the start of the War. The darkness, the altitude, the hour, the thought of Mexico below—all helped to give me a combination of the creeps and the jitters, but all combined to make Mr. Slimuel X. Evans keep his eye on the ball.

A second later, the meaning of the fugitive's move came to me. The De Haviland hurtled past me a hundred feet lower than I was and fifty feet to one side. In the rear cockpit sat Squirrel Seaver, the harness of his parachute gleaming as white as his face in the rays of the flashlight he held in his hand. The pilot in the front cockpit was just a bulk in the darkness. Squirrel Seaver pointed at himself, pointed at the other man, and indulged in rapid and involved maneuvers and gesticulations.

The meaning of them was plain. If the border-patrol ships didn't get the

hell back to where they belonged, Squirrel Seaver would be knocked off.

"That's a smart move at that," I thought numbly, watching the other ship as it banked and started coming back.

The third De Haviland had now arrived on the scene and hovered above me. Once again, with that flashlight illumining his face, Squirrel Seaver went through his act. If ever there was a man who was half crazy, it seemed to be this one. I was flying in the same direction now, as was my ally above, so I had plenty of time for soulful scrutiny.

Squirrel Seaver was a complete and total wreck, a heap of human débris. A deep clamminess settled over me as the body of Sergeant Clay seemed to materialize on one wing, and the gray face of Dave Fitzpatrick on the other. I realized that those who hadn't stopped at murder once wouldn't be deterred from it a second time.

Well, there, in a manner of speaking, I was. On the face of it, there was nothing to do except save little Squirrel Seaver's life by going on back home, thrown for a loss. The third De Haviland came creeping up alongside of me and a few feet higher. I was fifty feet behind and fifty feet above Seaver's plane, and the third man was a similar distance from me. I looked up at him but couldn't see for the minute who it was in the darkness. He pointed down at Seaver, shrugged his shoulders, pointed at me and himself and then gestured northward.

Then, as the ship above me came closer, it seemed to me that a giant fist had socked me square on the button. That third man's gestures were becoming more emphatic and the man was Tar Roof, otherwise known as Tony Galini!

Lieutenant Slimuel X. Evans was most emphatically alone and outnumbered, two thousand feet above a hard, cold world.

Right then and there something happened to me which has happened before and which has been largely responsible for putting me in a series of messes and keeping me constantly broke, in trouble, and in bad odor with the powers that be. It will also be responsible for keeping me in the same spot the rest of my natural life and eventually see me cooly kicking off from this vale of tears because I don't know any better.

In one fell swoop all common sense and regard for consequences left me and any residue of brains I may possess curled up and died. Not Galini, or Seaver, or anybody else in the air above or the earth beneath or the waters under the earth, were going to keep me from having a bite of it. Not even the sight of a gun trained by the front-seat man on Squirrel, would stop me.

Very methodically I banked away from the lower ship, climbed a bit, and strapped the parachute harness on myself. Now that I look back on it, no crazier move could have been made by man or beast than the scheme which had popped into my mind without notice.

A moment later the ships were trundling steadily southward, and Galini, a Sphinxlike image above me, was still gesturing peremptorily. Of course, he wanted me to go home.

I was gradually diving toward the outlaw plane. Again the flashlight illumined Seaver's contorted face as he gestured toward the gun and flashed the light upon it. The man in the front seat was crouched low, his face a pale smudge as he looked back toward me. Then, unexpectedly, two tiny details in the scene below impressed themselves on my mind—both possibly meaning the same thing. If there had been any real chance of my changing my mind, it disappeared then. There was more here than met the eye, and I was going to find out what it was, in spite of hell.

I was twenty-five feet behind the ship and slightly to the left of it, my motor

cut to twelve hundred revolutions and my D. H. in a very shallow dive. Slowly I drew up on my prey until my wings were parallel to the tail of the other ship, the right wing tips twenty feet to the left of it. They were watching me as though paralyzed. Right then, half a mile in the air, the roar of the motors pounding against my eardrums, I saw in the light of that flashlight a picture I will see in nightmares from now on. The gibbering Squirrel Seaver was a sight I'd give a pretty penny to forget.

Suddenly, I angled my ship downward slightly and shoved the gun full on. Whether the man in the front seat had a parachute on I didn't know, but I didn't care.

My speed was twenty miles an hour faster than theirs as I sent my right wings plowing into the left wings of the fugitive ship with a horrible, rending crash. Linen tore, and wood splintered as the impetus of my ship swung us both around to the right, locked together like two monsters of the air in mortal combat.

My lower right wing folded back and I ducked to escape it as I cut the motor. The next second, I had unstrapped my safety belt as the motor of the other ship died and only the drone of Galini's Liberty came from three hundred feet higher.

I had figured that the worst that could happen was that the flea-weight Seaver could bring the other man down on his 'chute without killing them both. Now, my brain preternaturally clear, I saw that luck had been with me. The two D. H.'s remained locked together. They were temporarily stalled, fluttering as though mortally wounded, bracing themselves for that last long dive.

I told you about that second wind I had. Well, I was a better man than I have ever been before or since as I hauled myself out on the lower wing, my parachute flapping around my thighs.

For a second I stared in the eyes of the 'chuteless man in the front seat. He was small and thin-faced and rat-eyed, and he was as scared and as desperate as it is given a man to be. Both he and Squirrel Seaver seemed unable to move.

"Climb out!" I roared as I plowed through the wreckage, hanging to loosely flapping wires to keep from falling off.

Because of my parachute I sort of plunged across that aerial platform as though such a thing as height didn't exist.

"Come on, Squirrel! We'll both carry him down!"

I was within five feet of them now, and the ship was whirling earthward with gathering speed. Any minute I expected to be thrown off or the ships separate, or something. My only danger was to be caught in the wreckage so the 'chute wouldn't work. For the first and only time in my life the idea of jumping into space with a pack on my back that was supposed to open, didn't scare me to a pulp. In the instant before Squirrel Seaver replied, a paralyzing thought hit me.

The easiest way out for Galini and his gang would be for that flinty gangster above to put me out of existence right then or pretty quickly. Seaver, too, perhaps. Any story would hold water under the circumstances.

"I'll take him down alone!" screamed Squirrel Seaver.

For a second, I hesitated. I had my gun out and somehow in the whirling chaos in which I found myself involved, the thought of gun play from the outlaw in front of me seemed ridiculous. I saw him plunge over the narrow cowl between the two seats. Seaver was standing up now. They locked arms about each other and, yelling a terrified duet, fell over the side.

I must have been a sight for the gods as I clung to a half-splintered strut, my goofy platform doing a snake dance

through the air. I gargled with relief as I saw the white 'chute flutter out below and the two bodies swinging in huge arcs, cleaving to each other for life.

The ground was barely fifteen hundred feet below. I had waited to make sure that everything was all right. Squirrel Seaver had rejected my princely offer to assist him in the embarkation,

transit, and safe arrival of the unknown pilot, and that strengthened my resolution to be the first to reach the ground. I'll tell you why in a minute. So it was that I launched myself overboard into the ozone in a mass of flapping arms and legs that must have made me look like an octopus doing his setting-up exercises.

To be concluded in the July issue.



THIS WILL INTEREST JAMES WORTH

ALL of you who have benefited by our New Places and New Friends department, or who may at some time write to James Worth about homesteading, vacationing, traveling for adventure or for starting anew in new localities, will also be interested in this. Out in Washington—you folks in Washington know about it, perhaps—three farmers recently changed places with three Alaskan gold miners. There's a story for you! Three men, weary of tilling the soil and anxious to try the more adventurous life of the prospector, got in touch with three men of the North who, tired of the hazards of gold hunting, were thinking longingly of the States and of secure bits of land they could cultivate in peace and security.

So they swapped. We think they were wise. They were tired and bored, all six of them. Now they're starting out afresh, with renewed enthusiasms. We hope they'll be happy. They deserve to be.



JAIL SENTENCES—1931 STYLE

AN Ohio judge, sentencing a man for carrying concealed weapons, was told by the protesting prisoner that his family would starve if he went to jail. The judge was sympathetic, and, on learning that the man worked out of doors, said: "You can't work outdoors when it rains; therefore on the next three rainy days you will go to jail."

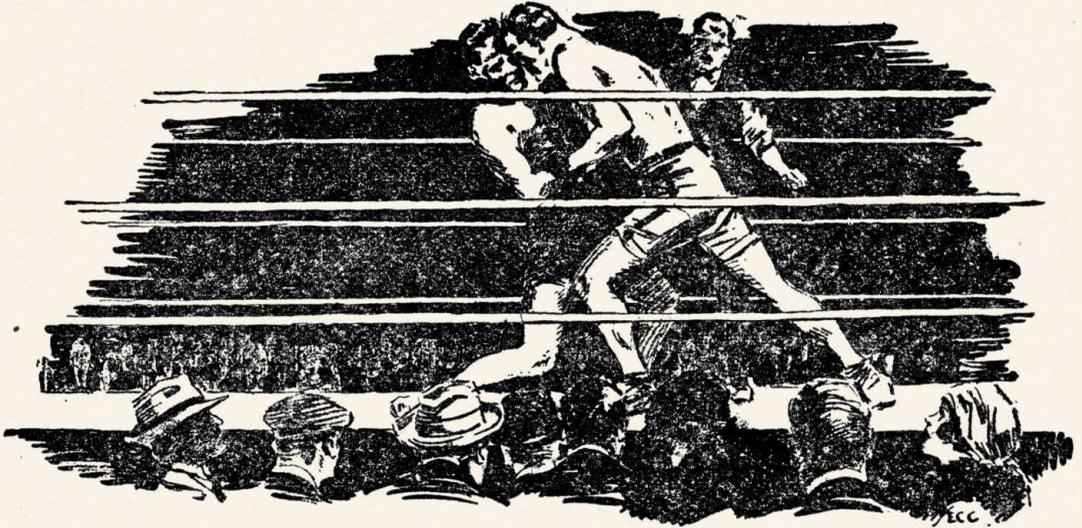
This precedent opens up many possibilities. Snow shovelers might be made to do their thirty days in the summer time, and beach life guards might receive deferred sentences until the first snowfall.

Why not, on the other hand, ascertain a man's hobby, that his punishment, for reckless driving, say, may be more impressed upon him? Thus, a hunter will do his sixty days in the hunting season. The fisherman will gnaw his knuckles in the coop while the streams are fat with toothsome trout. The holiday pickpocket will serve his time beginning with the next big holiday, while the stores, to his chagrin, are jammed with easy victims whom he cannot jostle.

The idea has punitive as well as accommodating possibilities, you see. How about taking a hit-and-run driver and chasing him around the prison yard daily with automobiles until he knows what it feels like? "Let the punishment fit the crime," the Gilbert and Sullivan song goes. But maybe we're just mean for chuckling.

WALLOPING FRIENDSHIPS

By WILLIAM HEMMINGWAY



Our Sport Expert Describes Some Hair-raising Bouts between Sailors from Rival Ships.

THE gong clanged. It was only a shimmering dinner gong, but as its harsh call rang out, the Frenchman and the Englishman leaped out of their corners with the speed of hawks and flew at each other hammer and tongs.

They were in a ring; eight hundred men and many ladies were massed in comfortable chairs around the ropes, while hundreds of late comers were trying to pry and wedge themselves in through doors already jammed full of humanity.

They knew there was going to be some good fighting in these international bouts on the pier of the French Line, and they were willing to risk broken bones to get in to see it. They were right.

Emile Bragance and "Taffy" Rees, the best featherweights of their ships, were mixing it up for the honor of their

fleets, and they fought as if they were struggling for the championship of the world.

Taffy was a Welshman, a pink-cheeked, blue-eyed lad, the best one-hundred-and-twenty-four-pounder on the steamship *Aquitania*; Emile a Frenchman of equal weight, from the steamship *Paris*, black as your hat and full of fight as a gamecock.

If you could see him—his fists quivering with anxiety to get home the winning punch, his eyes boring clear through his antagonist—you could never forget that picture of pugnacity.

Taffy was keyed up, too, though he did not quiver so much. He blocked or ducked most of Emile's punches, and once in a while got home one of his own. They ran into clinches, and quickly fought out of them.

It was startling to see the energy both lads put into their work, something not

common nowadays, when the boys are more interested in the gate than in the wallop. Their fists kept up a steady *rat-a-tat-tat* like the clattering of a pneumatic drill.

Honors were easy in the first round, but in the second Rees began to find his man oftener, while Bragance was so eager that in one of his rushes he dived halfway through the ropes and barely missed plunging down on the floor.

When he straightened up, Rees welcomed him with a hot left drive on the nose that brought a stream of red, and Emile charged in again, faster than ever, the gay red frills of his black sateen trunks fluttering like battle flags.

Whew! but it was lively work, all four fists flying so swiftly that no human eye could keep track of them. The boys were punching as fiercely as Terry McGovern and "Young Corbett" in their famous championship fight—not so cleverly, of course, but quite as fast. To those who spend their money on the big ballyhooed shows, their rapid fire was refreshing. They meant business every time they hit.

There was no let-up in the pace during the third round. The dark face of Bragance was streaked with red, but he attacked as if the battle had just begun, leaping in and punching away for glory. Rees was just a shade too clever for him, though, and after the old dinner gong boomed the end of the third round and the bout, the judges—illustrious Georges Carpentier and the super-giant Primo de Carnera—agreed that Rees was the winner.

As the referee, "Battling" Levinsky—former light-heavy champion of the world—raised Taffy's right arm in token of victory, Emile Bragance, who a moment before had been trying so earnestly to knock his head off, trotted across the ring, his reddened lips spread in a friendly smile, and shook his hand warmly.

I could not hear his words of con-

gratulation, but there could be no doubt of his sincerity. And the crowd, evenly divided between sailors of the two ships, cheered and clapped their hands in hearty indorsement of the verdict. Not one boo could be heard, nor any grumble at the decision, though the fighting had been very close to a draw.

"These bouts are part of a regular program to cultivate international friendship," Messrs. Braider and Siemsen, of the Y. M. C. A., explained in answer to questions. "They are only an incident in the full schedule of athletic activities of sailors of all nations promoted by the Y. M. C. A., here and abroad. We have international track and field games and soccer matches, and we expect soon to have a race in the Hudson River of ships' lifeboats manned by sailors of every seagoing nation."

"But how do the lads cultivate international friendship by walloping one another?" I inquired.

"By giving and taking punches with true sporting spirit," they answered. "In all the games the same spirit prevails. Look at that smile on the face of Primo de Carnera. He's expressing the international friendship idea."

It was surprising to see the vast Italian so friendly and apparently so happy among a crowd of Frenchmen. But there he was, and his boyish smile seemed to fill one side of the room. He and the famous Georges Carpentier were chatting away between bouts like brother and brother. René de Vos, middleweight champion of Belgium, was with them, a third smiling brother. His smile was not as big as Primo's, but it was as constant. Fighting men are really the most amiable in the world—when the fists are not flying.

In the next bout Billy Waite of the *Aquitania*, though he weighs but one hundred and twenty-four pounds, tried all his speed and skill against Jean Le-tray of the *Paris*, weighing one hundred

and thirty—a heavy handicap in that light class. The Frenchman was not only heavier but was taller and had a much longer reach; so Billy thought his best chance was to make a whirlwind battle of it. And he was some whirlwind! He seemed to have a dozen fists popping at one time, and the fierceness of his attack drove Letray back as a gale drives a bunch of autumn leaves. The Frenchman braced and came back with a stiff left jab and a right follow that drove Billy to cover up with head drawn down behind both arms—a perfect turtle formation that no punch could go through.

As Letray was trying to solve the puzzle with an uppercut or two, Waite suddenly snapped out of it and let loose a left and a right swing that would have flattened Letray if he hadn't jumped back in time. He jumped in again with a fast left drive, and Waite sank to one knee to avoid punishment and was up instantly.

He reminded some old-timers of the tactics of that agile Englishman, "Tug" Wilson, who infuriated John L. Sullivan by slipping to the floor and thus avoiding a knock-out. But Bill differed from Wilson in one important respect—when he rose from the floor, he came up fighting, turning loose a flock of jabs and hooks that filled the air with fists that grazed Letray's chin.

"Come on, Billy!" his shipmates sang out as the gong boomed the second round, and Waite dashed in with all his might, swinging fiercely with both hands for the head. But Letray, with his longer reach, was able to stand him off, and just before the end of the round caught him on the tip of the chin with a nice left hook that flopped him on the floor. The bell saved him, but his seconds had to carry him to his corner.

The minute's rest freshened Billy wonderfully, and at the gong he dashed out with a left hook that caught Letray on the jaw, a little too far back to hurt

him much, and he waded into the little fellow like a punching machine. Step by step Letray drove him back, sending home lefts and rights so fast that the English lad had to crouch and smother up behind his bent arms. But Letray had solved the puzzling crouch by this time, and he whirled in with a left hook that dropped Waite on the floor. He got to his knee, took his time, and rose at seven to fight on; but Letray steadily drove him back once more, and again flattened him with a sweet left hook.

"Come on, Billy!" his shipmates were yelling with their hearts in their throats, and Billy, a true John Bull, came on with a grin of defiance and both fists making play like piston rods. But Battling Levinsky saw that his eyes were glazed and his knees shaky; so he mercifully stepped in between, gently pushed Billy back and raised Letray's arm to show he was the winner. Again the unbroken chorus of cheers from all sides as winner and loser shook hands.

"Too bad to see a game lad like Bill lose," I remarked to an *Aquitania* sailor.

"Oh, Billy's a bit off all right," he agreed. "It wasn't the six pounds or the Frenchman's long reach that beat him. He's been in bed four days with the grippe, but he was the best we had on hand just now; so he went on. Well, he'll win next time."

Can you beat it?

Jack Skelly of the *Aquitania* and Monsieur Couvin of the *Paris* were matched at one hundred and thirty-six pounds. The Frenchman led off with a volley of left and right jabs and jolts that drove Skelly across the ring, but he rallied and came back with a wild rush that plunged him half through the ropes.

As he circled away from the edge Couvin was on him with a shower of short swings of both fists to the jaw; but Skelly rolled his head with the punches and escaped unhurt.

Then he came in with a hard right drive on the jaw. It was a nifty punch, carrying plenty of steam, but Couvin, in excellent condition, shook his head, weathered it, and drove Skelly so hard that the Briton in his dodging wrenched off his left shoe. He fought the rest of the round like my son John in the song, "one shoe off and one shoe on," but he didn't seem a bit the worse for it.

Couvin made the pace in the second, but Skelly met him with a pretty left hook to the ribs that stung deep; yet the Frenchman's condition was so good that he kept right on in the lead.

"Courage, Couvin!" a charming French girl cried as he rallied from the blow and stepped in. It was pleasant to hear, but he didn't need it, for he already had *beau-coup* courage. Skelly tore after him so fiercely that he lost his other shoe, and he did all the rest of his fighting in his brown socks. He landed a peachy right cross on the jaw, but it only spurred Couvin to faster work, and he sent Skelly across the ring with right drives to the ribs and one particularly fine left hook to the jaw.

The Frenchman forced the pace all through the third round, though Skelly never failed to counter him with lively punches. But Couvin was in the better condition; stopped many of Skelly's blows and punished him severely in the body at close range, besides a hot right hook on the jaw just before the last bell. It was easily Couvin's bout, and the big room vibrated with cheers from the sailors of both fleets at the decision. Skelly trotted across to Couvin's corner, shook hands, and congratulated him. The two stood chatting a moment like two friends who have enjoyed a hot struggle at golf. You could not imagine a finer exhibition of sporting spirit.

Jack Grace, a welter from the *Aquitania*, had four pounds advantage over Derry of the *Paris*, and he felt so sure of victory that he smiled and chewed

gum in his corner while waiting for the signal to leap out and put his man away.

He pranced into battle with a flock of haymakers revolving around Derry's head so fast that he looked like Cierva's autogyro flying machine making a landing. The difference was that none of the blows made a landing on the Frenchman, though they swept him far off his course.

Finding his victim still standing, Grace launched his haymakers still faster; but Derry ducked or blocked them all. Grace stood a while in puzzled thought, chewing his gum and absent-mindedly rubbing his nose with his right glove, and at that precise moment Derry shot over a left hook on the jaw.

Down went Grace, chewing gum and all, and was counted out. Yet he had been so good that his admirers whacked his back in admiration all the way to his dressing room—after he had smilingly congratulated Derry. Friendship was never forgotten.

George Gilly of the *Aquitania*, a little high in flesh and fancifully tattooed on his round white arms, had six pounds on Y. Treguier of the *Paris*, who weighed one hundred and fifty-four, but the blond Frenchman looked and acted as if he was trained to the minute, though perhaps a little too anxious to win quickly. His fists darted at the same instant, landing like the point of a bullet driven by every bit of energy in the man. He led off with a left hook on the jaw that spilled Gilly on the ropes. Treguier flew to a neutral corner and quivered there with anxiety to hop in and finish the job the moment his man recovered balance.

But Gilly came back with all his faculties in good order, and, when Treguier lunged in, swinging both fists, let him have the same and plenty of it. The gloves clattered like hail on a roof. It was as wild a rally as any one ever saw, and in the midst of it a photog-

rapher's flashlight went off with a glare and a boom that made you think of the end of the world. Talk about action! Here was more action than the eye could follow, honors almost even, with Treguiet a little bit surer in his shooting and just a shade in front.

The blue tattoo on Gilly's arms flared and flew as he whanged Treguiet across the ring and up against the ropes. They clinched and fought out of the clinch without a word from Referee Levinsky, who stepped around briskly and smiled to see such sport. Treguiet came out of the mix-up with his nose bleeding, but in his eyes a more determined look than ever.

Each was so hot in the second round that they clinched at the first rush; then fought loose as Gilly forced Treguiet back to a corner with a volley of high hooks. Each man was in such a hurry to win that he forgot all about body blows. Treguiet charged so fast that he drove Gilly before him; then the Englishman reversed the process, though Treguiet blocked and slipped most of the blows. At the end they were panting like Marathon runners, with Treguiet still a little ahead. His blood flowed, but his attack never ceased.

Gilly was not so soft as he looked, and he took the lead in the third, landing three lightning left jabs on the jaw before Treguiet could find his defense and reply with a hot right counter on the jaw. He followed this with a left hook on the other side of the head and a batch of hooks with both fists that not only backed Gilly off but made him smother up with both arms.

They fought loose over by the ropes, and Treguiet again drove his man across the ring, forcing Gilly to crouch under shelter of both arms. But the Englishman attacked once more, only to be driven away by the straighter hitting of Treguiet. They were hard at it when the gong clanged to cease firing. And did the crowd cheer? They cer-

tainly did, and they kept it up while the referee consulted the judges, then went over to Treguiet and raised his arm, to proclaim him the winner. The cheering was louder than ever, but there was some booing mixed with it. Hal Evans of the *Aquitania*, master of ceremonies, raised his hands for silence.

"Boys," he said, "that is not the spirit we want here. I'm sure no *Aquitania* man booed." That ended the booing, and a wild hullabaloo of cheers followed. In the midst of it, Gilly ran over from his corner, smiling with great good nature. He shook hands with Treguiet, said something pleasant, and patted him on the back. Then—well, I'm blessed if they didn't throw their arms around each other and kiss each other on the cheek! You see, a fellow gets all wrought up in a good, hot fight, and at the end of it his emotions are apt to break loose in a kind of hysterical explosion. The emotions these lads felt were admiration and friendship, and they just bubbled over without restraint. They are real fighters, and I would walk miles to see them in action again, especially in a ten-round bout, where they could take a little more time and work out better strategy.

Laurie Rowe of the *Aquitania* made short work of Z. Paumelle of the *Paris*. He leaped at Paumelle and exploded on him about a hundred jabs, hooks, slams, uppercuts, and a general assortment of hard knocks that brushed him off the scene as a Swiss village is brushed away by an avalanche. Referee Levinsky saw one of Paumelle's arms sticking up out of the blow-drift, and he stopped the show and gave Rowe the decision. The crowd felt as if they had been looking at a dynamite explosion, and cheered a long time in gratitude.

Bob Blondell, still another welter from the *Aquitania*, had a tough time with J. Joignant of the *Paris*, who had an advantage of two pounds and a

right-hand punch that would flatten an ox. That is, if the ox stood still. Blondell measured his man as the gong boomed, saw him tighten up in a crouch and cock his right fist for an awful sockdolager; so he skipped nimbly out of his way every time Joignant shot it over.

In the second round, however, the Frenchman worked in closer with a fusillade of left and right hooks for the jaw and Blondell mixed it with him so fiercely that you expected every moment to see one of them drop. The Englishman noticed the sudden frown on Joignant's forehead just before he let go his killing punch, and by slipping away from that frown he managed to escape the punch. Yet Joignant did land one of his best on Blondell's jaw just before the gong. Bob rolled his head with it, clinched and was safe.

Each tried for a quick finish in the third round; so they flew and buckled like a pair of gamecocks, banging away at short range so fast that while you were shouting, "Oh! What a corker!" for one, the other had landed two better punches in return. Each pinked the other's nose with short right drives, but they only grinned and made the pace hotter. Joignant did most of the leading, only to be foiled by Bob's fine blocking and slipping. Bob got the decision; so that the score now stood: *Paris*, four wins; *Aquitania*, three. One more victory would put the English even, while if the next Frenchman should win, the *Paris* boys would be ahead by five to three. The crowd hardly dared to breathe.

Out came Sailor Richards of the *Aquitania*, a shade taller and two pounds lighter than Monsieur Samson, one hundred and fifty pounds, who carried the hopes and prayers of the *Paris* crew. They were earnest and they fought hard, but they were not any too sure of what all the shooting was about.

Samson was slow—maybe his name

weighed him down—and Richards had a queer trick of leaning far backward to escape a left lead. If Samson had timed him and stepped in with a right follow after leading—well, he didn't; so Richards escaped time and again, when a more expert boxer would have outed him. They were even during two rounds. As they came out for the third, there were wild cries of, "*Allez, Samson!*" which inspired the Frenchman to go for all he was worth.

But Richards met him every time and mixed it with him; so that this round was as lively as any of the others. They stood toe to toe and swapped smashes, neither bothering to guard but putting all his hope in the chance of a knock-out blow. It was a riot, the battle cries in French and English ringing out every moment—"Allez, Samson!" and "Out him, Richards!"—and everybody ecstatic with the fast action. Even the grave Captain de Malglaive of the *Paris*, used to storms as he is, nodded his head in time with the punches.

The boys were in a whirlwind of left and right hooks, of which Samson was landing the greater number, when the gong stopped them. Each had enjoyed the good fight so much that they shook hands, embraced and congratulated each other before they ran to their corners. The judges and the referee consulted; then the referee seized the arm of Samson and held it aloft to signify he had won. All the other cheering was as nothing to this; for the *Paris* was ahead by five wins to three. But there were a few booes mixed with the cheering, and instantly Hal Evans of the *Aquitania*, master of ceremonies for the evening, beckoned for silence, and got it.

"That is not the spirit, boys," he said. "The decision was close, but no one from the *Aquitania* will question it. Englishmen don't quibble."

Whereupon the whole pier vibrated with the cheers—for Hal Evans, for the good fighting, for everything. Then the

trophy presented by the Merchant Seamen's Y. M. C. A., a silver cup as tall as a bell buoy, was handed to Captain de Malglave of the *Paris*. He smiled and bowed his thanks, but wisely omitted words in a place where blows were so eloquent. A collection amounting to two hundred and seventy-five dollars was taken up, to buy athletic equipment. *Not one penny goes to the boxers*—a very significant fact.

It is expected that the boxers of the United States liner *Leviathan* will compete for the silver cup very soon. It

is hard to round them up for competition, because their homes are here, while all the foreign crews live on their ships. The Y. M. C. A. people, who help take care of the ten thousand sailors ashore in New York every day, say that the boxing and other games have done wonders in promoting international understanding and friendship. And to aid the cause they are building a fine clubhouse down among the Hudson River piers, at a cost of one million dollars, and expect to have it in commission this fall.

William Hemmingway's vigorous, entertaining articles appear regularly in this magazine.



HOW MUCH ICE?

THE average family should use about eight thousand pounds of ice a year, if it takes that commodity from the wagon all summer and winter and keeps it in a refrigerator that is in first-class condition.

This estimate comes from the Leonard Institute of Food Preservation, which also gives out the surprising information that people make a big mistake when they wrap ice in a newspaper or a blanket to keep it from melting fast. As a matter of fact, says the institute, that wrapping-up idea is a delusion and a snare which needlessly enriches the ice man.

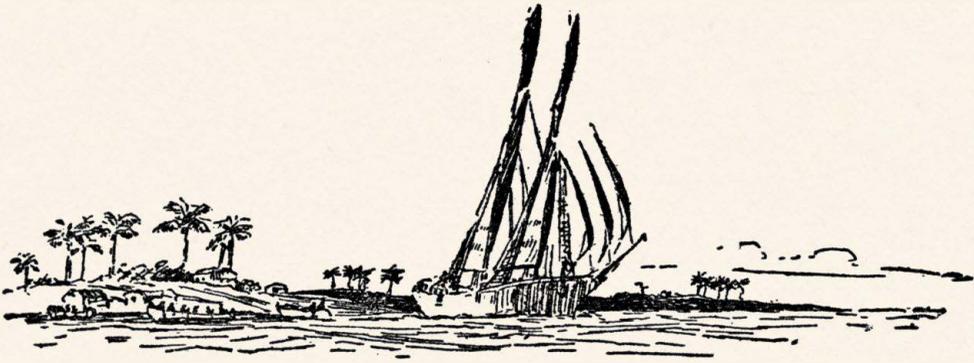


A NEW MICROSCOPE

EXPERTS in Germany are perfecting a microscope that will magnify objects to twice the size now possible. It is expected that the new equipment will be of invaluable assistance to metallurgists in determining the defects suffered by steel in the process of tempering.

This affects you more than you realize, perhaps. It has been discovered that tempered steel develops many microscopic cracks, not heretofore visible—and prominent metallurgists are of the opinion that these cracks are responsible for the weakening used in motors, axles, and general machinery. It is thought that a way may be found to eliminate the cracks while tempering, and that, if this can be done, much of the steel now used for additional strength can be done away with.

There is a less practical side to the improvement of the ultramicroscope—a more romantic side, suggested not by a poet but by a man who is one of the leaders in the metallurgical field. The microscopic world known to followers of this branch of science is both lovely and fantastic, he declares, rivaling the most imaginative conceptions of fiction writers. It is impressive, too, in the lessons it teaches to the beholder, for you have before you the most intimate and secret workings of Nature's methods—how in a world at once infinitesimal and as vast as the universe, she goes about her job of constructing and destroying, silently, irresistibly, endlessly. It is a strange thing, isn't it, to reflect that the world we see with our everyday eyes is but a mere faction of the totality of Nature's genius.



The SUN BRAND

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

Under the Pitiless Glare of the "Devil Sun" on an Obscure Caribbean Reef, Two Men Are Left to Die, Diabolically Marooned.

BONNEY glanced up from his table on the vine-darkened veranda of the Caymana Club just in time to catch that silent gun play in the dusky hall to the cardroom.

That other American, DouL, a guest like himself at the club which was the only place in this flea-bitten West Indian port where a white man could be housed decently, had stopped the young waiter with an automatic pressed to his side.

Just an instant. DouL saw Bonney watching, and his snarling whisper turned to a laugh. Then he followed out to the veranda and took a table three tables away from the Galveston cattle breeder.

Bonney shifted his eyes. The waiter was another Yank, and Bonney had wondered what he was doing hidden away in this black man's job at Port Morea. This gun threat was no playing; when Marty MacLear came to Bonney's table he was smiling faintly, but fear was in his eyes. He whisked a napkin on the cloth and went away.

DouL kept watching Bonney covertly, and the cattleman had the queer feeling that the other stranger, Mr. Vance, who was said to be in the islands seeking banana-land investments, had also kept him under scrutiny ever since Bonney had returned from the Morea highlands.

The Texas man had just delivered forty high-grade Holsteins to a "pen keeper," as a stockman is called in the West Indies, up in the foothills, and it had been a job. Each animal had been swung in a sling from ship to lighters which were then towed to port. Even a small freighter could not get closer than the roadstead seven miles out.

Bonney was thankful when he got his stock up to Sweeting's pen without bruise or blemish. He had found the elder Sweeting as decent as his younger brother, Major Eric Sweeting, of the long-disbanded Territorials, was not. Right now he could hear the major declaiming loudly at the bar after cadging his fourth Scotch and soda from DouL's traveling companion, Mr. Vance.

"Silly rot—importin' American cattle—all go in a year. Tick fever, y' know—and my brother shellin' out some two thousand pounds to this boulder from Texas——"

The rest was lost as Vance excused himself from the club pest and came to join DouL at dinner. Vance gave Bonney that usual brief, blank look. Yanks in the Carib ports do not usually ask too closely of each other's business, and Bonney let the two alone after a casual barroom introduction. He didn't like them. Prosperous, youngish commercial men, maybe, as they seemed, but he sized them up as boat gamblers—only this was a poor spot to work out from. No regular passenger ships, and few travelers in the hot season.

DouL was a short, compact man; Vance, taller, rangier, like Ned Bonney himself. The two would be passengers with him on the *Empresa* to-morrow night, en route to Santiago de Cuba, homeward bound, and Bonney regretted it. The two saw his reserve and let him alone. They cultivated Major Sweeting who had a meager colony billet as acting port officer which let him visit each ship at the anchorage.

Vance shrugged to DouL. "The major's got a new one. Wants me to invest in pineapples." He laughed and eyed Bonney again.

Bonney's eyes lifted to the dusky hall. The kid waiter was making some queer signal to him, before going to the kitchen. The Caymana Club was frayed and musty. A damp billiard and card-room, a phonograph and some old London and New York papers were the limit in entertainment of guests. The members were mostly shipping agents and sober-minded planters down from the hills now and then.

From the dining veranda Bonney could look over the waterside wall where a few motor launches were moored along the wire-netted fence which kept sharks away from the bathing pool. He

could see miles of shallows, hemmed by sand bars, mangrove islets and coral reefs into which the weekly steamships found fairway to the anchorage.

The Yank felt a touch at his elbow. Young MacLear had placed the smudgy menu before him. Even the Texas cattleman knew that Marty was a clumsy waiter, hating his job. He was impatient, sullen, fixing suspicious eyes on each guest. Bonney had been wondering about him even before this queer gun threat from the other American, DouL.

The kid tapped the typewritten card and spoke loudly:

"Try the plantain soup, mister. And the fish—it's good." He pointed with a nervous finger: "This—see?"

Bonney saw—and understood. Beneath soup and fish, MacLear had penciled other words. The two other Yanks were watching, listening.

Don't be friendly. Danger here!

"Fish," grumbled Bonney. "Shoot it along, fella. No soup."

The waiter whisked the bill of fare away. Bonney grumbled more when his dinner came. He ordered cocktails and complained of them. The bottle of Burgundy was worse, he declared, but he let DouL and Vance think he drank it all. When he got up he walked unsteadily past the two strangers without a glance at them. But they were watching him incessantly, sizing him up from head to foot, and he knew it.

Bonney ordered brandy out in the billiard room and watched DouL and Major Sweeting bet sixpence on shots across the lumpy cloth. He was playing the sleepy drunk to put them off guard.

"Danger here?" he thought. "Must be from those two. Danger for me or the kid? He wants to talk and is scared to."

An hour later, lurching out of his pretended doze, he passed two young planters in muddy boots and palm-straw

hats at the bar. When he reached the hall above, he heard them laugh at some wisecrack which Vance got off. Just another drunken Yank on the night before ship sailings—a pity, too—such decent chaps usually!—thought the colonials.

But Bonney stiffened alertly at his room door. Something brushed his sleeve. Marty MacLear's whisper came as he had expected:

"Mister, I knew you weren't drinkin' much. You fooled 'em. They won't bother about anything till after the bar closes. Then——"

"Talk fast," muttered Bonney. "I saw DouL bear down on you with the gun. That silk-shirt feller holds something over you. What?"

"DouL says"—the kid's voice was low and steady—"I got ten hours to live. Or pull a rotten job for him. He'll clip me anyhow——"

Bonney chuckled. "Son, this ain't the States. Mr. Sweeting, up in the hills, said they ain't had a good murder here in five years. No up-to-date ideas. So nobody can take you for a ride like home folks would."

The kid did not smile. But Bonney decided he was not scared now. A hard-muscled, clean-cut chap, older than Bonney had first thought. They could hear the click of billiard balls below the porch and see the patch of yellow light on the yard distorted by shadows of the players.

The cattleman whispered on to ease the younger man's strain.

"Killin' talk, hey? I figured 'em just a couple of gamblers. But this DouL knew you before, did he? Kid, you're hidin' out from the law."

"Well"—Marty hesitated—"not the way you think, mister!"

He found it hard to talk, then suddenly hurried on as if fearing that some menace out of the dark would stop him, and this stranger was the last appeal for bigger matters than his own life.

"Mr. Bonney, you don't get this. This man Vance may be a land investor as he says, but he's runnin' with a hard guy—DouL—and DouL is just one of his names back home. Did you notice that the two are interested in you every minute?"

"Sure did. And I don't get the answer. You understand it?"

MacLear hesitated again. "No—not yet. I'm tryin' to guess. And I'm tryin' to guess if DouL came here to put me away or he just happened on me by chance. Vance and him arrived from Belize, and here I was. He thinks I'll squeal on him. I'm dangerous to him."

"Go ahead," grunted the Texan. "Crash his game, whatever it is. I think you're straight and I'm with you if it gets rough."

The exile shook his head. "No. This thing's got to be kept under cover. I promised the United States district attorney back home I'd stay out of sight, say nothin', do nothin', till he wanted me. Mister, I was an amateur lightweight just comin' up in those Jersey clubs. A green kid out of high school two years ago. Well, I met DouL through my manager when we were gettin' set for my first professional bout. They told me this DouL could help me, and I fell for his friendship.

"Later I saw it was nothin' but a stall to give DouL an occupation. He was one of a big smugglin' ring; and that's how I happened to be ridin' in his car the night the Federal agents tried to clamp down on his mob truckin' a load of silk from a warehouse sidin'. Two of the government men were killed, and the gang got away. Well, I was grabbed up later—and then the funny part took place. The government attorney told me to clear out where the mob couldn't find me—and finally I saw the light. The government isn't ready to spring its murder case till it can get the big shots behind the smugglin' ring, in the States and out. Then I guess it'll want

me to talk. But now DouL's found me—and he says I'm through."

"Well, you ain't," grunted Bonney. "Nor me. I'm just startin'."

The kid did smile then, briefly. "There's something hangin' over you, mister. You see, I promised the government not to get in any mess anywhere. It might spoil the undercover work to get the big men behind the game. Slick guys who stay abroad some of the time. So I can't talk, but I'm just tryin' to warn you. DouL put that gun to my side to-night just to let me know I got to come across."

Bonney stared. A man of the range lands couldn't fog through this. He grinned close to the kid's ear. "Well, I ain't askin' you questions. If them two gunmen want to start war to-morrow I'm right along on it. But I don't understand——"

The kid gripped his arm again. There was a silence. They had forgotten to listen to the billiard game below. The cardroom light had vanished. But no man had come up the stairs to bed. DouL and Vance must be waiting in the dark. Even Major Sweeting's tipsy garrulity was missing.

"I got to go!" gasped the kid. "DouL's waitin'—he'll come to my room. Mister, I got to rob you to-night. So be quiet, will you?"

Then he was gone into the shadows noiselessly.

Bonney was too surprised to answer. He heard steps on the stairs later when he sat on his iron bed staring at the veranda door. What did the kid from home expect him to do? The kid seemed to be risking his life to further some end of the Federal agents; but Bonney had no idea of being robbed.

He sat in a chair in a dark corner—and spent the quietest night of his life. Bats skurrying, the call of an owl, the clicking of insects. The first streak of dawn found him, ugly and awake, in the

cane-bottomed chair, gun in his lap, watching, listening.

He went to the veranda. Thin land mist drifted above the leafy town. The shoal water mirrored the distant mangrove islets. Landward the massed green of the banana fields stretched to the palm-and-fern-grown foothills.

"I been made a fool of," thought Bonney glumly. "The kid's excited, but it's some kind of joke. Nobody tried to rob me."

Once he had thought he heard a movement in the hall, however. So now he felt of his wallet. Money, passports, lodge cards—everything all right. Those two city slicks, Vance and DouL, had put one over on him—got him to stand guard all night, and on the ship to Cuba they'd tell it and get a laugh. But the kid—well, he did seem on the level. This was Bonney's first sea experience, though.

He saw a black boy crossing the yard and hailed him for a pitcher of ice water. He was sitting on the bed when the boy came after a long wait. Once Bonney thought he heard voices, but the kitchen help must be stirring by now. He tossed the boy a sixpence and drank heavily. A pewter pot, ancient, grimed.

Then he shoved over on the bed, his eyes against the pillow to shut out the growing light. He'd get a snooze before breakfast.

Peaceful at last—then he thought something was wrong. A sort of paralysis seized his legs. He tried to lift a hand once when vague shadows seemed about him, tried to protest—and forgot——

Then Bonney felt heat. His fingers twitched in dry sand. His legs ached and it took an effort to open his eyes. For a long time his dulled brain asked no questions. He simply blinked up at brilliant blue. Sky—and sunlight lanced down from it through chinks. A ragged thatch of dried palm leaves, a rickety pole frame, a roof.

He turned his head and saw blue, still water beyond a glare of sandy beach. Sea birds wheeled and screamed. He yawned sleepily.

But when he tried to move it stirred a deadly sickness in him. He was tied up, hands and feet. Presently his mind began to function but without worry. It seemed like some other man's problem. "Le' me see. A yard boy brings me water, after I'd stayed awake all night. What was the names of those guys? Where's my coat? Hey—my money and papers? Where's this I'm at?"

He rolled over and strained at new white cord binding his wrists. This sprawled him out where the heat thrust under that ragged roof like the thrusts of a torch. He stopped fighting and tried to think. Once he shut his eyes he didn't want to open them. Anything to shut out this burning silence of sand and sea.

Some one dragged at him and he cursed. Then he heard.

"Mister, snap up! I got your ropes off. I just got back to you."

"I—been—doped——"

"Sure you have! I don't know what it was they handed you. They got that yard boy's water pitcher and fixed it to flatten you. They dragged you to the major's launch and put your baggage in. The major was drunk—and it ain't nothin' for him. Nobody was stirrin' at the club except the kitchen boys. It just looked like an early fishin' party leavin' in Sweeting's launch. Just a souse fishin' party. But you were brought out here to the second reef and dumped in an old last-season turtle hunter's shack. DouL and Vance got your passports and credentials—and now I know why!"

Bonney got to an elbow. Somehow he couldn't get excited. He tried to shift his legs and couldn't. That was more important, and he stared at them. The kid suddenly broke out as if he understood.

"Mister, you're drugged, but you got to move. DouL's goin' to kill you. He ain't had the chance yet, but he's got to get rid of you. You must just disappear. Understand me now?"

Bonney wagged his head feebly, but his torpid brain cleared. Yet his arm seemed helpless as he fumbled at his pockets.

"No gun—no money—coat and hat gone. We better go——"

"You're marooned on a reef seven miles out. Sharks swarmin' in the shoals, and no boats land here except in the turtle season. Mister, Vance and DouL been workin' on this ever since they saw you. I heard 'em talk. Vance—whatever his real name is—is goin' to enter the United States on your papers, with your baggage and all."

Bonney was on his feet now, swaying unsteadily. Seaward a glitter of calm, and landward the dazzle of this sand-spit with a curve of gray rock outcropping among the low mangroves. He was in agony for water, dizzy from the dope and heat. He blinked at the kid.

"How'd you get here? Did they let you roam loose?"

"They think I'm done for. Mr. Bonney, you were watched last night, and they saw you stayed awake. DouL kept me under the gun to do that job, but it couldn't be pulled. But the yard boy gave them the chance after daybreak. They made me come along, but in the launch I concluded what was doin'. They couldn't pull any killin' with the major awake, drunk as he was. So they got you to this shack and left you tied. Then we went back to Sweeting at the boat behind those mangroves. DouL asked me to take a walk down toward the east point—and I knew what was comin'. Halfway around the dunes I made the dash straight out to the seaweed patches and dived. DouL opened up with all he had. Just got me once."

He showed a little spread of water-

thin blood under his left armpit. Bonney's eyes were growing vague again. The kid shook him.

"Aw, it ain't much! I threw up my arms in the water and kicked around till I sank. He thought he got me sure. I swam out, sticking my nose up through weeds till I got back to shore up here."

"Good work," grinned Bonney with blackening lips. "And the major'll put two crooks on that ship to-night—one usin' my name."

"Vance is one of the smugglin' ring's top men. He looks enough like you to answer that passport. Once past the customs as a racin' man from Havana, he'll hide out in some small southern town till he can take another name. He's bound to get back to the States for some big coup his mob is framin'—but he's the big fella the government wants worst of all. If I could have got word out by radio—but they kept me right by 'em. Mister, you and me were to disappear—gunned and buried in the sand here."

Bonney studied it doubtfully. "Gun a man tied up and doped? If I could just walk and fight. But we ain't a weapon. Not a club even."

Marty stared along the heat-dancing sands. "Just one thing I can think of. You stretch out under this thatch as if you were still tied up and helpless. If DouL comes alone I might punch him out and get his gun. No use of us tryin' to crawl away. They'll see us if we move from this shack a hundred yards. Anyhow the sun would kill us by night-fall—no water, no shade."

The Texas man tried to stand again and couldn't. "Well, if the two of 'em come we'll have to face the lead. Tell 'em to go to hell and take it. This poison has ruined me for any battle."

"Just one chance—if DouL comes alone. I think he will. He's the rod man. Vance will stay with Sweeting in the boat, for that liquor head might wake up and pull out, leavin' 'em. I

heard DouL say not to trust the major. Now, mister, I'll try trickin' 'em."

Bonney heard the kid scrambling among dry grass and tidewash in a sand ruffle three yards from the hut door. When he came back the older man was stretched out, feverish and silent.

"Loopin' the cords over your feet and hands, mister. Your play is to have DouL think you're clean out."

The Westerner felt him fumbling about his body. He didn't need any play acting; he was fighting surges of unconsciousness and hardly knew when Marty crept away out to the intolerable dazzle of high noon on the tropic sands. Whether minutes or hours passed he didn't know. But he heard the kid's rasping whisper once:

"DouL's comin'. Mister, don't lose your head. I'm goin' to dig in and make the last battle we got in us."

Bonney turned his head finally. The shoulders of a man were coming above the dunes. DouL in a blue shirt and linen trousers, with a gun holster slung under his arm. Then Bonney lost sight of him. He closed his eyes against the sun striking through the chinks of the thatch. Then he found himself talking when he didn't mean to!

"The kid'll faint. Good kid—he'll die out there tryin' to hide, face up to the sky—just a little trickle of sand over his face—sand so hot it stings. Tryin' to fool DouL. Old devil sun—it's lickin' us before we start. Borin' to my brain—"

Then he heard the sludge of feet in the sand. DouL had come within twenty feet of the tiny hut and stopped to peer in. Speakeasies and night clubs do not inure a man to the lash of a tropic noon. The killer's hard eyes wavered under his close-pulled panama. He stood with the leather of his gun holster pulled away from his shirt, taking his time to look beyond the shack to the sand ruffles and the tufts of

grass. He'd have to bury a limp body, and it was no likable job in this fierce, silent glare. Killing an unconscious man out in the open under the stare of the sky and sun—but it would be safe and easy. Nothing but the wheeling sea birds within miles.

He came on a yard, bent over, hands to knees, watching the inert body under the flimsy thatch. He wouldn't need to shoot; the gun butt to that red, fevered skull was enough.

So the Jersey gangster straightened up by the pole frame door. So far—good. The few men in Port Morea who had met Bonney would believe he had left on the *Empresa*, going out to the ship anchorage as casual passengers usually did, in Major Sweeting's launch. The major would be kept too drunk today to have any clear idea of the cattleman's doings until too late. Once in Santiago Doul and Vance would have time to plan entry to the States. If Bonney's murder was discovered, even in a week, the two would be safe home, the victim's credentials and baggage destroyed after use was made of them.

Doul grinned; this coup would put him solid with the big fella whom he had gone to Honduras to meet and plan an entry at some smaller American port. There was a big dope and jewel smuggling job coming off at Mobile, and Vance was bound to be in, directing his gang.

The kid, MacLear, was no worry. He was blotted out, and it was just a lucky chance that Doul had found him in Port Morea. He had been suspicious of MacLear ever since the kid vanished. A link in the government's evidence, held in reserve—but now Doul had destroyed that also.

Doul grinned again through sweat. "The big fella ain't the only guy with brains." He bent lower again, took a step under the low thatch roof.

Bonney, eyes closed, twitching jaws locked, heard him. This waiting was

terrible. The kid must have fainted—crouched under sand and grass from that devil sun. Bonney moaned; he had to, even if it drew lead. He heard the rustle of Doul's sleeve. The gun was coming.

Then there was a weak shout, a lunge, the crash of bodies. Bonney opened his eyes.

The kid was fighting out in that yellow sand.

Bonney cheered huskily: "That gun, kid—his left shoulder——"

The kid had whipped his right to Doul's left ear and swung his left hand under Doul's arm to lock the holster against his ribs. The heavier man swung, and the kid's light body whirled out, but still with that grip from behind.

Doul saw him now, and amazed fear flashed to his eyes. The dead had come from the sea—Doul saw him sink an hour ago with a cry when his bullet went home. Then the killer grinned, malignantly confident. He was getting his automatic free.

MacLear couldn't stop it; then he tore Doul's blue shirt from his shoulders, stripped it down to the belt. The gun was tangled in cloth, with both men fighting for it. Doul backed free. The kid shot a right to the chin and Doul grunted. He'd forgoten that Marty MacLear was a boxer. But boxing couldn't win if that gun came up. Doul snarled and grabbed at the butt, with both hands. It came out and he fired a wild shot from his waist level.

Bonney saw the kid's fist crash through the smoke film, and Doul toppled. His naked shoulders crashed to the pole frame and he fell across Bonney's feet. The thin, dry thatch slanted down on both of them.

Bonney was trying to cheer from swollen lips. Then he crawled from under the débris.

Doul's white back, with the shattered palm fronds over head and shoulders, did not move.

A yard away Bonney pawed Marty MacLear's face from the trampled sand.

"Ain't shot. Just out. Gave all he had—and won. Grand little man. But burned out. Damn my legs! Got to drag the kid to shade."

He looked about. That launch was hidden behind the mangroves and sand dunes on the bay side of the reef. Seaward, the blue water glinted. He locked his arms under the kid's shoulders and dragged him that way. Ankle-deep in the first pools, Bonney cursed.

"Hot as soup. I thought it'd bring him to."

He started along the beach. A hundred feet of it and he fell.

"Can't stay here. That sun——" He set his teeth in the kid's shirt and tried to crawl. There was a low ledge of gray rock flickering in the heat and he shoved through the hot pool water to it. He nudged the kid's body in the narrow shade and mopped his brow with brown seaweed. No shelter for Bonney. The vertical lances of light bored to his brain. Presently he knew he was talking again, wildly, foolishly, cursing, and triumphant.

Then he saw the kid staring at him with red eyes in a blistered face.

"Jersey, you can battle. Knocked that fella crooked. Me, like a big butter-milk swiller, I couldn't lift a hand. Legs no good."

MacLear looked at him silently for a time. His eyes took a hard glitter. Then his lips began to move.

"Well, we got to think fast. You can shoot, Texas, better'n I can. Vance heard that shot DouL flung at me, but he'll think it was DouL puttin' you away. Then he'll come over the ridge. You got to get him—and get him the first crack."

"Get him?" grunted Bonney. "How we goin' to get him?"

"With DouL's gun. Then take the boat and hook to port."

"Gun?" Bonney stared. "Oh—gun!"

The kid sat up grim-faced. "You didn't get DouL's gun?"

Bonney's lean jaw quivered. "Gun? Say, I never thought——"

Marty rolled over on his side. "Mister, that's what I was fighting' for. We ain't a chance without a gun. Vance'll hunt us down soon as he discovers what happened to DouL."

"Think of my bonehead," mumbled Bonney, "leavin' the gun."

Marty didn't answer. He was too hurt and weak for a time.

Bonney tried to grin cheerfully. "Kid, all I thought of was gettin' you out of the sun. Same old devil that was fryin' my brains to nothin'. Chalk up one for Jersey—got more sense than Texas."

Marty had closed his eyes. This Westerner refused to see death when it hunched his shoulder. Then he heard sludging in the sand. He opened his eyes.

Bonney was a yard away, crawling. Marty yelled at him. The cowman grinned apologetically. "Son, I'm goin' to get that gun."

"Come back here! You're weak as a cat."

"As nine cats. But they manage to wiggle——"

"You damn fool!" wheezed the kid. "Crawl back here. You'd never get to the hut." Then he slumped up and stared through the thin mangrove roots above the coral ledge. "There's Vance now—the big shot—comin' over to see why DouL don't come back to the boat."

Bonney wriggled back slowly to the scant shade. He lay alongside the kid's body—in the tropic sun, then grinned again. "Looks like we were in a fix. If my legs would work I'd get up and ask that guy what he means takin' my name on that night boat to Cuba. Goin' to call himself 'Bonney,' is he? Edward H. Bonney——"

"He's starin' about," broke in Marty. "Can't see his pal's body under the

busted thatch. Now he's goin' back, puzzled. He thinks DouL is off buryin' you under the sand."

"We're ahead one shake. Kid, why can't we move on toward the east point of this reef, where the ships come to anchor?"

"Come ahead," retorted the kid, dully. "We got to. Only chance. When Vance finds DouL he'll hunt us down. Even if they pull away we'll be dead to-morrow. No water, no shade—and this sun. Say, put some wet moss on your head and crawl, low behind the sand dunes far as they go. If you'd only got the gun."

Bonney swore about the gun. The kid had put all he had in a punch, and Bonney made it useless. He crawled in the kid's tracks to the next low rock ledge. They could see the launch across the sandspit now. Sweeting was asleep under the striped awning, Vance prowling about the motor, uneasy, watchful.

The castaways made another hundred yards to the next outcrop in the sand. Then MacLear whispered, staring back to the dunes:

"Vance is at the shack now. DouL must be dead—with the sun on his spine a couple of hours and the drink in him. Now if Vance comes——"

Vance had dragged DouL to his feet. He found the gun and put DouL's hat on his lolling head. Then he hauled him on past the sand ridge from their sight.

"Come on," panted the kid.

He bent over and staggered along the wet sands. The tide was scouring the shoals now. Ahead nothing but the gray rock teeth showed. They got to the first and slumped in shallow water behind the coral.

Then they heard the faint throb of a motor over the yellow glare of the ridge. Bonney grinned with his blackened swollen lips.

"Gettin' away," croaked Marty. "DouL must be finished and couldn't tell what happened. Vance got the motor

goin'. The major's drunk and asleep, but he'll take 'em to the *Empresa* to-night." He looked at Bonney quietly. "Mister, we're marooned on the out reef where nobody lands this time of year. It's bad. I'd rather face the gun."

"Gettin' off free, on my papers," Bonney croaked. "A big boss crook goin' in home with my baggage and stuff. Made a sap of me!"

Marty's silence sank the deadly truth to his clearing mind. "Me, dyin' of thirst on a damn Caribbee sand bar. Come on, fella!"

MacLear watched his reeling steps, then led the way. They waded upright now, for the launch had surely left the reef. Once they saw it making a great turn shoreward to pass the shoals off the east point. Out there, by the ship anchorage, they would wait for the Cuba-bound *Empresa*. Marty eyed the sun. Behind him Bonney began to shout weakly as he staggered on. The coral fangs cut their shoes to tatters, they slipped in pools and fought dank weeds from their knees.

Bonney remembered nothing for hours until he realized that he was staring into a red glimmer above veiling gray, and smooth-flowing water was above his waist. His thirst was an agony. Then Marty came splashing to him.

"Here, keep that water out of your mouth! Stand quiet."

"Middle of the sea!" croaked Bonney. "Old devil sun—where's he at?"

"You ain't in the middle of the sea. You're on hard rock, but the tide's in. Won't come no higher. Aw, mister, cut the worry!"

The Texan looked at him, then about. He saw higher rock ledges in the twilight, and stars were beginning to glimmer. He felt for the kid's hand, then stared close in his face. Marty smiled faintly. His lips were swollen and his eyes puffed.

"Mister, you been out of your head. You started yellin' right to sea. I had to hold you and you battled me. It's all right. This is the end."

"Son, I been a care and a trouble. Must have been sea cows I was tryin' to haze. I just remember—— Say, is this the east point?"

"Come on to the last rocks. I landed once here with the club steward fishin'. There's deep water beyond to the anchorage, some three miles out. The turtle men got a cache here——" The kid suddenly yelled.

Then he was plunging to the highest ledge. From its eight-foot elevation the gray tide ran unmarked, illimitable. His faint shout brought Bonney to where he knelt above a crevice. Marty was tearing at tough withes which bound dried palm fronds to stakes.

"Mister, we got a canoe! Cached here under shelter to keep it from crackin' in the sun. I remembered seein' it. The turtle hunters found it in the pass—said it wasn't much good. But—say!"

Bonney felt smooth wood under the stuff. Marty was oddly excited.

"Just one paddle. A big coastin' dugout. Ever run a canoe?"

Bonney grinned mirthlessly. "Me? A dry rancher?"

They shoved and dragged it on the slant of rock. When the broad nose touched the first tide pool they went to laughing dismally. Two tattered, bleeding exiles filled with crazy hope. Bonney weaved over the bow when it floated. The kid dug the heavy paddle astern. A hundred yards away the swell lifted gently. The kid stopped paddling.

"Look at those lights off east. The *Empresa*, and she'll drop a hook for a couple of hours. The major'll board her, batterin' drinks as usual, and put Vance and Doul aboard. Vance showin' your papers instead of his. He's about your build, and the same eyes and hair nearly. The big shot of Doul's mob.

Well——" he muttered, watching the water.

Bonney saw the green and red lights now. Then the red alone.

"She's come to her hook," The kid looked abeam tiredly. "Mister, I made the mistake now. We'll never battle to Port Morea. The tide's turned, and the land breeze come up. Oh, mister!"

No answer. Bonney had slumped amidships. The kid tried to mark the slip of the distant lights past their drift, so far away, and dragged the paddle against the wood. The bigger man couldn't help if he knew.

"Devil sun—and devil sea." Marty whispered. He tried to mark the star clusters over the bow as guides, but the one sure thing was that red port light twinkling more faintly, swinging far astern now. That was bad. Tide and land breeze bearing the canoe silently to sea.

Young Marty was stroking slower, more weakly. He called to Bonney, and knew that his voice was a croak out of lips too swollen for speech. Bonney stirred dully as if trying to answer. The kid lurched forward to touch his arm. The bigger man must be fading out and he ought to be told of the fix they were in; ought to know that the kid himself was fighting to retain consciousness, was licking his hard lips crazily against the salt damp of the gunwale, knowing that he'd pulled his last stroke against the sea.

Then the paddle slid overboard with a soft plop. Marty blinked at creeping star images astern on the water, and then crawled to the other man. Bonney was muttering about the old devil sun.

A man on the forepeak of the *Empresa* sang out that there was a bit of wreckage of derelict boat off the starboard bow. The little steamship was making but quarter speed at midnight, for she had to veer sharply to keep off

the last of the submerged coral hemming the inside passage.

The starboard turn brought her so close that her running lights flickered on the smooth tide, and the lookout shouted again. The officer in the bridge wing saw also and turned to the telegraph. It was nothing but a native dug-out down there, but there seemed to be two men in it, face up, silent.

One of them stirred when orders were shouted, and men were at the falls of a boat aft. But the kid could only point to his companion's limp body when the two were fetched up and laid along the scuppers. The deck officer stared at them. White men, he thought, but beach combers, bums copping it out of Port Morea jail, undoubtedly, unable to leave the island in any other way.

The *Empresa* was in the clear now and picking up speed. The master came down from the bridge and frowned at two women passengers who had come to the rail. The saloon was empty at this hour but lights glittered in the card-room. Captain Ashley pushed past the two sailors, and the second who was asking questions curtly:

"Get up on your feet—you're not so bad off. So you wanted to leave Morea, and put yourselves out in this fair-way where we had to see you, eh?"

Marty MacLear was already on his feet, and this put Bonney up also with a croaking shout. "Not on my crazy life—except that I got a ticket for this boat and goin' to use it. Out o' my way! Where's the boss?"

His eyes glittered wildly, then roved to the captain's gilt-braided cap. The second officer dropped back.

"Drunk—hangover," he muttered. "So they took the chance to board us. I've seen games like this before, really."

"My man," said the master heavily, "get for'ard. You'll be taken care of. To Santiago, and then the police——"

"And a Cuban jail—that is a tough break," grinned the second.

Bonney hung to the rail, staring incredulously. Then Marty fell back from a window with a throaty gasp. He pointed within.

"Mister, there's Vance! And Dou— he ain't dead! Got a sucker already in a poker hand!"

And suddenly Bonney lunged to the door. The deck officer shouted to a sailor, but Bonney went stumbling over the rug of the lounge to the cubicle off the bar. He was yelling—a tall, gaunt, glassy-eyed scarecrow in tattered shirt and trousers, his feet leaving pink stains of blood upon the floor.

"Get him out of there!" snapped the master. "This thing can't go on my ship. Clap them under guard, Mr. Burns!"

The second rushed in, and this gave Marty MacLear a chance to duck past the captain's sleeve. Therefore Dou and Vance looked up to see the two at the same instant. Dou's swollen eyes in his red face narrowed but he gasped audibly. Vance merely regarded Bonney with indifferent wonder.

"Crooks!" yelled Bonney. "Got my baggage—got my money——"

The officer seized his shoulder. "Get back from here, you!"

Vance stood up, patting his lips with a handkerchief. Dou also arose but heavily, as if at the cost of infinite pain. The eyes of both showed nothing but annoyed amusement now.

The second was pushing Bonney away, but the kid was in front.

"Oh, no—you don't know us, do you? Didn't try to blot us out on that second reef to-day, did you? And leave us marooned——"

Dou's eyes were on the kid with deadly fixity, but his lips smiled to his friend. "Listen to that, Bonney. Says he knows us."

"Calls him 'Bonney,' hey?" The Galveston man thrust a grimy hand past a sailor's grasp. "The nerve of that ranny. *Bonney*——"

Vance was grinning complacently. "Captain, what's all this about? I remember now, seeing this fella. He was moochin' on the waterside at Morea. And the little one, too—I saw him; asked me for shillings twice, and when I turned 'em down the last time the big bum said he'd get even. Said they'd stowaway on your ship to-night, too, I remember. Major Sweeting said they'd been ordered out of port by the constabulary. If the major was aboard he——"

Doul gave the big shot an admiring look. This was why he was the big shot, why he could travel in any company and get away with it. He left the rough stuff to rod men like Doul. Doul began to grin appreciatively as Vance talked on.

The captain's mouth set in a harsh line. If the dugout hadn't gone astern he'd have set these two bums adrift to fetch shore as they might. Now he'd have to take them on to Santiago, but he could make it rough. Doul read his thoughts.

"Skipper, this guy's a ganga smoker. I saw him comin' out of one of those waterside joints this mornin'. That's all ails 'em."

Bonney eyed him. Doul, himself, must be burning with the lash of the sun to-day, but he was hiding it. He had got a stateroom at once, and shaved and slipped into a fresh shirt to face curious eyes. The major had introduced him and Vance to the purser and the barman.

Bonney croaked on in obstinate despair: "Well, take us home. I guess it's no use now to state that I'm Edward H. Bonney—and that other tall guy isn't. Cattle raiser, Galveston, Texas—that's mc. I can't prove it now because that fella's got my stuff. He and Doul doped me. Marooned me on a reef to bump me off. Sweeting was there but drunk in his boat. The kid, here, knows. Doul threw lead at him,

and the kid knocked him cold. Fightin' kid, le' me remark——"

Vance chuckled: "On a reef, eh? To-day? That's good. We came from the Caymana Club in port. Spent some hours fishing inside the bay. Got sunburned naturally. And drank a little liquor—the poor old major!" He mopped his red face. "Too bad he's put back to Morea!"

"Your name is Bonney?" inquired the master.

Vance smiled again. "Purser! Fetch my ticket and papers."

"Sure," grinned Doul. "Want to see my papers? Fine! I'll get 'em."

But the skipper raised his hand. "Never mind that. Mr. Burns, have these two out of this cabin. Hustle them out—hear me?"

Hard hands gripped Bonney's arms. But Marty suddenly lunged after the departing Doul.

"Never knew me back in Jersey, eh? Never killed a Federal agent?"

Doul halted. He must have been in intolerable pain, but this got to him. Then he laughed—and wished the big fella could handle this. The big fella would never have halted in the doorway.

He had started on, however, when the kid rushed him. Not with swing or uppercut. Marty jammed a shoulder into Doul's burning back, and even as the man yelled, he jerked at the silk shirt and tripped him with an outthrust foot. Marty hauled a net singlet to Doul's shoulders, peeling him like a peach, and backed away yelling wildly.

"Look at him? Where'd he get that? In a club bar? Under a boat awnin'? The lyin' crook—look at him, skipper!"

They had to look at him. Doul's broad back was a flame of swollen flesh from neck to belt line, and across the red were marks of livid white. The watchers could make them out as he writhed.

Broken palm fronds—some lance-

pointed, and some ragged, but there, where the sun's anger had printed them while he sprawled unconscious under the thatch of the murder hut.

"Who lies?" blurted MacLear. "Tell me, mister?"

Doul got up slowly. If the big fella had been there he wouldn't have lost control. But his rage broke to a howl and he swung about with his automatic coming higher. It was Bonney who lunged forward and smashed his elbow down. The shot went into the saloon mirrors.

"That's twice to-day you missed the kid," Bonney announced.

The skipper was shouting orders. Two husky deck men rushed Doul. He was against the wall, cursing, when Vance entered. He had his credentials, and a set smile on his face. But it hardened from amusement to deadly alertness when he saw Doul.

"Take your hand from your pocket!" cried the skipper. "Mr. Burns, he has another gun. No reason for this on my ship!"

The second plunged before Vance. Vance gave up his gun with an annoyed gesture.

He lit a cigarette and surveyed Doul, who had no such finesse. Doul was raving. "Go to hell! All of you! MacLear, you'll burn for this back in Jersey."

"You see, he does know Marty, doesn't he?" explained Bonney. "And burned and branded himself. Old devil sun——"

The master jabbed a finger toward Doul. "Mr. Burns, get that man out. Set a guard over him." He jabbed a

finger at Bonney. "You say you are Bonney, and this man isn't?" He jabbed at Vance.

"Edward H.—cattle breeder, Galveston, Texas. Captain, let me ask this feller a few questions about live stock. If Vance can answer 'em I'll go jump off your boat, grab a sea cow by the tail and bulldog it back to Matagorda Bay. Yeah, I'll ride!"

The skipper was getting madder at all of them. "Mr. Burns, have these men fed and washed up. Fetch them to my cabin. I want a full report of this. The facts should be easy to get at."

He departed. Marty MacLear stumbled out to the starboard rail where Bonney was taking the night air. Along the port side Doul was going forward, cursing at the sailors. Vance followed, explaining something to the second officer which Burns seemed to think was of no importance. The two scared lady passengers came back into the deserted saloon and stared curiously at a smashed mirror.

At the starboard rail Bonney was watching the sea wash past.

"How in hell, kid, did you know Doul'd be marked up that way?"

"I didn't. But I knew he'd be burned. Think of the sun scorchin' him till that palm leaf showed on his hide! Branded, wasn't he?"

"Old devil sun. Say, kid, I'm payin' your way to Texas. You're through East when the government gets these two rannies. Come along."

"Mean it?" grinned the kid. "All right—I'd like to see that cow country. Never been West."

Another story by Charles Tenney Jackson will appear in a future issue.

A WISE MAN'S GOOD LUCK

SOLOMON had one good break when he took onto himself his multitude of wives: there were no back-seat drivers in those days.

Brant Frazier, Texas Ranger, Tracks a Mocking, Phantom Killer
to His Extraordinary End.



The *Scarlet* NEMESIS

By EDGAR L. COOPER

In Three Parts—Part III

CHAPTER XVII. (*Continued*)

THE KILLER.

DON'T move a hair or make a sound, Halliday," said a level, deadly voice. The long, blue barrel of a Luger parted the shivering curtains—the next second a phantomlike figure followed, swathed to the chin in a dark raincoat. A black mask covered its face, the two holes showing only a pair of burning eyes. And a black felt

hat completely covered head and forehead.

Stepping like a panther, the figure behind the mask quickly crossed the room and stopped at one end of the table, Dick Halliday's glazed eyes following every step. The lawyer's breath came in wheezy gasps, and his face was hideous with unbelief and terror. With twitching mouth and cheek he stood rooted to his stance, utterly paralyzed.

"I see you recognize the voice,"

purred the masked visitor. "But just to make certain——"

A left hand darted up like a striking snake, and whipped away the concealing black cloth, the black slouch hat, in one gesture. And Richard Halliday's eyes dilated until the pupils filled the iris—and his eyeballs threatened to burst. His jaw hung slackly, with a stream of saliva dribbling from one corner of his jerking lips.

"God!" he whimpered, mouthing like an animal.

The eyes in front of him blazed like a cat's in the dark, and the face holding them was demoniacal. It's time you were lifting your thoughts above the flesh," came the voice, barely controlled with passion. "Your number's up. Halliday. You won't dodge the long gentleman any longer."

The lawyer's face was the color of a dead man's. It would never be any other color again.

Lightning swift came the succeeding actions. The Lüger slid into a raincoat pocket, a tiny curved bow of queer pattern with taut string attached appeared in the figure's hands like black magic. Came a swift click, a *sipp*—a little, almost inaudible, *plunk*. And Richard Davenport Halliday gave a strangled, rattling gasp, teetered for two seconds, then fell heavily across the table, balancing limply a third, fourth, and fifth seconds, then rolled off to the floor with a dull thud.

A little arrow, red feathered, stuck from the hollow of his twitching throat.

The assassin leaped to the table, swept the deck of cards to the floor, dropped a blood-red club on the smooth surface in their stead. Like a flash the figure made the plum-colored draperies, slid like an eel behind one of them. The heavy curtain bellied out, shivered a little, and grew still.

Dinty Reagan, skulking across the drive from the Halliday res-

idence, thought he saw somebody crouching under the French windows of the den in the hasty illumination of a lightning flash. Quickly crossing the metaled roadway, he vaulted the iron-spiked fence of Halliday's grounds and hid under the drippy shelter of a pyramidal cypress. He was almost certain he had seen a moving shadow over there.

By chance the reporter had gotten the hint that the gathering of the summoned Tricorners would take place at Halliday's that night. He didn't even have time to phone Brant Frazier of the fact before he had to tear out there and see what was what. For Val Meservey, sick and drunk, had been difficult. Doctor Scaife finally prevailed upon him to go home, but Dinty, as a result, had been pressed for time.

He had hardly taken position under the cypress tree when another vivid tongue of lightning picked out a moving figure landing in a heap from a window embrasure and vanishing like a shadow across the lawn.

Hardly realizing what he was doing, so great was his excitement, Dinty flew over the soggy turf in pursuit, running rapidly and blindly in and out among shrubbery and trees. The lighted house sat some distance away from the drive, in the center of spacious grounds.

Dinty Reagan, pistol in hand, pulled to a skidding halt, his heart pounding, breath pumping. For from that house sounded a high, piercing scream, rising in tempo like a siren—the shriek of a woman in deadly, awful terror.

Then he barged on toward where he had last seen the shadowy phantom, vividly remembering that suspicious leap and run from the window. But he was to keep his suspicions to himself for a number of minutes. He got no further in his headlong rush than the edge of a clump of crepe myrtle when a heavy blow knocked him unconscious.

And a fitting figure sped from the clump, vaulted the iron-spiked palings, and ran on its toes up the rain-threshed street to where a parked car waited two blocks distant. Came the throaty roar of a started motor, and with a howl of swiftly shifted gears the big sedan leaped away.

CHAPTER XVIII. "THE QUEEREST GAME."

TOM," said Brant Frazier, "something hellish and damnable is going to happen to-night. I feel it in my bones."

"I noticed yuh do," replied Tom Flint, puffing at his cigar. "You're prowlin' around the room like a hungry catamount, an' smokin' like a steam engine. Figger things're gonna bust wide open, huh?"

"Yeah. The party we're up against is moving a damned sight quicker than I expected," the ranger growled. "God! I wish I could get a report from Washington right now. But my hands are tied, Tom—I can't move or act. This is the queerest game I ever sat in on, and I've played plenty."

Frazier looked at Flint queerly, licked a cigarette into shape.

"Tom," he said thoughtfully, "do you believe in ghosts? Do you believe a dead man can come back?"

The sergeant grunted disgustedly in reply, put out a pungent smoke screen. But he eyed Brant Frazier with suddenly squinted orbs.

"I don't either," said Frazier evenly. "But I wouldn't be surprised if we don't see just that."

"Hell!" said Tom Flint. Then: "Wonder why young Dinty ain't phoned yuh?"

"Yes, why? And where the devil is Cleve Poole? I can't cut his trail since he got out of the bastile this afternoon. Where is Lady Natalie le Seur? Halliday the lawyer? His man said he was

out when I called. Where is Raoul the blackmailer—and worse? Even old Sheriff Clegg's out somewhere! Damn—something's sure going to pop, Tom Flint!"

Brant Frazier, blood descendant of Joseph Brant, Sachem of the Fifth Fire in the Long House, whose totem was the wolf, prowled as restlessly as the animal on his Iroquois totem pole. His lean face looked very swarthy and very masklike, and his eyes, wrinkled from peering long into hot suns and toward far horizons, were cold and bright and hard as twin agates. And he swore often under his breath.

It was twenty minutes past eight when Sheriff Jake Clegg phoned him from the Halliday residence, and told of the lawyer's murder. Five minutes later Frazier and Flint were in the powerful car, lurching through the rain-blurred streets.

"They've bumped Halliday," Frazier told the sergeant, tersely, "and the police have got Dinty Reagan with his tail in a crack."

"No wonder he didn't phone yuh," grunted Tom Flint dryly.

Numerous parked cars, and some fifty milling people were before the iron picket fence that separated the Halliday estate from the street. Uniformed police kept them out, and in the grounds pocket torches were winking. Lights blazed in the palatial brick-veneered mansion behind the trees and shrubbery. And all the while the rain lanced down and lightning forked viciously.

The sheriff spread his hands in weary resignation as the two rangers entered the stately hallway. Many men were in there, moving about, talking, passing from room to room, questioning people. The door on the left that led to the library-den was closed, but an officer on guard admitted Frazier and his sergeant at a word from Sheriff Jake Clegg.

"They've got Dinty in there with

him," muttered Clegg. "But I jest can't believe that lad's guilty, Frazier."

The latter hunched a shoulder, smiling thinly in reply. His eyes took in the richly furnished room and its contents with one comprehensive sweep. The body of Richard Halliday hadn't been moved, for Coroner Ake was not yet on the scene. It lay crumpled up to the right of the swivel chair, with one leg under the table, slightly bent, the torso almost flat on its back. The dark eyes were wide open and bulging, the once handsome face hideously distorted. Richard Halliday wasn't a pretty sight.

And just beneath the knot of his henna-colored necktie, flush between the tips of a tan silk soft collar, thrust out the haft of a tiny arrow, red feathered, and bearing the almost infinitesimal symbol of the Scarlet Tricorne.

"Who found him?" Frazier asked shortly, glancing about the room.

The beetle-browed Concher, who seemed to have developed a sudden case of adenoids, answered asthmatically and roughly. The Jap servant, Kaguchi, was in the back part of the hallway outside the den when he heard a thump. Mrs. Halliday, dressed for a party, was just coming down the stairs. Kaguchi, alarmed, went to the den door, listened, then shoved it open a little. He saw his employer on the floor, and flung the door wide. Mrs. Halliday rushed down, looked in behind him, saw also. She screamed, then collapsed in a faint. Kaguchi called the police station. Headquarters notified the sheriff and district attorney. That was that.

"Did the Jap see anything suspicious when he broke in?"

"Said he thought he heard a window being closed—one of those front windows. And when he looked, after phoning, one of 'em was open a little."

Frazier nodded slightly. He looked down at Halliday, then at the long thin cigar that lay chewed but unlighted near the body. He saw the half-folded news-

paper, the loaded automatic, the opened penknife on the table. He glanced at the scattered playing cards on the floor, at the blood-red jack of clubs on the table, just beneath the rose lamp.

"Where is Mrs. Halliday?" he asked a plain-clothes man.

"Upstairs in bed, prostrated. Doctor Nolte has just gone up."

"Just a minute, Concher——"

The beefy captain turned, his face apoplectic, from roaring at Dinty Reagan, who sat in a chair against the wall looking paler than usual, a plain-clothes man hard by.

"Sure the marauder crawled in the window?" asked Frazier.

"You got eyes, ain't you?" bawled the detective. "Lookit the wet spots and streaks of mud on the floor between the desk and window! Lookit the windows themselves—all shut tight except one, and the mesh screen outside that, cut so's it could be unlatched. Mud and prints all over the sill and casings! Oh, hell no, nobody didn't come in at the window!"

The detective's furious sarcasm didn't trouble the ranger. He countered with another question:

"What you got on Reagan here? He the guy?"

Concher growled like a grizzly. "He's in a tough spot, and no fooling. Claims he was passing along the street, and *thought* he saw something prowling beneath those windows—saw it in a flash of lightning. He hooks it over the fence, goes sneaking up through the grounds to see about it. A little later he sees—in another lightning streak—something jump from the window ledge and land on the grass a-running. So Dinty dashes up in pursuit, his pistol in his mitt! Claims he was rapped over the bean out in the grounds somewheres, and laid out cold."

Concher sneered his disbelief, then wound up.

"A couple of the boys found him a

while ago. Still out, or playin' possum, till they got him inside and give him a cold shower. And he's got a knot above his right ear the size of a hen egg, and a right smart cut. Could have done it damned easy himself!"

"Oh, yeah!" The reporter took a crumpled package of cigarettes from his coat pocket, took one out and put it between his lips. He tore a paper match from a book of matches, struck it, lit the cigarette. "If I'd 'a' rubbed out Halliday, flattie, believe me—I'd 'a' saved myself one hell of a headache! Be yourself, Concher."

The captain purpled. "Save the gab!" he snarled. "Everybody knows you had it in for Halliday. And you were found with a gat in your fist."

"Sure. And I shot the pretty little arrow out a .32, huh?"

"Anyhow," roared Concher, "I'm locking you up on general principles."

"You're not that dumb a tripe, are you?"

"Oh, I'm not, eh?" Concher's fists doubled. "I won't lock you up, huh?"

"Maybe you are that dumb, Concher. Try it."

There was a long moment of silence during which Concher bulged motionless in front of the sneering reporter, his breath wheezing in his throat, the veins standing out on his neck and forehead. Reagan's hard eyes never wavered—he regarded the burly bulk of the homicide officer with blunt, bold insolence.

"I wouldn't chuck you in, would I?" repeated Concher in a thick croak.

Dinty ripped his hand away from his stomach in a slashing gesture. "You hick bulls are the berries, believe me! If this is a pinch, hop to it, Concher. And I'll call a lawyer. If it ain't, be your age."

Concher swung away from him, his eyes slitted with fury. "I'll have another talk with you, wisenheimer," he said hoarsely. "Even so."

"Oh, be your age!" retorted Reagan wearily, and grinned with all his straight, hard teeth.

Brant Frazier, who had been watching this byplay, got up from where he had been seated astraddle of a chair, his arms on the back. He went to the drapes which framed the windows, parted them and closely examined the partly opened panes. A clean cut showed in the outer screen, where it had been unlatched, there the window raised. He didn't disturb the mud smears, and his examination seemed indifferent and cursory. He went back into the center of the room, stared levelly at Reagan a long moment.

"Well, Dinty?" he asked at last, the shadow of a smile on his lips.

Reagan groaned, grimaced, held his head between his hands. He looked like a fellow in the throes of a hangover. "Cap'n," he said, "as a dick I'd make a fine oil can. I sneaked out here to cover the Tricorne get-together—didn't have time to give you a buzz—and look what happened to me! Concher's spiel about that part of it is O. K. But I ain't got any more idea than he has who slugged me."

He took out a limp, blood-stained handkerchief and gingerly patted the side of his head, making a face. "I'm all wet as a sleuth—in more ways than one."

Frazier suddenly leaned nearer to him and lowered his voice. "When you get away from here to-night, stick around—and damned close. To me, I mean. For I may need you, and *bad*. God knows what's going to happen."

"Gotcha, cap. I learned my lesson."

Frazier looked up the prowling Tom Flint, and gave some swift, terse instructions to him in private. Thunder crashed, tumbled away, growled afar. Lightning spat, crackled, blazed whitely. Reverberations shook the Halliday mansion. Rain drummed against the windows with redoubled intensity, and

water flooded gurglingly down the drains.

Tom Flint nodded his understanding, turned up the collar of his raincoat, and slid out of the front door into the stormy night.

"Anything else found here, Clegg?" Frazier asked the moody sheriff.

"A dead dawg, out on the lawn, not so far from the fence. Halliday's Irish setter. He was kilt with an arrer like the one you see in Dick's Adam's apple. He's layin' out there on the porch now."

"I see," said Frazier shortly. "And did anybody, here in the house or among that mob out front, see any one leaving this neighborhood about eight o'clock. I understand there was to be a meeting of some sort here to-night."

"Yuh better ask Watts about that, son. He's been in the drawin' room interviewin' a number of witnesses. This thing's outa my territory."

The district attorney looked haggard and miserable when Brant Frazier called him out. His face was drawn, his eyes ringed. He wore an air of heavy, weary dignity.

"Where will it all end?" he muttered. "What is it you wish, Captain Frazier?"

The ranger told him succinctly, and Watts replied tonelessly. Yes, he had interviewed a number of men who came to Halliday's that night. And one of them, an insurance man named Murrefree, had seen a car pass him like a streak some six blocks up Riverside, coming from the direction of the Halliday place. A closed car, a sedan. That was all, so far.

"Not much help," commented Frazier. "Does Concher have any men out interrogating the neighborhood?"

"Oh, yes. But so far we've heard nothing of help."

Frazier told the district attorney, very coldly and meaningly, that he wanted Dinty Reagan released on recognizance, and at once. "I need him to-night, badly," he finished. "And of course he

isn't guilty of Halliday's murder, no matter what appearances may be."

Watts demurred a little, but consented, and called Captain Concher out to inform him. The homicide officer protested and argued vehemently, but the D. A. was wearily adamant. The report of the finger-print men and of Doctor Ake, who meanwhile had arrived on the scene and finished their preliminary examinations, apparently cleared Reagan and gave him an out, so Concher's objections went for nothing.

But he gave Brant Frazier an ugly look when he came into the library, then turned his back upon him. The ranger, paying no attention, called Reagan aside and talked swiftly for some moments. Dinty nodded rapidly several times, worked his jaws industriously, then gingerly put his hat on his aching head and took his departure—but not before grimacing insolently at Captain Concher.

The finger prints on the arrow, red club card and window were all identical with the ones found before—scarred thumb and all. Dick Halliday had a scar on his right thumb, but his prints were of entirely different classification. Part of a shoe print, found in the edge of a flower bed beneath the French windows, showed a small foot and rubber soles. The only other thing found in the room, besides the lethal arrow, was a small piece of paper—waxed paper—in the shape of a tiny cone.

Some one had found it and picked it up, halfway between the table and the fireplace. It lay on the table now, and Doctor Ake was of the opinion that it had been used to shield the tip of the poisoned arrow. It was handled with extreme care thereafter, routed for the chemist department and finger-print bureau headquarters.

The coroner said another post mortem would have to be performed, to determine fully about the poison which he was certain had been used. The body

had been removed in an ambulance, the scattered deck of cards picked up. Frazier gazed narrowly at them, at the open penknife, at the queen of clubs which had a little black scraped off one pip. He stooped down and peered beneath the table, then rose and shook his head slightly.

So much for hunches and theories, he reflected dryly. But he wondered just what Dick Halliday was peeling that club pip for. And a queen at that. There was a bit more right there than met the eye.

One of the roving detectives returned, saying that a negro servant girl up the street had seen somebody run from Halliday's grounds and get quickly in a closed car that was parked near her mistress's curb. She said it looked like a woman. Watts, his face drawn and white, walked over to where Brant Frazier was ready to take his leave.

"I've just questioned Leroy Forrester, who was due here to-night," said the D. A. "And he told me, very regretfully, that one block east of here, toward town, a car shot down a side street and almost collided with his machine. He recognized the other car."

"So?" Frazier looked interested. "And who was in such a hurry?"

"Cleve Poole," said Watts grimly. "Your words this afternoon were prophetic, Captain Frazier. I'm a hideous blunderer."

The ranger only looked at him, then without a word crammed on his Stetson and ran lightly down the steps toward his waiting roadster.

CHAPTER XIX.

"WHAT DID YOU KILL 'EM FOR?"

IN room No. 903 at the Driskill, he smoked restlessly, poured himself a stiff drink, and several times used the telephone. He was waiting, waiting for a buzz from Tom Flint or Dinty Reagan. The electrical storm was getting

more distant each minute; the rain had almost ceased. But a subtle chill was permeating the atmosphere inside the hostelry. Brant Frazier went to the window, raised it, and peered out.

The first "norther" of fall had arrived, driving the mist, the rain, the thunder and lightning, before its chill breath. It moaned around the cornice with eerie whispering, swept down from the hills. Below, in South Main Street, a trolley bell clanged petulantly, a lot of motor horns blew. Then a police traffic whistle shrilled, and bell and horns stopped.

Frazier shut the window, went back to the light. He took a crumpled blue envelope from his coat pocket, and scanned it with pursed lips and squinted eyes. He looked at his watch, twisted and licked and lighted a twentieth cigarette. The minutes ticked on monotonously. He called two numbers, got no satisfactory replies to his questions, and hung up and cursed.

The bell clattered. He had the receiver in his hand before the ring finished. Sheriff's office calling. The mysterious sedan seen near Riverside had been located, parked on a downtown side street. It was a maroon Cadillac, and had been stolen early that night from a merchant named Macomber, and he had reported the theft to the police. It seemed to be O. K. save for a slightly bent front fender. They would look it over for finger prints, of course. No, no trace of Poole as yet.

Frazier threw himself down in the chair, drumming upon the arm with his fingers. Sidonie Evans, Poole's sweetheart, claimed not to have seen him since early that afternoon, right after his release. Nor had he visited any of the clubs, restaurants, or speakos. His apartment was deserted—he hadn't gone to his ranch. Where in hell to look, now?

It was twenty-five minutes past eleven when Tom Flint called.

"Yuh better leg it over to police headquarters right pronto, cap," he drawled. "Y'know that government dick we saw yesterday—the dope man, narcotic squad? Well, he and a partner of his have nabbed that feller Le Seur everybody is lookin' for. Yeah, it's him all right.

"Seems like he's been peddlin' snow right smart. Yeah. But what they got him for is really murder. Claims he bumped off that narcotic guy down in Houston three weeks ago. C'mon over—they'll be extrys on the street in half an hour. S'long."

There were a number of people in Captain Concher's office at the central station when Brant Frazier arrived a few minutes later. The district attorney was there, excitement on his face and triumph in his eyes.

Sheriff Clegg was there, chewing his grizzled mustache and smoking.

Captain Concher was there, rubbing his beefy hands together and glowering gloatingly. And two hard-faced narcotic men, government agents, were also there, their eyes chill and alert.

One of them, Buck Hatcher, Frazier knew by sight. The other was introduced as Wilkerson. And against the wall, a pair of "darbies" on his wrists, sat Raoul le Seur.

He was slender, thin faced, dark bearded, with tousled black hair thickly covering his well-shaped head. Black eyes beneath wiry brows slid around the room like inky beetles. They were defiant, jetty eyes, yet furtive and uneasy. His slitlike mouth and very red lips were closed trap-tight. A sodden raincoat of dark material hung over the back of his chair, and a wet, soft hat of dark shade lay on the floor beside him. He wore a dark-blue sweater coat, soft-collared shirt open at the throat, gray trousers and mud-caked shoes. He moved his manacled hands nervously, and shuffled his feet now and then.

Le Seur was still darkly handsome despite the ravages of dissipation, drugs and hard living. The concealing beard hid his features very well, but without the blue glasses his eyes were as small and bright and glittering as black buttons. He sensed Frazier's keen gaze bent upon him, and stared defiantly at the ranger a moment, then shifted his eyes.

"Well," rumbled Concher, "I guess this settles things. He's the Tricorne murderer all right. We want him on three counts."

"What you want and what you get are two different horses," retorted Hatcher disagreeably. "We nailed this bird, and we keep him. He's got a little killing down the road to explain before you guys leech him."

"Like hell!" said Le Seur harshly. "You got nothing on me, guy."

"Naw," grinned Hatcher, "not *much*. Just a little more than enough to break your neck in Leavenworth, hot shot."

"But see here," argued the D. A. "This man has perpetrated three murders here since last Wednesday night, and instituted a regular reign of terror in this town. People are leaving the city. Travis Breckenridge, one of our most prominent citizens, made reservations for Europe to-night. Three others are going away—two have gone already. Visitors and tourists are going, too. I ask, and demand, that you let us examine him thoroughly—get his confession and statement."

"Sure, brother, sure," grinned Hatcher. "We don't care how much you make him rattle the cup. Hop right to it. But don't get any funny ideas about who he belongs to, tha's all."

Concher blew out his breath like a porpoise, legs spraddled, arms akimbo, a stub of cigar clamped in his jaw. "Where'd you fellas get him?" he asked grudgingly. "We've been combing half of Texas for him the past few days."

"Never mind," said Hatcher, with an offside wink toward his partner. "We go places and do things. Don't spend all our nights in bed."

Concher cursed and heeled away. Watts stared severely at the flippant narcotic man. Brant Frazier smiled thinly. Roul le Seur, his eyes veiled and lowered, hunched his shoulders and stuck his manacled hands between his knees. And his cruel, handsome features were defiant.

"Gonna come clean, Le Seur?" growled the homicide officer. "Or do you want a session in the squad room, maybe?"

"Bring on your rubber hoses and blackjacks," said Le Seur in a raspy sneer. "Trot out your strong arms. You'll frame nothing onto me, big boy, because I haven't done anything."

"Oh, yeah?" Concher smiled with heavy sarcasm. "Nothing except bump off Lon Chapman, Joe Oyervides and Richard Halliday. You——"

"What? Halliday!" Le Seur was startled; he leaned forward a little, opening his eyes wide a second, a strained look on his face. "When was Halliday killed?"

"Innocent, ain't you? Cut out the blah, red-hot! What did you kill 'em for?"

Le Seur shrugged; but Frazier noted that his face was a bit strained and tense.

"Listen, Le Seur," said Concher with a gentleness that did not fit his voice or bulk, "you haven't got a chance. You've been prowling around here, in hiding and in disguise. You were at Brook Hollow Club last Wednesday night, in the same part of the grounds where Lon Chapman was killed, about the same time. You were near Meg Price's place in Floptown just before Oyervides got his. Witnesses saw you both times.

"And tonight"—Concher bent forward—"you stole a sedan downtown, drove it out to Halliday's place, crawled

through a window and bumped him off. Then you ditched the car and hoofed it. But you got picked up by these Federal gents. Laugh that off, snow-bird."

"Boloney," shrugged Le Seur. But he was uneasy, restless, despite his bravado, and his beetle eyes were never still. "Prove it, flattie."

"Have it your own way," grinned Concher, apparently in a good humor again. "I guess you'll deny blackmailing your former wife and Halliday, huh?"

"Go to hell!" rasped the dope peddler. "I'm admitting nothing."

The homicide officer walked off a piece to confer with Doctor Ake and the district attorney. Le Seur was left for the moment alone. And Brant Frazier walked up to him, caught hold of the manacles linking his wrists.

"Let's see your hands," he commanded crisply.

"Who the devil are you?" snapped Le Seur. But Frazier jerked his wrists up, turned his hands palms upward despite the prisoner's attempt to double his fists. Brant stared at the fingers a long moment. His eyes narrowed in surprise; then he gave a low whistle. He released his grip.

"Interesting," he commented softly. "Very, very interesting."

Le Seur snarled like a bobcat as the ranger walked away, and put his hands between his knees again. Frazier went over to where Buck Hatcher was watching the proceedings with a bilious and slightly amused expression.

"Where did you boys pick him up?" he asked the Federal man.

Hatcher raised an eyebrow. "Oh, we got a rap," he said easily. "From a friend of his. Found out just where to make the pinch. In a Mexican shanty out behind a glass factory, on — Street. Know the neighborhood? Pretty little spot—yeah. Dark as hell and a *bon* hideout. We caught him

sneaking in on the q. t. Had a gat in his ribs and the darbies on before he knew what it was all about."

"He'd been out, then? What time was this?"

"Yeh, he'd been out. We got him about eleven, I reckon."

"See his hands, did you?"

"Uh-huh. That won't get him anywhere with us, though. Don't need his finger prints on our job. One of his buddies spilled the beans on him. He bumped Monroe Rinn in Houston three weeks ago. He's cold turkey. His name wasn't Le Seur then. It was Dean."

"Who gave you the rap on him, Buck?"

"Never mind," said Hatcher coldly. "We ain't putting out our info to all you State dicks. We got him, and that's plenty. 'Nuff said."

Frazier, who knew that there was a lot of animosity between Federal and State officers in the enforcement squads, shrugged and left him. He watched Concher and Watts try to break down Le Seur's sneering silence.

Time dragged slowly, and the prisoner doggedly denied everything, challenging them to prove a thing against him. Concher was mopping his face, though the night was far from warm.

The finger-print man, Sims, came in with his inking pad and police Bertillon form; and, at a nod from Concher, advanced to the prisoner. Raoul le Seur laughed harshly and thrust out his hands. Sims stared, straightened, and looked around at the watching officers.

"Lookit his mitts!" he exclaimed. "Geez!"

Concher grabbed the manacled hands, staring. Watts, Sheriff Jake Clegg, and Doctor Ake, all bent over them. For a moment nobody said anything. Then the homicide officer flung down Le Seur's hands and gave a hoarse laugh of finality.

"Burned his fingers so we couldn't take prints!" he exulted. "Pretty good, hot shot, pretty good! But it won't get you anywhere. That's just what we needed to lock the lid on you. Try to run in faked prints on us, huh? I thought there was something mighty funny about finding all those thumb marks and clear prints on things!"

Doctor Ake was closely examining the prisoner's fingers, while Le Seur laughed jeeringly in his face. Eight fingers and both thumbs, from last joints to tips, were solid burn scabs, rough, slick and drawn. An impression of them would show absolutely nothing save drawn, dead skin. The coroner dropped the hands, shrugged, turned away.

"Did it with some sort of acid, apparently," he remarked. "And he's very cleverly planted faked prints for us to stick our noses to. Did you learn that trick in South America, Le Seur?"

"How long would you say they had been burned, doctor?" asked the D. A.

"Three weeks or a month, perhaps. Certainly no less time."

Hatcher laughed. "He burned 'em," he stated, "when he made his getaway from Houston. But he hadn't counted on Hype Hagler rattling the cup and turning U. S. evidence."

Le Seur's bearded face went livid, and his eyes darted about like a trapped animal's. "That's a damned lie!" he burst out hoarsely. "That dopehead can't frame me! He's the guy that killed Rinn!"

"Tell it to the hangman in Atlanta," grinned Buck. "You're slick, buddy, but not slick enough. Maybe for these hick bulls, but not for big time."

Concher looked apoplectic. "Take his prints anyhow, Sims!" he said hoarsely. "Not that there's any use, for he's our man."

Le Seur submitted without resistance to having his burned fingers inked and pressed upon the Bertillon form. While

this was going on the outer door opened, and a plain-clothes man entered with Natalie le Seur.

"Just picked her up, captain," said the detective. "She's been out all night."

CHAPTER XX. TWO NOOSES.

THE widow stood just inside the doorway, a chinchilla coat pulled close about her throat and chin, a smart fur turban fitted snugly on her head. Her face was whipped by the "norther" into a riot of color, and her sloe-black eyes were brilliant with wonder and curiosity. Her red lips were a little parted, and her breath came unevenly.

Then she saw Raoul, and her eyes dilated. She gave a sharp gasp.

Le Seur, staring at her, half rose from his chair, and his eyes were like live coals in the pallor of his face. His lips twitched spasmodically—he lunged to his feet, shaking manacled fists at her.

"You double-crosser!" he screamed. "Turn me over to the law, will you? You'll pay for that! Sneak around till you find my hangout, then spill the beans to the bulls. I'll cook your goose if——"

Concher slapped him savagely in the mouth, knocking him against the wall. But Le Seur caromed off, whirled, standing on his feet. His ex-wife had gone dead white—her hands crept to her cheeks and her fingernails clawed at her skin. She clapped one hand over her mouth to stop a scream.

"Listen, you fools!" raved Le Seur. "I haven't said anything, but now I *will!* Watts, that woman killed Lon Chapman, and I'll bet my bottom dollar she bumped Halliday, if he's dead! She stabbed Lon with an arrow. They were ready to break. I know that, for I was out at Brook Hollow Wednesday night, and saw the whole thing. I made her pay me hush money for it, too!"

He took a step forward. His voice grated like the rasp of a file on a saw, almost incoherent with ugly gloating.

"She had it in for Dick Halliday, too. They were tangled up in a sweet little love affair. Halliday gave her the gate, and she was sore. It don't cramp her style to kill a man—oh, hell no! A sweet disposition she's got. I ought to know, for I trained with her for nearly two years! She even tried to kill me once—*with poison!*"

Dazed, speechless, with horror-widened eyes, Natalie le Seur stared at him during the tirade. Her hands were balled into fists against her bloodless lips. But if Raoul, or any one else present, expected her to wilt, to break down, to betray herself under the unexpected dénouement they were badly fooled.

Instead of collapsing, she advanced on Le Seur like a tigress, her face suddenly flooded with color. Concher hastily stepped between them.

"Nothing doing," puffed the captain. "Cut all this rough stuff out."

Watts and Brant Frazier had hold of her, and after a second she stood quietly in their grasp. Le Seur laughed nastily, sat back down in his chair. "She had plenty of reason to kill them both!" he shouted. "And I know she bumped Lon. She won't two-time me and get away with it!"

Natalie began to struggle again, sobbing with uncontrollable rage, but Frazier held her firmly, saying nothing. Sheriff Jake Clegg stood by, rubbing his blunt chin, his eyes hooded inscrutably. "Who killed Joe Oyervides?" he asked Le Seur suddenly in a voice like a whip-crack.

Le Seur glowered at him. "Why, Concher there, of course!" he said insolently. "Killed him to make himself a hard case to bust open!"

"You——" began the officer, raising his hamlike fist, then checked himself. Le Seur laughed tauntingly, his eyes

like a snake's. The D. A. spoke to Natalie, who was calmer now, but still crying. A policeman gave her a glass of water, which she sipped very gratefully.

"Well, Natalie," said Watts, "are you ready to tell us now where you were all night?"

"Of course." And her voice grew strong and firm. "I had dinner out—at the Blue Moon—with Garner Bass. Afterwards we went by several places, visiting and drinking cocktails. Friends' houses, you understand. It was after ten when I took him home, for we were in my roadster. Then I drove a while by myself, for I have had a touch of neuralgia all afternoon, and was very restless and nervous and knew I couldn't sleep. When I returned to my apartment your man here"—motioning the detective—"brought me down to headquarters. That's all."

"Boloney," sneered Raoul. "A little too pat, old dear!"

"Shut up, you rat!" roared Concher. "One more cheep out of you, and I'll give—"

"Please!" expostulated the D. A. wearily, holding up a hand. Then to Natalie: "Did you see Cleve Poole this afternoon?"

"No," she replied, "I did not. And I was downtown most of the afternoon, too. Went to a matinee at the Empire, and did a bit of shopping. Called to see Doctor Scaife about the neuralgia, but he was out—he had gone hunting this afternoon, I believe. So I went home and dressed for dinner."

Brant Frazier's eyes narrowed in his masklike face; he took a short step forward. "Scaife was out hunting, you say?" he asked. "And what time was that, Mrs. le Seur?"

"Somewhere about five, I think, I'm not positive."

"Thank you. That's all." He lowered his eyes and began twisting a cigarette, but his mouth was a thin, straight

line. He lit the quirky, glanced at his watch, and swore under his breath.

Raoul le Seur was laughing mockingly, his eyes on his former wife. She, most of her composure recovered, regarded him calmly, the while puffing at a scented cigarette. Watts stood lost in thought, his eyes on the floor, and Concher stared around stupidly. Things seemed to be at an impasse—no other course open than to hold Natalie le Seur for strict investigation. The law would demand that.

Buck Hatcher, grinding out the stub of his cigarette beneath a heel, stepped away from the wall and stopped in front of Raoul. He thrust his hands in his coat pockets, and glanced around the audience with a grin.

"Plenty's been spilled here this night," he remarked conversationally, "but I can add more. Also correct my friend Dean here—excuse me, I mean Le Seur—in a slight error on his part. He's accused the lady of two-timing him—putting the bee on him with us. That's all wrong. It was a man that gave us the rap."

He grinned at Raoul.

"We don't usually put out our sources of info, young fella, but your case is exceptional. *The* exception, I might say. For the fella who put us wise to you, and where you were hanging out, asked me to give you a message. He said you'd understand O. K."

Le Seur was staring at him, tense and startled, the pupils of his eyes dilated. "Yeah?" he said hoarsely. "And what was that message, wise guy?"

"This."

Buck Hatcher suddenly drew his right hand from his pocket—thrust something under Raoul le Seur's nose. Brant Frazier, standing close by, saw what it was, as did Concher and Clegg and Watts.

It was a red jack of clubs. But instead of the usual "J's" at the top and bottom of the card, there were two

nooses drawn in ink, with tiny arrows pointing at the figures of the jack.

Raoul le Seur stared with popping eyes, his face gone ashen—dead white, like the ash of a fine cigar, and his eyes were horrible with some frenzied, nameless terror. He wet his lips with a parched tongue, tried to speak, but the words wouldn't come from his stiff lips.

The Federal man hit him sharply in the face. "Snap outa it, buddy," he said with a short laugh. "I see you recognize your friend, O. K. He got you on the spot!"

His blow broke the spell! Raoul le Seur sprang up, his face working, eyes maniacal. His manacled hands beat at the grinning narcotic man.

"Lock me up!" he mouthed brokenly. "Quick! Lock me up! I'm your prisoner, officer. I'll spill the works about that Houston job, but get me behind bars *right now!*"

His voice rang out hollowly in that silent room as two policemen led him away to the cell block. And he went in a hurry. And Captain Concher paced up and down the office, a caged beast—kept from his prey.

He whirled upon the complacent Hatcher, beat his fists against his forehead.

"What did the man look like who gave you that card?" he yelled. "Quick, man! Don't stand there grinning like a damned possum!"

Sims, the finger-print man, had the scarlet jack and was dusting magnesium powder upon it from a little bulb. Hatcher took his eyes away from the operation and leisurely lit a cigarette. "Who wants to know?" he asked coolly.

"Damn you!" bellowed the purple-faced officer. "This is murder! Murder, you understand!"

"Oh," shrugged Hatcher, "that's different." He grinned, exhaled a lungful of smoke, and squinted at Concher. "Being it's murder, I'll break a rule and squawk. He was a tallish sort of

fella, wore yellow glasses, and talked kinda hoarse-like. Guess he was disguising his voice, like he did his face. He wore a beard, but I guess it was phony. That's about all."

"Which is nothing!" bawled Concher. "What color was his hair and eyes?"

"He didn't take his hat off," said Hatcher. "And his eyes looked yellow through his glasses. And I can't tell you if he was thin or fat, cause he was all bundled up in plenty of clothes all the times we saw him."

"You saw him last, when?" cut in Brant Frazier sharply.

"This evening." Hatcher looked at the ranger. "First about three o'clock—last about seven, I reckon. He said he'd been busy for the past few days, and couldn't hook up with us to guide the pinch before to-night. Also"—Buck exhaled slowly—"he said he had to vamose and couldn't stay to watch the fun, because—because he had to put in some target practice with his bow and arrow."

"He said what?" screamed Concher. "*Bow and arrow?*"

"Yeh," nodded Buck, unmoved. "Bow and arrow. Also he added that he wasn't so hot with a rifle, and laughed some about it."

"Good Lord!" blurted the homicide officer, and flopped down weakly. He mopped his sweating face. Sims, with the playing card, brought his attention to it. Concher stared at it dully. The white powder showed a second set of finger prints—and there was a short scar on the thumb.

The homicide officer regarded it a moment, then got heavily to his feet.

"Hold Mrs. le Seur here to-night," he said wearily. "And get every bull in town on the lookout for Cleve Poole. Phone Doctor Scaife's house and see if he's in; I want to talk to him. It'll take a hell of a lot to make me believe that Le Seur didn't fake and plant those prints, after all. And he's the murderer

of those three men, or I'll turn in my badge."

Buck Hatcher edged up to Frazier.

"Say, what the hell does all this red-jack-of-clubs stuff mean, anyhow?" he asked curiously. "This Tricorne hokum? What's the joke?"

"It's not a joke," replied Frazier grimly. "Not by a damned sight. And if I knew just what it meant, *and could prove one thing*, we'd be a hell of a lot closer to solving this saturnalia of murder."

Hatcher shrugged, clumped off. "Oh, well—it ain't my funeral. I got my bacon, and he'll swing sure as God made little apples."

Brant Frazier smiled crookedly, and started for the door. A detective reported to Concher that Doctor Scaife was out on a call. The ranger's mouth tightened; he increased his pace. The harassed homicide officer stalked after him, his eyes bulging with bewilderment.

"What do you make of that snow-bird's talk, Frazier?" he called out.

Frazier countered: "Le Seur claims he's innocent, doesn't he?"

"Hell! Heard what he said, didn't you?"

"Uh-huh. Wouldn't it be funny if he is?"

Brant Frazier walked on down the wide steps, the thin smile still on his lips.

CHAPTER XXI.

"UNBELIEVABLY DEVILISH."

HE left the curb before the huge, white, stone building in a hurry, driving rapidly through deserted streets toward the hotel. Newsboys were shouting extras; he bought one as he parked his car near the side entrance, and went through to the coffee shop and drank two cups of scalding java. A nodding elevator boy shot him up to his floor where, entering his room, Frazier threw himself wearily into a chair.

Having left word with the night clerk at the desk, he knew that no more phone calls of importance had come from Tom Flint or Dinty Reagan. And dawn was not far distant—the dawn following a hectic, unreal night. Nothing now to do but wait. He smoked and read the extra he had bought.

Presently he grunted, tossed away the paper, and mixed himself a strong drink of whiskey and water. It was cold out, and getting colder. He stood at the window, staring absently down into the silent, deserted streets. It was that unearthly quiet hour just before dawn when all nature seems to pause, hesitating; when doctors and nurses bend anxiously above the slow and weak pulse of a patient.

Le Seur and his former wife in jail; the dragnet out for Cleve Poole; Raoul le Seur, trapped by a cunning, far-seeing enemy—trapped for murder, a murder he would surely hang for, Buck Hatcher said.

The telephone rang shrilly.

"Cap'n? Flint talkin'." The ranger sergeant's voice was crisp, hurried. "Come a-hellin'! I picked up Poole's spoor at last, and he was headed out North Flores Street toward the Pleasanton Road a mile a minute in that racing car of hisn. A couple of hours ago, it was. A man in an all-night filling station recognized the car. I'm downstairs."

"Coming."

Frazier shucked into his coat and crammed on his Stetson. Too late, he thought bitterly, his lips moving in muttered curses—two hours too late.

He was barely outside the door when the telephone bell clamored again a long, continued pealing. He unlocked the door, sprang to the table and jerked off the receiver.

"Cap?" Reagan's voice was hoarse and excited. "Hit the ball, and how! Doc Scaife's high-powered car is tearing outa town on the Pleasanton Road

somewhere—left 'bout half an hour ago. Just found it out. And he was *hunting this evening*—get me? Found that out, too. I'm at the Milan Garage on Cypress—will meet you on the corner of Calaveras and Pleasanton. And step on her, cap'n!"

"Coming. Sit tight."

A minute later Frazier was in the lobby, and Tom Flint was waiting for him. The night clerk, now wide awake and curious, who hadn't seen Frazier enter the hotel when he passed through the lobby from the coffee shop, came from behind his desk, a letter in his hand.

"A' newsboy left this for you after you'd gone to police headquarters," he explained to Frazier. "Said some man gave him a quarter to deliver it to the desk—somebody he didn't know and never saw before. Sorry I didn't see you come in, or I'd given it to you then."

Frazier ripped open the envelope flap, shook out a single sheet of plain white paper, and scanned the bit of doggerel verse inscribed in its exact center:

I've spent my time in rioting,
Debauched my health and strength;
I squandered fast as pillage came,
And fell to shame at length;
But dauntingly and wantonly
And rantingly I'll gae;
I'll play the tune and dance it roun'
Beneath the gallows tree.

Its signature, plainly impressed in bluish-purple, was a thumb print with a little scar above the vortex whorl.

Brant Frazier groaned, thrusting it into his coat pocket. "That devil! Come on, Tom—but I'm afraid we're already too late!"

The powerful roadster hurtled through the streets and purlieus of the town, dismal in the dark, early glow of the wet dawn. The blocks fled backward under the spinning wheels. Frazier turned into the wide-paved Pleas-

anton Road, braked up to a slow slither at the corner of Calaveras, picked up the slickered Dinty Reagan, and gave his car the gun again.

On they sped, the speedometer needle shivered—beyond the outskirts now, and presently in open country, with everywhere the chill of that drizzly morning, the woods and fields dismal in the murk. The lowering sky was the color of a shark's belly, and the wind from the hills hooted like a banshee.

As they approached Rocky Hollow, where a byway turned off the highroad to the left, Frazier slowed down. It was a gloomy spot, thickly wooded in steep benches on both sides, its trees and rocks and thickets sinisterly somber. Lances of rain beat down coldly, and water puddled the road, showered from wind-swept trees. Red-breasted robins chirped in the cedars, and crows cawed from dead trees.

"Cars have turned off here O. K.," said Reagan, jumping back on the running board, after scanning the tread tracks. "What are we gonna find at the end of this trail, cap'n?"

"God knows!" grated Brant Frazier. "But it won't be pretty, I'll guarantee that. Still got your gat handy, Dinty?"

"Even so. And I'm nervous as a Galway witch. Did Drake cover everything all right for the paper while I was out flatfootin'?"

"Yeah. But you're going to write the finale, old son, and scoop it all. It won't be long before we know now."

Dinty shivered and shook himself like a wet dog.

"And a hell of a fine mornin' it is for mischief, too," he muttered. "Do you *know*, captain?"

"Yes," nodded Brant Frazier grimly, and his face was a stiff mask. "Yes, Dinty, I'm *afraid* I know. And it's—it's unbelievably devilish."

The roadster rocked on up the slippery trail, skidding, lurching, flinging mud and water, down into the wooded

canyon beside the creek, the oaks and cypress and sumacs blanketing it looking chill and bleak in the early light. A flock of tufted waxwings, those early harbingers of winter, twittered among the cedar berries; a red squirrel ran across the road. Val Meservy's cabin and its protecting live oaks became visible, vague in the mist, the gnarled trees like silent sentinels guarding whatever dark secret they were hiding.

A tuft of smoke rose from the cabin chimney, and two cars were parked in the open near by—the roadster of Cleve Poole, and the blue car of Doctor Mortimer Scaife. But no clattering guinea hens greeted the arrival of the three silent men, nor did the coon hound bay.

It was not until Frazier braked his car near the two parked and empty machines, and the trio had alighted, that they saw the Thing slowly swaying beneath the moss-bearded tree in front of the cabin.

"Look!" whispered Dinty Reagan in a cracked voice.

But Brant Frazier and Tom Flint had already seen. With pistols in hand, walking on their toes, they advanced toward the gnarled, crooked-limbed tree. Reagan, his breath whistling from his lungs, followed.

Only a moment did Frazier and Tom Flint look at the body of Cleve Poole swaying from its gibbet; but Dinty pointed excitedly. For on the front of the dead man's coat, a red splash against the dark suit, was pinned a jack of clubs.

"Scaife!" mumbled Reagan, his eyes horror-stricken. "Who would have——"

But Brant Frazier, his mouth clipped in a hard, straight line, was walking toward the closed door of the cabin. Tom Flint's eyebrows jerked, and he followed. Dinty stumbled after them, looking pale and ill.

Frazier glanced once at Tom Flint, who nodded. Then the ranger captain kicked open the door—leaped within at

a crouch like a fighting panther, his finger on the trigger of his pistol. Flint and Dinty were at his heels.

CHAPTER XXII. SERENO WINSTON.

THE fire crackled cheerily on the hearth. Old Vagamundo squatted on his haunches in a corner, his eyes bright as a bird's, his wrinkled, weathered face sphinxlike. The room was vaguely lighted by firelight and shifty shadows. The big hound rose from beside the bunk against the wall, teeth bared in a snarl, the hackles rising on its neck. Brant Frazier and Flint stood just inside the open doorway, their eyes raking the room, pistols ready at hips.

"As you were, Jeff!" said a harsh, weak voice to the dog. "Down, fellow. Come in, captain—I have been expecting you. You can put away the artillery."

Brant Frazier looked at the figure on the bunk—a man almost a complete stranger to him; a man with close-clipped, graying hair, high, narrow forehead, and curious eyes of a greenish slate color.

"Good Lord!" burst out Frazier, gesturing with his gun toward the cot. Dinty Reagan, his jaw sagging and eyes bulging saw, and leaned weakly against the wall.

For at the head on that cot, neatly printed on a piece of cardboard, hung a black-lettered sign. Two words, plainly legible in the wan light:

Exhibit Z.

"So," said Frazier in a raspy voice, for his heart was pumping a little fast. "So. The mask is off, then?"

"I am doubtful," said Sereno Winston with a ghastly grin, "that it has ever been on, for you. *Le roi est mort! Vive le roi!*"

A stir in the corner by the fireplace drew the eyes of the three newcomers

quickly. A Vandyked man rose to his feet, and his face was white as paper. He drew a deep breath, released it in a long, quivering sigh.

"Thank God you have come!" said Doctor Mortimer Scaife.

Brant Frazier pulled up one of the chairs, and sat down facing the man in bed. He took a pistol from the table near by and stuck it in his pocket. Tom Flint squatted by the door, his cold eyes watching Vagamundo. Doctor Scaife sat on the other side of the table; Dinty Reagan leaned against a bookcase. The coal-black crow on the mantel looked down with beadlike eyes; the oak log in the fireplace crackled sharply.

Frazier stared long, and impersonally now, at the man propped up with pillows on the bunk. He had the scarred face and neck, the warped mouth and ravaged body, of Val Meservey, but those strange, malicious eyes that burned in that frozen visage were no longer screened by tortoise-shell glasses, and no longer sought to evade those into which they stared.

Gone was the myopic, curly-headed hermit. In his place had come an utter stranger, at last able to disclose himself in his true character. And those eyes into which so few people had looked for more than a second or two together were steadily trained on Frazier, Flint and Reagan now.

"Sorry I had to slug you last night, Dinty," came the harsh, weak voice. "It was unfortunate, but necessary."

Dinty's hand instinctively went to the cut on the side of his head. His eyes were still dazed and incredulous. "Val Meservey!" he muttered unbelievably. "Meservey—Serenio Winston! Somebody's crazy—and I guess it's me! Why, you used to be one of my best amigos!"

"Why 'used to be'?" asked Meservey, sardonically. "The past tense is wrong, Dinty, speaking for myself. Does retribution affect you so? But we must

leave the small talk out now, gentlemen. The grape is pressed, the wine drunk—it is almost time to close the book."

He turned painfully to the table, poured out a half tumbler of straight whiskey from a vinegar flagon that stood there, and drained it at a gulp. He choked, gagged, coughed a moment, then leaned back against the piled cushions.

"I had to work fast, you see," he said to Frazier in a slightly stronger voice, "work fast to complete my revenge, before my own death overtook me. Last Friday morning I had a hemorrhage—climbing trees at midnight, or any other time, is not exactly good medicine for a case like mine. Oyervides came high. I knew then that I had to keep the ball rolling."

"It's dangerous to let a ball roll too fast, Winston," said Frazier.

"Oh, yes. But I was beginning to fear that you shared a certain bit of knowledge with old Vagamundo and the Almighty. You see, I didn't fall for your hokum about the social call, Captain Frazier. You suspected me then, didn't you?"

"A little," nodded Frazier. "But just a very little, Mes—er—Winston. Your hands and fingers fooled me. And I've been looking at them since I came this morning. It's little short of witchcraft! Your hands are entirely different now from what they were!"

Winston laughed hollowly.

"That's a secret that will go to the grave with me, captain," he said hoarsely, "for it is capable of wrecking the entire Bertillon police system. It is an Indian secret from the jungles of Brazil, the making of this perfect skin glove. It's human skin, by the way, and any finger prints can be superimposed upon it—prints from glass, especially—with a secret formula. The cannibals of the Upper Amazon tributaries know many dark secrets like that, Captain Frazier."

Frazier examined Winston's right

hand interestedly, and at length, his lips taut. The skin over it reached only above the wrist. All finger prints were natural as life, the color was natural, and there was a little scar above the whorl vortex of the right thumb. He turned loose of the hand with a puzzled head shake, and Doctor Scaife, who also had been examining the skin closely, muttered under his breath.

"I want to be buried in these skin gloves," said Winston. "Buried beneath the cedars beyond the brook. And I want you men in here now to promise never to betray that part of my confession. I used it for my own ends, but want it to go no farther. That is part of the bargain, captain. For without my confession you could never convict me in the world."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Frazier slowly. "I've written Washington about the prints found on the bow and arrows and cards. They will match up with yours, Meservey."

Winston laughed shortly, coughed. "Do you think I would tell you all about this, captain, if I had a chance to live?" he asked sardonically. "Hell, no! But my number is up—I can't dodge the bony gentleman any longer. I'm keeping going on stimulants now—just long enough to set your minds at rest about several things. Long before noon I will be shaking hands with my forefathers. Ask Doctor Scaife."

He took another drink of raw corn whiskey, lit a cigarette, blew a stream of smoke against the window pane, then looked at Brant Frazier and smiled—smiled as never before had the ranger seen any man smile—white or black, red, yellow or brown. Winston motioned toward the heat-steamed glass with his smoking cigarette.

"Out there swings the last of the Mohicans," he said mockingly. "Under the gallows tree, against a wintry sky and a background of evergreens. Raoul le Seur will parrot his mode of passing,

but Uncle Sam will be the judge, jury and hangman with him. I wasn't strong enough to swing them both, and nothing short of hanging by the neck would be fitting for Le Seur. So I put the finger on him to the Federals last Friday—phoned to San Antonio to do it, too. They sent Hatcher and Wilkerson. I had earlier discovered his identity and hideout. And they've got him. He'll swing, right enough."

Winston stopped in a fit of coughing, and Doctor Scaife administered a hypodermic injection in his arm.

"Sand's running out pretty fast," Winston muttered. "Jacking too much. I'll have to hurry."

"But—but, Sereno!" broke in Dinty. "How didja get burned that way? We all thought you were dead in Honduras long ago!"

Winston smiled like a death's head. "I faked that death and burial," he chuckled. "Not so hard to swap identities down there in the Latin countries. You see, I had my plan of revenge all mapped out and planned. Then I went on to South America, and got badly burned in a gasoline explosion. For weeks I clawed at the ragged edge, holding on by sheer will power to live and consummate the vengeance due five certain men. It was after I got about that I had the fake skin gloves made, for my hands were burned as bad as my body and face. And the fumes ate out my throat and lungs."

He smiled at Frazier and flipped away the cigarette.

"Everything is written in a statement about all this, captain," he said. "You will find it in that lockbox on the mantel—the one with the key in the lock. Also in there you will find a pretty little take-down bow, several tiny arrows, a small phial of concentrated venom poison. The coroner, Doctor Ake, thought it was hydrocyanic; in truth it is essence of a snake venom—with a certain kind of boiled berries distilled and mixed with

it. It kills even quicker than hydrocyanic—instantly paralyzes lungs and heart, and leaves but little trace. The tiniest puncture is fatal.

"Also in that box you will find a small printing outfit, and a stamp pad soaked with a solution of elderberry juice and chaparral berries, which makes a rather unique violet-purplish ink. Just a slight item to cause the central station sleuths to plow their hair. And I'll bet you a drink of ice water against an extra dance on hell's griddle that Concher and his bulls don't know what it's all about yet. Likely they are trying to third-degree Le Seur, or else have the special pick-up order out for Poole."

Winston's eyes burned feverishly; he glanced at the ticking alarm clock on a bookcase. "Did you bring out one of the extras?" he asked Frazier. "What did the paper say?"

Frazier shook his head. "I read one still wet from the press after midnight, but didn't bring it. Sorry. There was a lot to be desired on the side of accuracy, but nothing omitted in the way of sensation. Reagan didn't write it, by the way. But to-day he'll put out one that will be a sensation from border to border, and coast to coast."

"Well, you can tell the world, Dinty!" Winston suddenly sat up, his eyes blazing. "Tell the world what Lon Chapman, Dick Halliday, Cleve Poole, Joe Oyervides and Tracy Markoe did to me—then tell 'em what I did to them! Markoe escaped me by dying, damn him! But I put the scarlet Nemesis on his grave.

"Those five ganged men one night, beat me to insensibility, poured hot tar on my raw back and split head, coated me with feathers and left me more than half dead on the court house plaza with a heavy chain padlocked around my neck. And that's not all. Cleve Poole, a young buck of some eighteen or nineteen years then stuck a knife in me. Smart, he was. Tough, and hard-boiled

—while I was tied. Doctor Scaife, who attended me in St. David's Hospital, knows about that. It was a stab that I never got over. And you can bet I never forgot it."

Again Winston drained a glass of liquor.

"I swore vengeance upon every mother's son of them, and swore to bide my time. In Brazil I learned much of archery, became expert at it. I found Vagamundo, who has been a faithful servitor to me ever since. He is innocent of all wrong-doing, captain. Please see that he is not molested in any way, for he cannot speak or hear, and knows no English or Spanish. Our sign language is all he savvies.

"I killed Chapman without the least difficulty, after mailing him the death club that afternoon. The day before I mailed one to Sheriff Clegg, just to let him know that something was going on. I fired the arrow into Chapman from a good distance, from the clump of jasmine bushes up toward the clubhouse. It wasn't poisoned, and I didn't miss his heart. He was a clear target in the moonlight. But I wore gloves that night.

"It was easy to run through the shrubbery around the club with the bow, duck into the servant's entrance and thence to the locker and shower basement. No one was there. I stuck the bow behind a locker, ran up the steps and into the hall, across the veranda and down the walk. People were just rushing up to Natalie le Seur. With the black gloves in my pocket I helped in the search, and after they had found Chapman, I hid the gloves in a patch of cactus as we went back to the club to wait for the police. And Dinty found them."

"You made me almost suspect him," said Frazier grimly. "I looked at that cactus bed, and it was a solid mass of spikes."

"Not under the outside edges," cor-

rected Winston. "Plenty of room there to stuff a wad of cloth, where the dirt had crumbled away. I kicked it under with my toe, or thought I did."

"My mistake," said Frazier. "And a dumb one, too,"

"I saw only an edge," said Dinty, "but my eyes are like a cat's in the dark. And I noticed that Captain Frazier was skeptical, so I'll confess that I sorta played a game on him while trying to find out things."

Meservey, or Winston, lit another cigarette with fingers that shook.

"Thursday night I tailed Oyervides from the post office, in disguise, after sending him a red club. Y'see, when I left town after the flogging, I sent all five of them a notice, saying that their own bloody sign would return and destroy them. Joe was scared. He holed up in Meg Price's, with his 'gun' on guard outside. I knocked out the wop, climbed the tree, and put a poisoned arrow through Oyersides's neck as he sat in the chair. I made up like Raoul le Seur, and the ruse worked as I intended. Suspicion pointed to him.

"Poole already had been arrested, and the case was moving out in several directions. It didn't suit me to have Cleve behind bars where I couldn't get to him. So I mailed the bow, which I had later taken from the locker room at Brook Hollow, to the police and D. A., timing it so it would climax the second inquest. Also, after you left here Friday night, captain, I went to Woodlawn Cemetery and painted the Tricorne on Markoe.

"I had planned Halliday's death, and Le Seur's arrest, for Saturday night. I drove to town, and fixed it with Vagamundo to put a couple of bullets into my car at Rocky Hollow. It was just another red herring for supper, captain. For I had to move, and move fast. I was fast getting weak."

"You almost threw me off the scent, and badly, with those bullet holes in

your car," nodded Frazier. "For a moment I suspected Halliday, then pointed an eye toward Doctor Scaife here. He hunted Saturday afternoon, you know. But when Halliday was found dead, I was almost certain. Yet I had not one iota of proof, Winston."

"I knew you were on the right track," said Winston, "for you were looking for motives, not clues. I knew that you were suspecting me, or beginning to. Also I knew you were following up that flogging case, and were interested in finger prints. Hot on the Tricorne trail. When you heard from Washington, the answer would likely point to Sereno Winston, and then it would be only a matter of culling out suspects. But all that didn't hurry me, for I could have outwitted you in the matter of proof. The thing that made me work fast was my quick-running sands.

"I lured Cleve Poole out here with a message that I'd discovered the murderer by trailing his tracks from the place where he fired at me. He came fast, Poole did, saying that the police were after him, and that his life was in danger. I got the drop on him, tied him up. Told him face to face all about it, and showed him who I was. He fainted, and I—myself—put the riata around his neck, fastened it to the tree, stood him on top of my car and drove it from under him.

"Also I tolled Doctor Scaife out by a ruse—promising to reveal some vital information when he arrived. He thought I was out of my mind. He knew that I was sick, dying. He's a good man, and kind. When he arrived, some time after Poole, he saw, burst into the cabin, horror-stricken. I kept him here until you came, captain, for I knew that you would come. Not only because you had Dinty and your sergeant combing the town for Cleve and Doc and myself last night, but because of the little scrap of verse from 'The MacPherson's Farewell' that I left at

the hotel. I knew you would understand, and come."

Winston choked, but waved away the hypodermic that Doctor Scaife was offering. He swallowed more whiskey, and lay back panting, staring out of the window into the bleak morning.

"The only thing I hated, last night," he said weakly, "was having to kill Haldiday's Irish setter. That, and slugging Dinty. But I had to get away, and wind up with Le Seur and Poole before taps. And for the murders—as I suppose the world will call them—I haven't the tiniest twinge of regret. Far from it. Only whole-souled, deep satisfaction. You can tell 'em that too, Dinty. Tell 'em I die happy."

He looked at Frazier. "I'm sorry we couldn't be real friends," he said simply. "And, if it's not asking too much of you, I hope you can understand all this—a little. Doctor Scaife and Dinty, being here at the time, do. They were friends, and good friends, of mine. It speaks rather well of my rôle, and disguise, that neither of them once suspected me. But two years here, seeing those five around me every day almost, the men I'd sworn to get, was two years of mighty hard waiting. For I intended to put them away, one by one and at my leisure, and then dance in the moonlight upon their graves."

CHAPTER XXIII. POTENT AND SWIFT.

SERENO WINSTON looked slowly around the room, and his eyes were bloodshot, his breath coming shortly. He looked at his neatly phalanxed books, the black crow on the mantel, the things on the wall; looked long at old Vagamundo, squatted motionless in his corner, his beady eyes never leaving Winston's racked face.

"My papers are all in order, in my lock box at the bank. Doctor, you can go over them. Is there anything not

clear to you, captain? Any questions whatever?"

Brant Frazier looked steadily at Sereno Winston, looked at the man who for two years had been canny enough to hide the truth about himself—the man who now knew the need for caution gone. He knew, too, that without this confession he could have defied Brant Frazier, or anybody else, to produce the tiniest bit of absolute proof that would have connected him with the murders.

Frazier shook his head slightly "No questions, Winston," he said quietly. "I've had the pieces of the puzzle all along, but never could have fitted them together without your help. And—I'll remember about the gloves. Also—I understand!"

"Thanks." Winston raised up slowly, weakly. Doctor Scaife and Frazier bent to assist him, for Sereno Winston was dying.

He drained the proffered liquor glass. His slate-green eyes opened wide and strainingly as the doctor gently eased his emaciated, strap-scarred and gasoline-burned body back against the pillows.

The hound Jeff got up, whined eerily, turned around and lay down again. Winston's clawlike hand slid beneath the bed cover, fumbled a moment, then came out with a small glass syringe in his fingers. It was empty.

His eyes met Scaife's and Frazier's, his lips twitched in the ghost of a smile. "Sleepy—stuff——" he whispered. "Sleepy — that — has — no — waking." The syringe dropped to the floor.

For a long minute the trio sat there motionless, and Tom Flint squatted by the door, his eyes averted. The hound got up, and with head hanging and slow steps went to the rear door, whining. Old Vagamundo got up, opened the door for him, closed it again. And his beady, birdlike eyes never blinked when Doctor Scaife gently straightened out

the relaxed body of Val Meservey, once Sereno Winston, onto the cot and drew a sheet over it.

Then Vagamundo acted. Too fast for the watchful Tom Flint to see what he was about. The old Indian's hand flashed from his pocket to his mouth, he swallowed convulsively, and without a sound pitched to the floor and never moved. Doctor Scaife, after one glance, shook his head sadly and got to his feet.

"These Indian poisons are potent, and swift," he said. "Too bad."

Brant Frazier passed a hand across his face, shook his head, looked at the doctor and Dinty Reagan.

"It's better this way," he said slowly, quietly. He made a vague gesture with his hand. "I'm not a judge of men, and don't pretend to be. Sometimes I see the reasons for what they do. And, frankly, I can't blame Sereno Winston too much."

"Tom, you and Dinty take my car, drive to town and notify police headquarters. Tell them to send Concher, the coroner and Watts out. Reagan will want to write his scoop for the paper. You notify the adjutant general's office that the case is solved, Tom. Tell

'em I'll communicate later. Doctor Scaife and I will stay here until you get back."

As Flint and Reagan were leaving, Frazier called after them.

"You might tell Concher," he shouted, "that he can release Mrs. le Seur from the *cuartel* now. And if you see Travis Breckenridge, tell him he can cancel his reservations for Europe."

For a moment he stood in the doorway, watching the roadster plow up the muddy road—a tall, hawk-visaged man, his slaty eyes holding a far-away look in their brown-flecked depths.

The jaybird still chattered in the cedars, and somewhere a red squirrel barked. The sky was bleak and gray, and a frigid north wind keened through thicket and brake and skirled weirdly about the cabin, driving squalls of chill mist before it.

For a moment the ranger stood there motionless, then flipped away his half-smoked cigarette, and shut the door. His eyes squinted quizzically at Doctor Scaife, who turned from the window at his entrance.

"I hope," said Brant Frazier slowly, "that I don't ever have another assignment like *this!*"

THE END.

Look for a new story by this dynamic writer, Edgar L. Cooper.



TESTING PAPER WEIGHTS

RETURNING a little early from the land of mosquitoes, flies, flat tires, and backaches after a vacation, a writer called at the office of a friend. This friend manufactures all kinds of odds and ends for office use. Receiving permission from a secretary, the visitor entered to find his friend sound asleep.

"Don't you work?" he asked the manufacturer, awakening him.

"Surc. I've been very busy, testing a new set of paper weights."

"But paper weights don't have to be tested!"

"Yes," he replied, "these did. See—just a pair of shoes with my feet inside."



A Man of Gloucester

By John D. Swain

IN the old fishing town of Gloucester, where I have summered for a number of years, there is a neat cigar and soft-drink establishment differing little in appearance from thousands of others scattered about these United States. But it will repay you to take a second look at the white-haired proprietor, straight as a spar, standing well over six feet—a soft-spoken, keen-eyed man of seventy-two.

As he makes change for you, accurately and deftly, you may note that there are no fingers on his hands. But that doesn't disturb him any. He can riffle a deck of cards, roll his own, or rig a sloop with the best of them. He is anything but garrulous; for he belongs to that old generation of indomitable toilers of the sea, who underwent incredible privations and endured unspeakable hardships quite as a matter of fact.

Not only that, but they deliberately sought danger and hardship, pitted their skill and their indomitable will against the forces of nature. In their respites from fishing off the Georges, they took the "letter-carrier's holiday"—hopped aboard a small craft and put out for open sea, just for a fine sail in the teeth of a nor'easter!

Back in 1883, before the days of beam trawling, Howard Blackburn was one of the crew of the fishing schooner *Grace L. Fears*. While out in one of the schooner's dories with Thomas Walsh, a sudden snow squall swept down upon them before they could make their way back to their vessel.

The gale raged for five days and nights. The thermometer sank below zero. On the third day, Walsh succumbed. His frozen body collapsed in the dory, and

Blackburn was left to fight on alone. It was his task to keep a rowboat afloat in tremendous seas, whose frozen spray incased it with a thick veneer of ice. Battling alone, and with the stark body of his dory mate at his feet, he found his strength ebbing. No longer could he maintain a grip on the long, heavy oars. Did he therefore resign himself to his fate, and slump down beside Walsh? He did not!

Since, in common with all seafaring men, he was ingenious and resourceful as well as fearless, he conceived the idea of letting his hands freeze to the oars. His feet already were frozen solidly to the bottom of the dory. And now, set fast and immovable, his hands soldered as it were to his oars with the crystal cement of the elements, he rowed on and on in the darkness and the frightful gale and mountainous waves.

On the sixth day, he sighted land, dimly. He worked his dory into a little harbor, crept to where an oil lamp shone in the window of a hermit fisherman's cabin. For the first time in more than five days he ate and drank. Then he thawed out his hands and feet before the stove; and afterward he and his host chopped Walsh's body from the dory and gave it decent burial in the frozen ground. A passing vessel bore Blackburn home again.

He became a small shopkeeper, but found life monotonous. So, in 1887, he was off again—to the Klondike this time, round the Horn. Two years more in his shop, and he simply had to have a nice sail again. This time he went all alone, in a thirty-foot sloop, the *Great Western*, which he sailed to Lisbon, Portugal. After this he cruised to New York through the Great Lakes, then down the Mississippi, through the Gulf and around Florida, on whose shores he was wrecked. So he decided to row home in a twelve-foot skiff. He contrived leather straps to hold his mutilated hands to the rowlocks.

In 1903 he decided to cross the Atlantic in a seventeen-foot dory; but a hurricane spilled him ashore somewhere west of Sable Island. And now Howard Blackburn is once more getting fed up selling you, and me, a package of fags, or a bottle of ginger ale, and replying to our comment that it looks as if we were going to have rain, or a stiff blow, or drought.

He has built him another thirty-foot sloop, and proposes to see if the Mediterranean is all it is cracked up to be! After that he may decide to keep shop again for a while; but he never will settle down permanently to that kind of a life—not while he is a vigorous, athletic lad of seventy-two!



NEW PLACES *and* NEW FRIENDS



By
James Worth

I AM sympathetically interested in your problems. I am here to help those who wish to uproot themselves and strike out for new places and new ways of making a living—invalids who would like to learn about healthier climes; vacationists, tourists, and travelers who are perplexed about routes, rates, and time; campers, hunters, trappers, and hardy souls who want to seek adventure.

Your letters of inquiry will be welcomed and answered at once. When possible, I shall also be glad to put you in touch with other readers who can supply added information. I will help you, too, through correspondence, to make friends with readers of the same sex. Your letters will be forwarded direct when you so desire; otherwise they will be answered here.

To obtain information about new places, or to make new friends, write James Worth, care of the Popular Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York. A self-addressed, stamped envelope will bring a prompt reply.



ALASKA—AMERICA'S LAST FRONTIER

Offers Free Homesteads to the New Settler

A LASKA, one fifth the size of continental United States and extending from the Arctic Ocean on the north to the Pacific Ocean on the south, is a land of opportunity for the man who possesses the vision, sinew, and spirit of our pioneer forefathers who developed the West.

In spite of popular opinion, the agricultural regions are not the wastes of

perpetual snow peopled solely by Eskimos which the name Alaska envisions.

Rather is that northland a country of millions of acres of rich soil and temperate climate, great in potentiality.

DEAR MR. WORTH: For some time I have been considering going to Alaska to settle, so I have been greatly interested in the information which has appeared in your department concerning this country. I am a young man under thirty-five with a wife under thirty. We are both strong and healthy and devoted to the outdoors. Roughing it has no terrors for us.

City life does not appeal to us at all, and I know that I'll never be successful in an office, tied to a desk. We both feel that if we could go to a new country and put all our energy into making a home where land is still cheap, we would not only be happier but stand a better chance to make good.

What we have in mind, as you may have guessed, is homesteading, and we'd like some facts about such an undertaking. If possible, I'd like you to refer my letter to some one among your readers who lives in Alaska now and has actually had experience along this line.

We'd like to know how many acres of land one can take up in a homestead, and what the requirements are. I am an ex-soldier and understand that this entitles me to some privileges in taking up a homestead. Is this true?

How much capital should a man have before undertaking such a venture? Where would be a promising locality in which to settle? Is there a good market for produce? What about the climate? And I'd like to know something of what life up there is like.

SIDNEY T.

Minneapolis, Minnesota.

We agree with Sidney T. that first-hand facts are always desirable when they can be obtained. Naturally, a man on the ground knows more of conditions than any one else, and we are greatly indebted to one of our readers up in Alaska for the following letter:

DEAR MR. WORTH: So many inquiries are coming in about homesteading in Alaska these days that it is a big job to answer the letters. I will try, however, to give Sidney T. all the information he asks for.

A homestead in Alaska contains not over one hundred and sixty acres. The require-

ments are six months' residence each year and, in addition, a habitable house must be built. One eighth of the homestead must be under cultivation when applying for a patent at the end of the third year. There are no taxes on farm land in Alaska.

The time of any man's service in the armed forces of the United States during any war applies as time on a homestead. In any locality where the land is more valuable for grazing than for agriculture, a reduction of area of cultivation can be obtained by applying for it. The filing fee for one hundred and sixty acres is sixteen dollars. The United States land office is at Anchorage, Alaska.

A married man should have at least two thousand dollars to start with. Lumber can be had at all settlements or towns. Many settlers build log houses. It is best to come and look the country over before buying stock and equipment. Sidney T.'s local transportation agent can give him passenger and freight rates to any port of Alaska. The entire southern coast is open to steamer traffic all year round. Mail service is in operation at all times.

My homestead is in southeast Alaska, fifty miles west of Juneau. In this locality we have fine range land and can raise a good variety of vegetables and berries. We make hay every year, and grain will mature. There is a good market, as about ninety per cent of the food used here is shipped in from the States. The producer in Alaska sells to the retailer or direct to the consumer, the consumer being in most cases the big salmon canneries, the mines, hotels, or boarding houses. We receive a much higher price for produce than the farmer in the States.

Our climate in southeast Alaska is more even than any place in the northern half of the United States. The warm Japan current, which follows the coast of Alaska, gives us a temperate climate. This past winter there was only one fall of snow. It was six inches deep and only stayed on the ground for four or five days.

I wonder if Sidney T. ever stopped to consider that there are lots of large cities and millions of people living in Europe and Asia at the same latitude as Alaska? Our climatic conditions are practically the same, too.

Our schools are equal in every respect to the schools of like size in the States. We listen to the same radio programs that you do. Our moving pictures have learned to talk. Front-page news in New York is published here about four hours later. We read about blizzards in New York and Chicago and think how lucky we are not ever to have any here. Most of the children along the

southern Alaska coast never learn how to skate, because there is very seldom any ice. They learn to swim in the summer, though.

Any reliable, hard-working man can become independent in a few short years if he will stick through the hardships. Pioneering is hard work any place. The return for your labor is much more, though, than if you worked the same length of time for wages.

There is government land open to settlers close to me. In fact, in my vicinity is the largest piece of flat, level country in southeast Alaska. Nineteen thousand acres have been surveyed, and there is much unsurveyed land. The soil is sand, sandy loam, sandy clay, and clay. Along all the streams is good agricultural land. H. L. R.

*Douglas, Alaska.

H. L. R. has generously volunteered to give information to any of our readers who are interested in Alaska. Address him in care of James Worth, and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope for his reply.



ARE YOU SEA-MINDED

If So, Here's Your Chance for Self-Expression

IN our excitement about *new places* we sometimes neglect the opportunity to make *new friends*, which experience often proves just as thrilling as travel. The following letter seems to promise a combination of both, however, for the writer wants friends who are looking for adventure via the seven seas:

DEAR MR. WORTH: I have returned to Popular after many years. It used to furnish my principal entertainment while on my homestead in Colorado. Then I enjoyed cowboy stories most, and now I prefer sea stories, especially those about the South Seas. I am something of a sailor at heart. The call of the sea seems to be in my blood, and I believe some of my ancestors must have been seafaring people.

When I was a small shaver of twelve I began building boats, and even before that my favorite pastime was carving toy boats from basswood bark. I have lived in many parts of the country, and never failed to build or buy a boat of some kind when there was water near.

My latest achievement was a sixteen-foot model hull outboard motor boat, but I am still interested in sailing craft, sloops, or schooners with auxiliary power. I have a thirty-two-inch model sloop, built piece for piece like the full-size one I hope to construct some day, but maybe it will turn out to be a schooner!

I am planning to locate on Puget Sound—if I can find a homestead bordering the water—and establish a boat livery. Then I'll build my dream boat. I have studied navigation and hope to undertake some rather adventurous trips. I would like to hear from some readers of Popular who are similarly minded. JOHN C. W.

St. Louis, Missouri.

All sea-minded readers looking for adventure are invited to write to John C. W., in care of James Worth.

It so happens that another Popular reader enjoys the same hobby—in a corner of the earth noted for the vital part it plays in the world of ships. F. W. Pittenger, of the Canal Zone, writes enthusiastically:

DEAR MR. WORTH: This all began when I was six and my sister eight. Our family spent their vacation at Ocean Grove, our father renting for us a small rowboat on the lake that divides that camp-meeting resort from Asbury Park, on the condition that we earn the rent.

We ferried passengers across the lake at two cents per head, or the length of it for a nickel, and succeeded in gaining our dollar and a half weekly rental for the six weeks of our sojourn. These skiffs were euphoniously known as "association tubs"—which name pretty accurately described them. We looked with envy on the kids who had the Asbury Park boats, which were much more graceful.

When I was ten I built my first skiff. While the workmanship on it was probably crude, it was tight, and I thought it a thing of beauty. That was fifty years ago; since then I have built and handled skiffs of many sizes and descriptions on waters tributary to the Arctic, Atlantic, Pacific, Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea. Each one of these was in some way an improvement over its predecessor, until I finally settled on a very graceful model—a V bottom, with a broken knuckle.

There is to me no other joy comparable to

that of battling with wave and wind with sail or oars; or in running the white-water rapids of swift-flowing rivers where there is always just enough of the element of danger to lend that excitement which is the zest of life.

F. W. PITTINGER.

Gatun, Canal Zone.



PICKING UP NUGGETS Is Not As Easy As It Sounds

THE search for precious metals is a topic that always suggests adventure and romance. In addition, however, prospecting has its practical side, which must not be neglected if one is to make good at this exciting game. The following letters will be of interest to all readers who have ever daydreamed of digging up a fortune:

DEAR MR. WORTH: As there is little doing at the moment in the particular business in which I happen to be engaged, I have decided to take a year off and try my hand at prospecting. While I am not rich, I can easily lay off a year or so and try something else until times become more cheerful in my regular line.

Could you give me any practical information from one who is "hep" to the prospecting game as to how to go at it? What type of study should one devote himself to, preliminary to starting? That is, what books? Granted that I do find some minerals, how do I sell them? If you can give me some pointers at the start it will be possible for me to take care of myself thereafter.

FRANKLIN G.

Los Angeles, California.

And now W. H. K., of Wyoming, who has a gold mine of his own, answers Franklin G.'s inquiries:

DEAR MR. WORTH: I am very glad to give some advice to your prospective prospector, as this is a subject that few know how to approach. The uninitiated believes that all he has to do is to go into the field and pick up nuggets and that the rest will be easy. This is all correct, provided he can get the start—the picking up of the nuggets!

The old-time prospector, from the days of '49 onward, had a more or less virgin field in which to prospect. He was after gold, lead, silver, copper, zinc, and the more common ores that carried workable values. These virgin fields have been worked and reworked, until, to-day, the man who contemplates pros-

pecting should first become acquainted with his mineralogy and the marketing of the minerals. He should also be familiar with the recovery processes now in vogue.

He should know his methods of qualitative determination of minerals and can, with little practice, acquaint himself with the formulas given in the various field handbooks. He should cultivate that essential quality of being observing. This applies to geology as well as to the mineral-bearing strata he will encounter.

Another essential is that he know considerable about the methods of outdoor living. There are a great many who know little of catching fish. In the mountains, fish are some considerable asset to add to the usually staid bill of fare. Get a few trout into the frying pan and lay off some of the sour-dough bread for a meal or two.

After finding a prospect that seems to justify the expenditure of a little time and money, Mr. Prospector should check up on the best methods of opening the property so that the greatest and best showing can be made with a relatively small outlay of finance. He should then analyze his reduction and haulage problems. After this is done and the showing of valuable tonnage is made, he should immediately attempt to connect with parties who would be interested in investing with him, or in buying the property outright.

The present trend of finance is to buy outright instead of coming in with the finder. They feel that, after the find has been made, the development should be handled by men who have been trained for this kind of work. Therefore, it is frequently more logical for the prospector to make an outright sale of the property. Then he will have built himself up to where he can become the operator, instead of the prospector, should he want to make the change. By all means he should have good, but simple, handbooks for reference at all times.

W. H. K.

Lander, Wyoming.



WANTED—NEW FRIENDS A Golden Opportunity

MANY of our readers have discovered that letters bring a touch of romance to humdrum living. Others have obtained much desired and valuable information through correspondence. And the members of a third group have found in the writing and receiving of letters a cure for loneliness and sadness.

Maybe you will find just the friend you want among the following readers.

X I X wants to correspond with a mining man who writes English and who lives in Michoacan or Oaxaca, Mexico, near the mining camp of El-Oro, and who is familiar with the Ixtapan River and its headwaters.

EFFIE S., OF MASSACHUSETTS, would like especially to hear from some one who works on a steamship, but will be glad to answer all letters. She is twenty-eight years old and likes all sorts of sports. She is very lonely and sad.

L. F., OF ONTARIO, CANADA, is twenty-three years of age, a great lover of sports and outdoor life. After spending several years in a girls' boarding school and three years in a nurses' training school, she has fallen a prey to the wanderlust. She would like to correspond with any one who has any suggestions as to her practicing her profession and traveling.

M. H., OF NEW YORK CITY, has a peculiar hobby. For many years he has collected the labels on wooden match boxes, although, as he says, "they have no intrinsic value; they merely answer the collector's passion." He would like to hear from any readers who have a similar hobby.

If you would like to correspond with any of the above readers, send your letters to them in care of James Worth, and they will be promptly forwarded.

GOING WESTERN?

Are you planning to "go Western" on your vacation this year? There are few more invigorating or pleasant ways of putting in a holiday than on a dude ranch, with long, sunny days spent in the open, in the saddle, and nights under the whispering stars. Such a vacation sends one back to the job tanned, husky, and bubbling with renewed vitality.

And perhaps you are hoping, during your Western sojourn, to take in a real rodeo, with trick and fancy riding, steer roping, wild-horse racing, and championship bulldogging?

The editor of this department will be glad to tell you just how and where to "go Western." Upon request he will send you a list of excellent guest ranches, and will also furnish information about rodeos, as to when and where they are held. Write to James Worth, in care of Popular Magazine.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of The Popular Magazine, published monthly, at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1931.

State of New York, County of New York (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared George C. Smith, Jr., who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is Vice President of the Street & Smith Publications, Inc., publishers of The Popular Magazine, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor*, Richard F. Merrifield, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.;

George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, Jr., 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

GEORGE C. SMITH, Jr., Vice President,
Of Street & Smith Publications, Inc., publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of April, 1931. De Witt C. Van Valkenburgh, Notary Public No. 12, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1932.)

AND IN OUR NEXT—

THERE are many different types of stories, many ways of classifying them. There're the dull story, the entertaining story, the character kind and the action kind, and stories are serious or funny, fast or slow, exciting or mystifying, good or bad, modern or old-fashioned, foreign or domestic. The list can go on and on.

We are thinking now of two types not yet mentioned. We are thinking of them because Lieutenant Seymour G. Pond's new novel, which is to lead off the next number, represents one type—the better of the two.

By trial and error, *The Popular* for many years has discovered that its readers prefer this kind of story. Thousands of letters are in our files from all of you, mentioning many tales published in this magazine in past years—and in almost every case the stories were of the kind we have in mind.

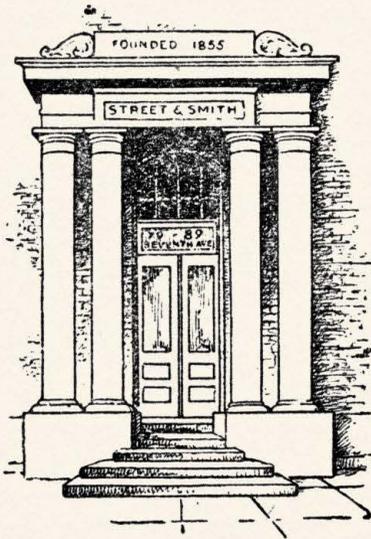
For convenience, let us call the lesser kind "superficial," and the more enduring one, "emotional." The first of the two touches only on the surface. The author feels no emotions when he writes, and his readers feel none as they read. The hero of the story is fighting his battles, true enough, but somehow he seems unaffected by them, or they are scraps which do not mean much in his life. You don't feel that he's concerned, deeply. There's nothing in

the yarn that stirs deep, human, responsive chords in you. You can't picture yourself in the shoes of this man. His problem is on the surface. It's trivial.

Lieutenant Pond's novel is an excellent example of the type we all prefer and remember. You'll get the idea from a brief description of it. His hero, just a regular guy, a newspaper reporter, quits his job, spends his last nickel on a ticket to Florida, his home, and goes to bed in the sleeper dreaming of palm trees and sunshine. But when he awakens in the morning, instead of Florida, he finds himself— Well, we won't tell you that part of it now.

The point is that he is stranded in a wilderness, broke, hunted, jobless. He doesn't even know where he is. He is face to face with life at its grimmest. From then on he must fight! And the fight goes on inside as well as outside. He accepts the bitter challenge of fate, accepts it with jaw set and eyes narrowed for the mortal combat—man versus hunger, despair, hardships.

Do you see what we mean? Now there you've got a vitally human problem before you. And Lieutenant Pond works out the situation masterfully, with rich human understanding, and with plenty of swift, dramatic action. This is one of the best novels of the year.



*Entrance to the buildings
where Street & Smith's
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Remember there is a Street & Smith magazine to fully satisfy the special taste of any reader. It pays to insist upon



STREET & SMITH'S

MAGAZINES

Between the Cross Fire of Police and Crook



Maxwell Sanderson, the "Noiseless Cracksman," fights to beat the game. Here's a genius gone wrong; but, right or wrong, he's still a genius at whatever he does. This time it's diamond smuggling!

With his friend, Barton Clark, Sanderson jumps into the middle of a precious-gem racket, and he carries with him brains worth their weight in bullets. Pitted against him are two of the very few opponents worthy of Sanderson's cunning—Minette and Pierre Leroux.

The Noiseless Cracksman has to prove that the king of diamonds is just one better than the queen. "One" is a slim margin, and Sanderson's chances of victory are as slim in this instance as they've ever been in all his adventurous career.

Read about his latest exploits in

THE KING OF DIAMONDS

By John Jay Chichester

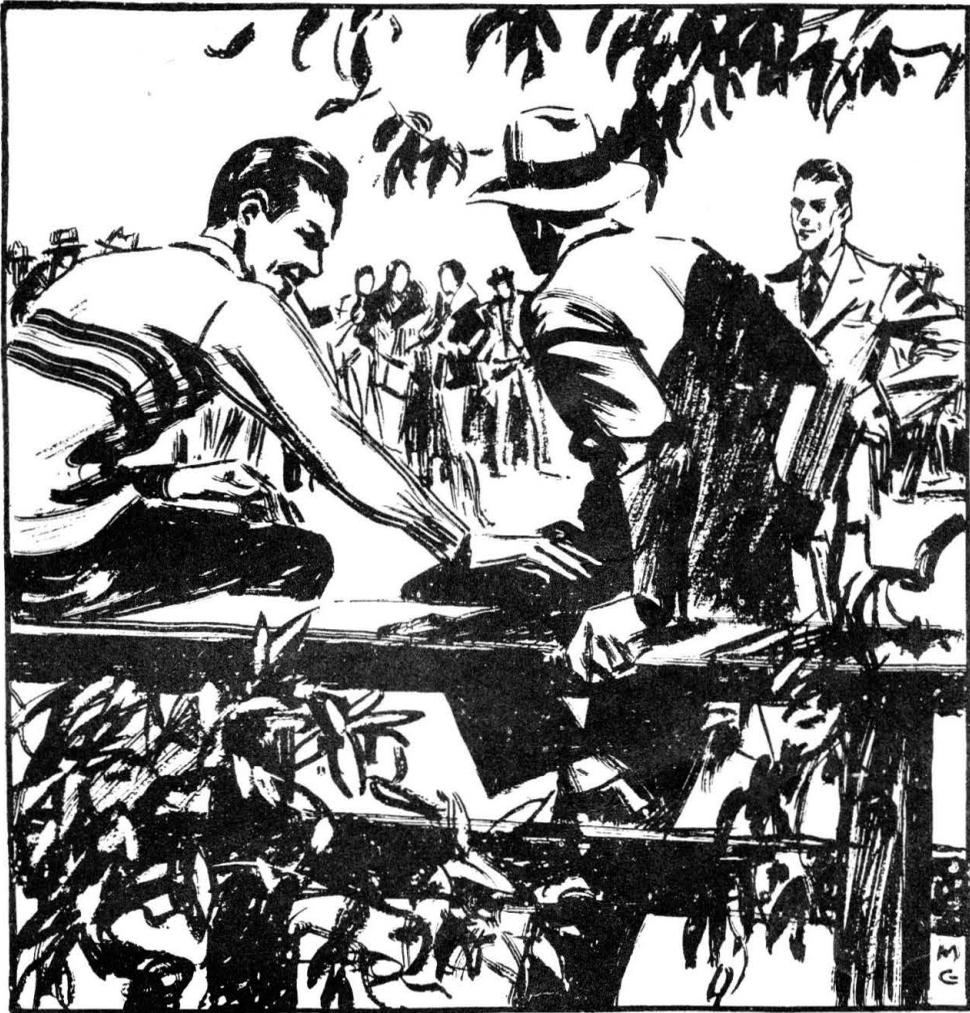
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The earlier adventures of this supercriminal can be found in the following novels by John Jay Chichester: "The Silent Cracksman," "Rogues of Fortune," and "Sanderson: Master Rogue."

CHELSEA HOUSE, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.



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CAMELS

TIGHT-SEALED IN MOISTURE-PROOF CELLOPHANE

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