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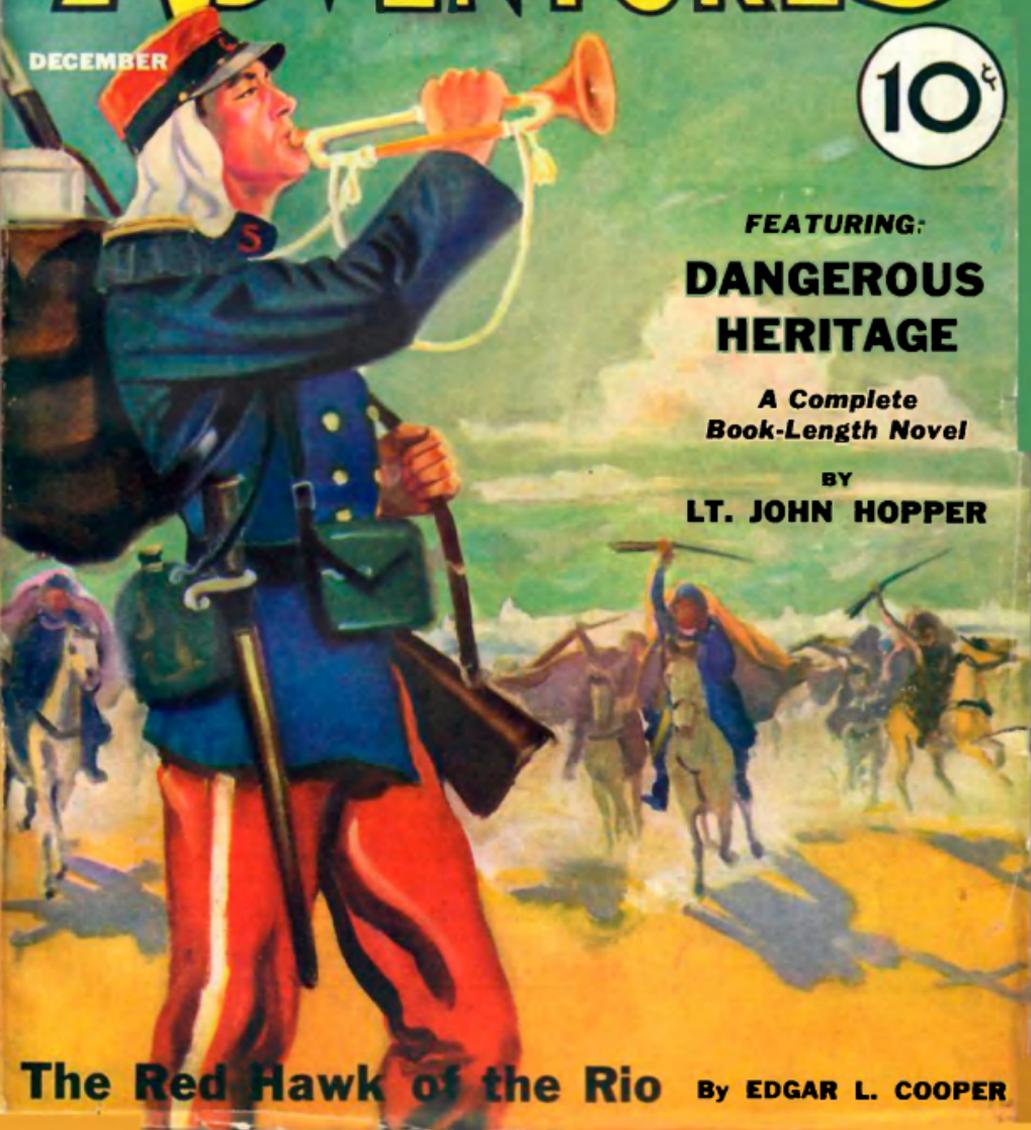
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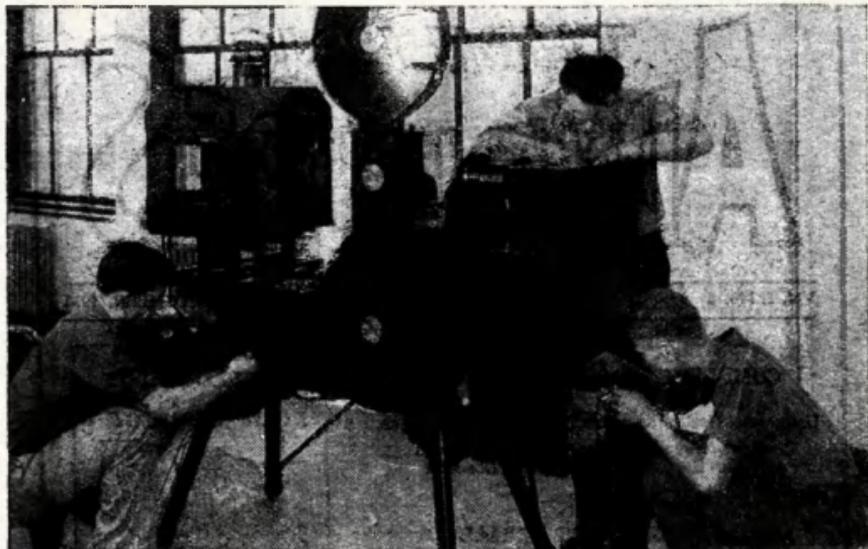
*A Complete
Book-Length Novel*

BY

LT. JOHN HOPPER



The Red Hawk of the Rio By EDGAR L. COOPER



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THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. I, No. 1

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

DECEMBER, 1931

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DANGEROUS



*A Swift-Moving, Exciting Story of Central America
and the Buried Wealth of the Gonzalez
for Which Many Men Lusted*

CHAPTER I

The Threat

IT had been a bleak November day. Now, at five o'clock, leaden gray clouds, promising snow were it not so cold, hung low over the vast city of Chicago. Bitter puffs of wind blowing in from the lake penetrated even the depths of the canyons of the Loop.

From the gaunt, massive office

buildings, festooned with golden necklaces in the form of lighted windows, the army of office workers was emerging. From one of the buildings, a lone girl, a straggler behind the pushing mob that had come out a few minutes before, stepped into the street. A biting blast nipped her firm, olive-brown cheeks, and caressed her shapely neck with icy fingers. With slim hands, she drew up the raccoon collar of her coat until the

A Complete Book-length Novel

HERITAGE



lower part of her face was shielded, leaving her large brown eyes, so intensely alive and sparkling, peeping over a rampart of fur.

She hesitated before the entrance of her building. At the same instant the door of a taxicab, which had been waiting beside the curb, opened and let out a heavyset, dark complected, well-dressed gentleman. He hurried to the girl, and touched his pearl gray hat.

"Lo, Celia!" he greeted. "How 'bout a nice little ride home, huh?"

Involuntarily, the girl shrank from him.

"No. No, no, thanks," she shook

her turbaned head, and smiled. "I really would like to walk. I need the fresh air and the exercise."

The man grinned tolerantly, masterfully. He took her arm and began urging her toward the cab. He was not to be denied. Nobody in Chicago dreamed of denying *him*.

With the powerful, well regulated purr of a special motor, the engine of his cab leapt into life. Then, off it glided, bearing him and the girl. And behind, unobtrusively, followed another softly purring cab, upon whose rear seat rested two lean, sharp-eyed, hard-visaged individuals whose business it was to follow the heavyset gentleman about in his vari-

By **LIEUTENANT JOHN HOPPER**

ous ramblings in and around the city of Chicago.

AT the time of this incident, the cop on the corner was greeting his relief. He indicated, by a slight nod of his head, the two cabs, and the man and the girl beside them. Then, covertly, the two policemen watched. When, finally, the two cars were being driven off, the old cop said to his young relief:

"That's Tony Mallow. The boys in the second cab are his guard. They follow him like shadows."

The youth's eyes widened.

"Tony Mallow—the boss of the Northside mob!" he ejaculated.

"Yep. The same—and in the flesh," confirmed the older man watching, with amusement, the other's youthful excitement. "The bird who's responsible for more killings, more robberies, more graft than any other guy in the country. That's him."

"Gee!" breathed the relief, while his eyes became rounder still. "But say, who's the dame?"

"Aw, I dunno. Some skirt or other. That's his only weakness, they say. Has a new one 'bout every week or so. He's the guy who can get 'em, too. They don't dare turn him down. Not if they wish their friends an' relatives to go on keepin' healthy an' happy. Some racket, eh?"

They laughed, and parted.

Tony was talking in his smooth, oily voice. Years ago, Tony had an accent. His English then was quite broken. In those early days, too, he had a nickname: "Tony, the Wop." But the passing years had done things for Tony. He was "big business" now. Forgotten was the dirty, one room speakeasy. Personally vain, he had hired tutors to break him of his accent, and had paid them well to forget that he had ever needed teaching.

Cecilia Gonzalez, her smooth, firm chin cupped in a gloved hand, stared out of the window of the cab at the tossing, darkening waters of Lake Michigan. She detested—and feared—the fat, greasy creature who sat beside her.

"I will come for you tonight, huh?" he was persuading.

"No!" she said sharply. "I don't care to go, I tell you. I have never been there, and I don't want to get started."

WITH a mean, half smile on his face, Tony began talking. And, as he talked, the girl's eyes widened with horror.

When he finished, she clutched his arm with her tiny, gloved hands.

"No, no!" she cried. "You wouldn't do that! Oh, you couldn't!"

"No?" asked Tony blandly. "What's to stop me?"

Both of them were unaware that the cabs had stopped. They were now in the apartment section of the city. The apartment before whose entrance they were was a "walk-up." Clean, neat, but cheap. It belonged to the same family as its neighbors that closely crowded about it.

Also, neither the man nor the girl noticed the young man in the apartment lobby gazing, disinterestedly, apparently, out at them.

Tony seized her hands, and with his prodigious strength, despite her struggling, drew her to him. He spoke rapidly and a little brokenly, as he always did when he was excited. His bad breath, coming hot upon her face, nauseated her.

"Come, listen to me, baby! I'm crazy for you! No. Not lika da rest. They were only women. You, ah, *Dio mio!* You are not lika those. I must have you! I gotta! Listen, baby. I got plenty da money. I geeve you everyt'ing. Fur coats. Autom-

biles. Diamonds. Evert'ing. You say yes, eh?"

"Oh, let me go! Let me go!" the girl cried.

With a sudden jerk, Cecilia pulled one of her hands free. There was a sharp crack. A dark red area, where her hand had struck, slowly began to appear on his smooth shaven jowl.

Still keeping her in his relentless grasp, he gazed, for the space of several seconds, into her white face and blazing eyes. In his own black eyes, a steady, intense fire smouldered. Down through the girl went a cold, paralyzing fear.

"Damn you!" he suddenly cried, and raised a heavy fist over her head. She shrank from the anticipated blow.

THE door of the cab opened. Not with a jerk as if the newcomer was in haste to interfere, but naturally, as if he were merely entering the cab to join the party.

A dry voice spoke, not excitedly, but almost drawling, in a matter of fact way.

"I wouldn't do that, Tony."

The Italian released the girl, and whirled to face the interrupter. Tony's face was suffused with apoplectic blood. Who dared to step in between him and what he was doing? Why had his henchmen permitted such a thing?

"Spike!" cried Cecilia. Relief, vast and instant, flooded her voice.

The young man, who stood with one foot on the ground and the other on the running board, who had one hand on the knob of the cab door and the other in his overcoat pocket, did not cease his gentle, steady gum chewing as he answered with a grin: "Me, honey."

FOR a full second, Tony Mallow and Spike Muldoon eyed each other. Tony's eyes were filled with

rage. Spike's blue ones, however, remained smiling and guileless. One might think, and have a perfect right for so doing, that Spike was a fool to stick his turned up nose into such a situation, especially when Tony, the boss of the underworld, was protected by his guards, proven killers. But, then, that one didn't know Spike Muldoon. Those who knew him, knew that behind those smiling eyes was steel, cold, hard, relentless.

"Whatcha want?" demanded Tony. "Why," protested Spike smilingly, "I only come after my girl. Thanks for bringin' her home, Tony."

In spite of his diplomatic nature, Tony could not help spitting out:

"Your girl!"

"Sure. My girl."

Outraged vanity became intense hatred in Tony Mallow's huge chest. For a second, he glanced back into the cab behind. His gunmen were regarding him intently. Their expressions told him nothing.

AND, in that second, Spike Muldoon's blue eyes narrowed the slightest fraction of an inch. But, his grin remained the same.

Tony hadn't climbed to where he was without some reason. His wily trickery had been his mainstay. Instinctively, he felt that in this situation, trickery would finally accomplish more than open gun play. No telling what Spike would do. And, what he couldn't do with a gun simply wasn't worth doing.

Tony pushed over and allowed the girl to step in front of him. In undertone, he muttered to her:

"Remember, girlie, the works if you don't. An' I'm the guy who can deliver the goods."

At Spike, he smiled amiably.

"See you tonight, Spike?"

"Okay, chief."

Spike Muldoon, his generous, well-

formed underjaw complacently working, rested his tall form against the lobby wall of the apartment, and gazed good-humoredly down at the heart he was worshipping the way her thick black curls escaped the close fitting, green felt hat.

"Tell me, Celia," asked Spike, "What did he say? I heard him warnin' you about 'the works.' Tell your old friend, Spike Muldoon himself, all about it. It helps sometimes, you know."

She wept silently against his broad shoulder.

"It's . . . it's my father."

Over her head, the face of Spike Muldoon lost its pleasant look. His eyes stared bleakly at the wall opposite. It was as he had guessed. Tony's usual game. The dirty rat!

HIS voice still remained smooth, gentle and unhurried. "Tell me about it, Cele," he coaxed.

From where she had her face buried in his overcoat, her voice came muffled, despairing.

"He said he would put father 'on the spot.' He said that the gang wanted to kill him for squealing on Dick Flucca. But he, Tony, had been holding them off on account of me. Now he says that unless I go with him, he'll have to step aside," the girl's voice broke, "and let what happens . . . happen."

Spike's sinewy fingers tightened on the girl's shoulder. Then he gently pushed her away from him. He tilted up her chin and looked down smiling into her wet, long-lashed eyes.

"Listen, kid. You're worryin' for nothin'. I can fix it okay? Now you run along upstairs an' forget it. An' don't get your old man worryin', neither, 'cause there ain't nothin' to this. Y'understand?"

She regarded him soberly.

"An'," he continued, "if that fat pig of a Tony comes around botherin'

you, just tell him to beat it. He won't do nothin' to you 'cause you're my girl. Ain't you, honey?"

For reply, she clung to him.

"It's you that I'm afraid for, Spike," she whispered. "Why don't you give it up? What does it get you? And some day, you'll . . . you'll——"

" . . . get put in jail, or get taken for a ride," he finished for her. "I know, honey. I know the speech all by heart, darlin'." He laughed.

Spike was youthful. He was confident of his ability to beat the game. He felt that he was a competent judge of what was right and what was wrong. Even Tony Mallow was careful of the jobs he assigned to Spike.

Spike was no criminal. He did more good than evil in the vast underworld of Chicago. His, always, was the helping hand to those down and out, or in trouble. Crooks respected him. Ladies of leisure mothered him.

It was to his early environment and to the stern necessity of making a living for a crippled father, an old mother, and a whole houseful of brothers and sisters that Spike owed his present position in life.

Cecelia Gonzalez knew all this. And, in her pretty head, there were visions of coaxing Spike into a new life, a life which all the world considered honorable and decent. She knew also, that a hard struggle lay before her. At the outset, there was Spike's love for adventure to be overcome. She knew, however, that some day she would win. And what a man he would be!

She patted the lapel of his coat. "I wish you would give it up."

"Maybe I will—some day. When I have a yacht, a house in the city, an' a house in the country—for you, darlin'.

"Now, you run along upstairs, an' remember, not a bit of a thought for that old scallywag, Mallow. Hear?"

She turned on the stairs and blew him a kiss.

Contentedly chewing, he passed out into the street.

AS Spike strode through the bracing November darkness, his thoughts became more sober. So that was the game, was it! Either Cecilia Gonzalez became Tony Mallow's moll, or her father would go on the spot. Spike's eyes narrowed. He spat viciously into the gutter.

Cecilia had told Spike the little she knew of the story of the Gonzalez. And, it was but very little, for the proud, dignified Gonzalez kept the secrets of his past history locked close in his gentle heart.

Cecilia's father, Dr. Felipe Gonzalez, was the last male member of a very old, very wealthy, and very prominent Spanish family of Central America. An unfortunate turn of political affairs in the little republic of Costa Bella, in which the Gonzalez family resided, and which they had helped to found several centuries ago, had forced the doctor to flee to the United States with his motherless daughter.

Cecilia had been five years old at the time. She recalled hardly anything at all of the pleasant, luxurious days in old Costa Bella, but her memory was very vivid regarding the later hardships when her father, friendless, penniless, unskilled at any task except the one of law-making, struggled for food and shelter, in an alien land, for his small daughter and himself.

The dauntless blood of the *conquistadores* of ancient Spain, which flowed in the veins of Gonzalez bore him through where a weaker man, with his background, and in his circumstances, would have failed, and taken a suicide's way out. His proud

spirit rose above the ignominy of the menial jobs he was forced to take, and be glad that he had the taking of them.

His head never bowed before the insults of those who imagined that his gracious manners, his gentle aloofness, sprang merely from a consciousness that he believed himself too good for the common association of the world.

The years, after all, had been kind to Gonzalez. His daughter had grown to be a lovely, intelligent woman. Some little comfort in material things of the world had been vouchsafed them. But the passing years had also powdered whitely his shock of uncombable hair. And further, his bright, black eyes stared more and more unseeingly upon the world about him. Perhaps now that his days of age were upon him, he saw all the more vividly the days of his youth, of his power, and of his wealth.

AT times, of a quiet evening, when the library lamp threw a golden bath over Cecilia's dark head as she bent over some sewing, he would turn to her from staring at the wall in front of him. He would make as if to speak. He would struggle with himself. Then, at last, he would sigh, and gently shake his white head. Perhaps it were better that she did not know.

Spike had heard whispers about the Flucca pinch, and the consequent rap. It was rumored that old Gonzalez had done the tipping off on Dick Flucca. There were reasons, too, for believing that. Hadn't the pock-marked, shifty-eyed Flucca been trying to pay attention to Gonzalez' pretty daughter? Hadn't the old man warned him to keep away, or he would see that Flucca was put where he wouldn't bother anybody any more?

Bad. Very bad. Spike hadn't paid

much attention to the silly talk. There were always all kinds of rumors floating around after a pinch.

He just hadn't been able to put the white-haired, gentle, courteous Gonzalez into the role of squealer. The old man wouldn't hurt a fly! Besides, where would he have gotten the information about Flucca? True, the old gentleman was a waiter in *The Mirrors*, Tony Mallow's night club. There it was, in the private rooms to the rear, that Tony had his headquarters. There it was that the boss held his "board meetings," planned this and that, entertained and celebrated.

But Gonzalez worked out front, with the playboys and the suckers. Why, he wasn't even in on the know. Of course, he might have heard a word or two now and then, dropped by some of the other waiters, or one of the boys.

Spike shook his head. He didn't believe it. The old man was simply a waiter, interested only in earning a living. It was unfortunate that he had found his way to *The Mirrors*, that he had been innocently instrumental to introducing his lovely daughter to the mob.

The insidious rumors were Tony's work all right. And the dumb eggs believed them. Nobody would kick if Gonzalez were put on the spot.

Spike came to a conclusion. Tonight he would have to have a little talk with Tony.

CHAPTER II

On the Spot

THE back room of *The Mirrors* was brilliantly lighted and garishly decorated. From the four walls hung black and white curtains decorated with glittering, silver, crescent moons. In the center of the room was a mahogany table supporting a

lamp, whose shade carried out the scheme of the curtains. Overstuffed chairs, with black and white coverings, were placed about.

In one of them sat Tony Mallow. His pudgy fingers toyed with the stem of the half-filled cocktail glass that stood on the end table beside the chair. Before him were grouped three taciturn looking individuals.

The door leading to the hall which connected with the night club proper opened and admitted the head waiter, a huge fellow in evening dress.

"Gonzalez ain't been around tonight, chief," he reported. Tony nodded his head, and the man retreated through the door.

"That won't save him!" he sneered at the men before him. He drained his glass, replaced it on the table, and wiped his thick lips on the back of his fat hand.

"You guys got it straight now?" he demanded. "You, Slim, stay here with me. That won't make him suspicious. Jack, you get behind the curtain. You know the place. Be sure you got the silencer on your rod, an' when I give the word, step out an' give him the works. An' Shorty, you go outside an' watch things through the peep in the wall. Just in case anythin' goes wrong. You birds get me?"

THE tallest of the trio, the man to whom Tony applied the name Slim, shook his head.

"I don't like it at all, chief. We ain't got nothin' 'gainst Spike. What's the lowdown, anyway?"

Tony's black eyes flashed. His voice, however, still remained smooth. Diplomacy, always.

"It ain't so much what I got against him, boys. But I don't quite trust him. You know, yourselves. Has he ever been in with us on any of the big jobs—jobs that take a

little guts? Have we got anything on him? No, not a thing. He's too wise, that guy. I wanta see what he's made of. You gotta. You know how it is in this racket. If he takes orders—if he comes through—I'll be just as tickled as you guys. An' nobody'll be hurt. Okay?"

The three still looked dubious.

"Suppose he don't take them orders, Mr. Mallow?" blurted Slim bluntly.

"What the hell!" cried Tony, rising from his chair. The gunmen involuntarily drew back from him. "You want that he should squeal sometime, maybe? You want to take a ride to the hot spot, eh? Are you goin' to do what I say or . . ."

"All right, Mr. Mallow," muttered Slim hastily. "Sure; it's okay by us."

"Then get in your places," ordered Tony. "He'll be here any minute."

Spike Muldoon stepped jauntily through the door. Grinning, he surveyed Tony in his chair, and the standing Slim.

"Lo, Spike," said the tactiturn Slim, without smiling.

The air was charged. Spike sensed it. He glanced casually around the room.

"Have a little drink? Yes?" Tony reached toward the buzzer on the wall.

"Not tonight, Tony. Thanks. Might be bad for my health." He selected a fresh stick of gum from his pocket, disrobed it, and placed it in his mouth. All the while, he studied the gang leader's face.

"What's on your mind, Tony?"

TONY shrugged his thick shoulders. "Just a little job, that's all, Spike," he said studiously. "Gotta be done. A squealer. Gotta take him for a ride. You remember Flucca, don't you, Spike?"

Slim moved uneasily. It was com-

ing. Spike's jaws kept up a calm movement, but his eyes narrowed just a trifle. He waited.

Tony was drawing patterns with the wet bottom of the glass on the end table.

"The bunch kinda thought you were the man for the job, Spike. The cops ain't got nothin' on you. An' it might be kinda embarrassin' for us if the coppers figured us for another killin' right now. Ain't it so, Slim?"

The gentleman appealed to silently nodded his head.

Spike's tone was indifferent, although his blood was pounding through his veins.

"Who's this guy, Tony?"

"Gonzalez. That dirty rat of a waiter. He squealed. He knows too much. He's gotta go."

FOR several seconds, there was silence in the room. From far away came the *throb-throb* of the orchestra. Outside, people were drinking Tony's bootleg liquor. Outside, good citizens were casting their cares and troubles away in a little innocent fun. Outside, there was laughter and merry, gay life.

Inside the room, a curtain moved a fraction of an inch. Jack was getting nervous.

Now, Spike's grin was thoughtful, but it appeared as disarming as ever. Slim breathed more freely. Sure; Spike was a regular guy! He had known it all the time.

"Where did you get the dope, Tony, my lad?" Spike's voice was low.

Again, Tony shrugged his shoulders.

"From a stoolie down at headquarters."

Spike's grin faded. His jaws became grim as they clamped on the gum.

"You're a liar!"

The place seemed as silent as a tomb. Tenseness gripped all occupants of it, and blotted out even the music and laughing voices of the reveling night club.

Tony merely spread his fat, white palms in a deprecatory gesture.

"You snitched on Flucca yourself!" continued Spike. "He was playin' around Gonzalez' daughter too much to suit you. Now you're out to get rid of me!"

Spike laughed grimly.

"You got me framed nice, ain't you? If I bump off Gonzalez, you'll make certain that his girl hears I done it. An' how wonderful that would make it for me! If I don't bump him off, I'm renegin' on the mob. Sweet! Very, very sweet! An' just like yourself, Tony, the Wop!"

Tony's black eyebrows beetled. His lips parted in a snarl, exposing his large, white teeth.

"Trot out your killers, guy," taunted Spike.

Not a person in the room moved.

"No? All right, then. But before I'll be leavin', allow me to tell you a few things. The girl an' her pa are to be left alone. Your dirty, black head the price of it. As for me, I ain't enjoyin' the pleasure of your company any more. I'll be hangin' around with Skeets Murphy an' his mob in case you want to see me. I should have stuck with my own race long ago. That's what I get for tryin' to be of use to a blitherin', ignorant dago like you!"

"Now Slim, kindly step out of the way, for I would be on the way, an' the air in here is that foul that it fair makes me sick."

"Not so fast, you squealin', yellow Irish dog of a dog!" screamed the infuriated Tony. "Come on out, boys!"

JACK stepped from behind the curtain, and Spike looked into that little muzzle attachment that would smother all sound of his passing from this world into the next. Through another door, in-walked Shorty, holding in his fist a mate to the weapon leveled by his comrade Jack.

Knowing that he was in a "hot spot" for certain, yet the grin on Spike Muldoon's lean features broadened. He looked from one face to another. In each, he read the same message. He was going over to a rival gang. He would give away secrets. No. He would die—right here, now, in this room.

"Now, my frien'," breathed Tony, his beady eyes glittering. "What you say now, eh? You go on a long, long ride out Woodstock way, an' you never come back." He spat. "You big damn fool! Your girl? Huh! Tony's girl. How you like it?"

Spike counted seconds. Tiny beads of perspiration were beginning to gather at his sandy temples. He kept stealing glances out of the corners of his eyes at the door on the other side of the room. He dared not look too frequently. If they should suspect.

His heart gave a tremendous bound. Softly, slowly, the shiny door was commencing to yield. Little by little. Now, a fiery red crop of hair was in. Now, a brick red face, fat and round, like a scarlet moon. In it stood out two, startling blue eyes, which twinkled like Spike's own. Those blue eyes cautiously surveyed the room, and then returned to rest on Spike's expressionless face. Incurably, one eyelid dropped down to cover a blue eye. In spite of his precarious circumstance, Spike's grin broadened a shade more. A wink—at a time like this!

"I say goodbye to you now, my frien'," smiled Tony oilyly. "I give

Celia your love, eh? An' tell her you'll not be back for a long time."

Tony started to make the motion with his head that would signal Jack, the killer, to finish the business. Spike's heart was thumping heavily. Curse that red-faced imp at the door! What was he waiting for? Did he want them to turn around, to get the drop on him, and shoot it out? If he didn't speed up, the act would be crabbed for sure.

"Drop thim popguns, or I'll be lavin' yez taste a man-sized chunk o' lead!" shrilled a squeaky voice, quite out of proportion to the bulky body from which it came. In comparison with the broad brogue, Spike Muldoon spoke perfect English.

IN THROUGH the door, before the astonished gaze of Tony and his disciples, bounced a regular rubber ball of an Irishman. The cannon he held in his right fist might easily have enlisted in any battery of Field Artillery. Up went four pairs of arms.

"Spike, darlint," continued the red-faced, perspiring grinning intruder, "do go an' collect those dreadful instruments of human destruction. They'll come in handy fer souvenirs fer the kids."

Spike Muldoon laughed outright at the dazed, frustrated expressions on the faces of his late captors. When he had collected the four guns, he said, in a mocking tone which wrung the very soul of Tony Mallow:

"Gentlemen, it gives me a very great pleasure, I assure you, to introduce my brother Tim. He belongs to the greatest mob in the world, the Muldoon gang. Ever hear of it before? Tony, if you don't watch your step, an' be a good boy from now on, I'm thinkin' you'll after be hearin' more o' the Muldoons.

"I'm surprised at you, Tony! How could you be thinkin' that Spike Muldoon would walk into your little

spider's nest with nary a thought for the gettin' out again?"

Tony cursed vehemently in Italian, but precipitatedly stretched for the ceiling as Tim Muldoon waved his cannon toward him.

"Stop it, be jabbers!" demanded the insolent Tim. "I can't understand the lingo, an' how do I know that you be not swearin' at me?"

A minute later, when the brothers stepped out into the biting winds of the now deserted streets, Spike yelled down to his short, tubby brother:

"Tim, my lad, I'm proud of you! You were a smashin' hit!"

CHAPTER III

Unexpected Visitors

CECILIA opened the door of the apartment, and hurled herself into the arms of the delighted, but somewhat taken back Spike.

"Darling," she breathed. "Darling, I've been so afraid."

Spike knew that she had been afraid for him. A lump came into his throat. Gee, it was great and wonderful, to have a girl like Cecilia feel that way about you! He would fight a dozen Tony Mallows, if need be, for her.

"Come on," she whispered, leading the way to the small, neat, enamel and tile kitchen. "My father has visitors in the living room tonight."

"Visitors?" Tony raised his sandy eyebrows.

"Oh, yes," she explained. "Two men from his own country. They walked in on him unexpectedly. You should have seen his face when he saw them! He was so excited. He shooed me out to the kitchen to do the supper dishes, and won't let me come near the living room. That's why he didn't go to work tonight. Poor father! I don't blame him. It's so long since he has seen anybody from his own country."

For a minute, the mention of visitors had Spike worried. But Cecilia's explanation relieved his mind.

"Now, what happened tonight?" demanded Celia, resting her elbows on the top of the kitchen table, and gazing across at Spike.

"Aw, nothin' much," he smiled. "Only Tony won't be botherin' you any more, I guess."

Her heart leaped.

"Spike, you didn't—you didn't——"

"Naw. I didn't. Why should I waste my time killin' a guy like him? We just had an understandin', that's all."

CELIA smiled her relief.

"I'm glad you didn't, Spike. I hate to think of you doing anything like that."

"Can't be helped, sometimes," he said philosophically. "But listen, Cele; your old man doesn't want to work at *The Mirrors* any more. In the first place, it's Tony's hangout. Besides, it's a rummy joint. Somethin's goin' to happen there some day. Your father can get lots of jobs besides that."

For a little while, Celia was silent. From the living room came a constant hum of voices. Strange sounding, foreign voices. Occasionally, one or another voice would rise higher than the rest. Those louder voices, were they becoming more and more frequent, angry? Were they urging something? Were they demanding? It was so hard to tell when the words were of unknown tongue. More than once, Spike turned his face toward the living room, as he caught a sharp tone, to listen.

Words from the living room were rising higher. It sounded as if all in there were speaking at the same time. Spike's eyebrows beetled. He looked at Celia. Now, she, too, was listening; her red lips parted as she strove to catch the words.

Perplexedly, she turned to Spike. "I can't imagine what on earth——"

Her statement was cut short by a string of sharp, short, clearly enunciated, Spanish words. Her face whitened. Her hand flew to her heart. Watching her, Spike rose half out of his chair, his hands gripping the table.

"What's the trouble, honey? What's wrong?"

She had no time to reply. From the living room came a cry of appeal, followed immediately by a grunt, as if some one had been suddenly struck forcibly in the pit of the stomach. Then, from the now silent living room came a groaning, most terrible to hear.

"Father!" screamed Celia, rushing out into the hall.

But Spike overtook her, and with one sweeping motion of his arm, thrust her behind him. An ugly, short-nosed automatic gleamed in his hand.

FROM the living room, a small, brown-skinned man stepped cautiously into the hall. In his hand was a pointed, narrow-bladed knife. Glancing up, and finding the narrowed, steel blue eyes of Spike upon him, he stood as if petrified. From the consternation written large on his small, pointed face, it was easy to see that he had expected to deal with no one but the girl. For an instant, the two men stared at each other. All the while, Spikes' jaw worked slowly and steadily with his gum.

As Spike advanced, his gun directed squarely at the breast of the man, that individual slowly began to back himself through the doorway of the living room. Suddely, Spike lunged forward, but he was just a fraction of a second too late in his estimate. He took the slamming door on the point of his shoulder. Exerting all

his strength, Spike shoved. The man, whose weight was against the door on the other side, gave way a few inches. But before Spike could squeeze his body through the opening, the door was held.

"Open the door!" Spike's voice was a grim, menacing command. The sobbing girl, down on her knees in the hall, was driving him on. "Open that door, or I'll blow my way through it!"

At that instant, the door, with a jerk, swung wide. Caught unexpectedly, Spike stumbled through. He had a fleeting glimpse of another brown-skinned man at the far side of the room. He saw the upraised arm. He tried to lift his gun to fire. But he had not yet regained his balance after his unexpected plunge.

There was a slight, swishing sound in the air. At the same instant it ceased, Spike felt a burning sensation in his right shoulder. The suddenly nerveless fingers of his hand were powerless to prevent his pistol from thudding upon the carpet. The first brown-skinned man darted forward and retrieved it.

Bewildered, Spike glanced down at his shoulder where a small, pearl-handled knife lay imbedded. For a second, he did not seem to comprehend. This was the first time that anything like this had happened to him. No one had ever gotten the better of Spike Muldoon before. A wave of dizziness swept him.

When his head cleared, he found himself staring into the mouth of his own gun.

CHAPTER IV

Murder—Wholesale

THE *senor* would interfere, yes?" said the small, slender man before him. "But it is too bad! We have no interest in you. However," he shrugged his thin

shoulders, "that cannot be helped—now."

He turned to his companion.

"Pedro, the *senorita*. She must be brought in here."

While Pedro went to secure Cecilia, his comrade, who seemed to be the leader of the two, motioned Spike to a chair. "It is better that you sit down, perhaps?" he asked courteously. "No doubt you are feeling a little bit sick at the stomach."

Spike took a step, and nearly fell. Night, filled with millions of glittering dots, tried to envelope his brain. He knew that he had lost much blood.

Somehow, he dragged himself to a chair, and sat down heavily upon it. He felt better. With the keen eyes of the other upon him, Spike took hold of the knife handle, and gave it a quick jerk. It was out, but that searing, now throbbing pain increased a hundredfold.

"Bravo!" murmured the man regarding him. "Now, if you please, *senor*, that knife you will toss out to the middle of the floor, so, *Gracias*."

SITTING in the chair, Spike began to feel better. By holding his handkerchief over the mouth of the wound, he had managed to stay the steady flow of blood. He commenced to take cognizance of the situation.

Not five feet away from him, on the floor, dying the carpet red with his life's blood, lay the white-haired Gonzalez. His hands were clenching a pearl-handled knife in his stomach. He was not dead. He was still groaning; but his groans resembled labored breathing from the little sound they made.

What was it all about? Spike racked his brain for an answer. Tony Mallow's work. No. These men didn't belong to Tony's mob. This seemed like something more sinister; yes, more deadly than mob jealousies

and fights. What was it all about!

Pedro entered, half-leading, half-dragging Cecilia. When the girl saw her father, she uttered a dreadful cry, and flew to her knees beside him.

"My father! My father!" she begged, lifting his thin, torture drawn face, and white hair, to her lap. "Speak to me! Speak to me! Oh—oh—oh—"

Her voice was pitiful to hear. Spike clenched his teeth, his eyelids, his fists. In sympathy with that girl, he was going through tortures of the damned.

He opened his eyes again. What devils were these who had so calmly, so cold-bloodedly done this frightful thing?

THEY resembled each other greatly, this Pedro and his companion. They were both of small stature and slender build. Their dark suits were of expensive make, and similar in fashion. The light brown skins of both were innocent of beard. Their long, jet-black, silky hair was drawn back over their foreheads in pompadours. The truth flashed home to Spike. They were brothers—twins! "We must hasten, Francisco!" Pedro cautioned his brother. "The girl will make the old one tell."

Francisco stood beside Spike's chair. Spike's gun, which he held in his hand, never wavered from the direction of Spike's head.

The slim, brown hand of Pedro tugged at Celia's shoulder. She, however, seemed beyond giving heed. When, finally, Pedro managed to draw her attention, she stared at him with wide, dazed eyes.

"You must," he insisted smoothly, "ask your father where is the hiding place of the Gonzalez jewels and gold that he hid fourteen years ago, during the revolution."

Pedro saw that she did not com-

prehend. In front of her eyes he passed his knife, the very, blood-stained knife which Spike had tossed to the center of the room a few minutes before.

"Ask!" he demanded. "The jewels, the gold of the Gonzalez. Where has the old one hidden them?"

SPIKE half rose from his chair, murderous lights glinting from his blue eyes. Francisco pressed the cold, round circle of the mouth of the gun against his face. Spike dropped back into his chair.

"I don't know!" The girl was hysterical. "I don't know!"

Pedro's black eyes flashed. He bent his face close to the girl's. "He knows!" he cried, pointing with his knife to her father's prostrate body. "He will tell you. It is better so. If not—" Pedro's gesture with the knife conveyed the meaning of his incompleted sentence.

Gonzalez stirred. With effort, he turned his head so that his pain-filled eyes could look up into his daughter's face.

"No," he breathed. "No—I will not—tell. It is—it is—your heritage—my daughter."

Pedro cursed. With one arm, he seized Celia, and bore her backwards. He placed the point of the knife against her smooth, slender, white throat.

"You like, old man," he hissed, "to see the lovely throat of your daughter slit, like the neck of a chicken, here before your eyes? Tell, or *por Dios*, it will be done!"

Spike's fists were clenching and unclenching. He gathered his muscles for a spring. He knew, however, that he could not succeed in preventing the final outcome. They were trapped—trapped by two unknown, undersized foreigners, with hairless faces as smooth as boys'.

The predicament was doubly bitter

for Spike Muldoon. He had prided himself upon his ability to take care of himself in the gangland of Chicago. Chicago's gangland, the toughest, most merciless area in the world. And here he was, like a hick, trapped by a simple trick, by two spiggoties whose patent leather black hair would turn white in a little, innocent Chicago stickup!

Well, he was facing the fade-out at last. He hadn't expected that it would come like this. Spike was fully aware that the instant he moved, a finger would press the trigger of that gun beside his head—then he would know no more.

GONZALEZ, in hoarse syllables, was speaking again. His gaze, bright from the burning pain in his veins, stayed glued to the face of his daughter.

"The ancient heirlooms, the family plate, the gold . . . of the Gonzalez . . . are buried. . . ." His words became faint. With intense concentration, Pedro bent over him. ". . . on the Gonzalez ranch . . . twenty miles from . . . the capitol . . . Las Vegas."

He stopped. His breath came and went in short, hard gasps.

Except for the old man's loud, ghastly breathing, the room was tense in its silence. Far down, upon the cold street, the occasional honk of a late roving taxi could be heard very plainly.

"Go on!" demanded Pedro, licking his dry lips. "Where, on the ranch?"

Once more, Celia's father summoned strength from his weakening body to speak. His life was rapidly ebbing away.

"In the bottom drawer of the dresser . . . in my room . . . there is . . . an envelope. It is . . . addressed to my daughter. In it . . . you will find. . ."

His voice faded into nothing. On

his daughter's lap, his frail body twisted convulsively. Suddenly, he raised himself bolt upright.

"Cecilia!" he called. His voice was strong and clear. His eyes, however, looked far away, over her head. "My daughter . . . your uncle . . . he. . ."

ALL at once, he crumpled. The will having left his body, he fell back heavily. Spike knew that Doctor Felipe Gonzalez was dead.

"Father!" cried Celia, in mortal terror. "My father! Speak to me!" She cupped his thin, careworn face in her hands. "Oh, speak to me!"

"Pedro," ordered Francisco. "The letter. Go and find it."

While Pedro went to ransack the dresser in the bedroom, the only sound in the living room was the hectic sobbing of Cecilia. Francisco stood carefully on guard, his black eyes somberly going from the girl and her father to his prisoner, and back again.

Spike stared morosely at the floor. An insane rage was seething in his breast. But, what could he do? The drop was on him, and on him right. He was helpless to do anything himself. He could expect no help from outside.

Curse these apartment dwellers! Doubtless, in some of the apartments around, some one heard peculiar noises issuing from the home of the Gonzalez. But, if any heard, they would keep on playing the radio, playing their bridge; go on with their laughing and talking. That is the way of a big city. No one knows, no one cares what happens in the next apartment.

Pedro re-entered the room. His eyes were sparkling with triumph.

"It is here, my brother!" he called, waving a long, time-stained envelope. "Under the palm trees, north of the garden. Now there is nothing left for

us to do but return and collect our reward. A very great one, too, it shall be."

Francisco's eyes, too, sparkled as he caught sight of the envelope. But his thoughts returned quickly to the work at hand.

"We must," he said to Pedro, "leave no clues. It is unfortunate, but it is necessary. Pedro, the *senorita*. You know what to do." He laughed a little. "No one, my little brother, knows how to do it so well. A quick stroke; a painless one. *Bastante*."

"As for you, *senor*," he returned to Spike, "as I have said before, it is most unfortunate that you are here. You understand," he said deprecatingly, "that we have no quarrel with you. But, however, you must also understand that at times certain measures are most necessary. I am sorry. But it is not so bad. You love her, yes? You will be together for always."

Now!

SPIKE tensed himself to spring upon Pedro, who was already stealthily advancing, knife in hand, upon Celia, who shrank from him in horror.

The door of the room flew open.

Crash! The shot reverberated deafeningly through the small apartment. Francisco threw back his head. The muscles in his brown neck writhed and knotted. The pistol he had lately held at Spike's head dropped from his hand to the floor. A second later, he thudded down beside it.

With a snarl of fear and rage, Pedro whirled from the girl to face the newcomers at the door. A second automatic barked, and Pedro pitched forward across the body of the *Senor Gonzalez*.

All this while, Spike Muldoon did not remain inactive. He took one look at the two figures by the door, and knew what was coming. He slid out of the chair to his knees. Hastily his

fingers groped for the gun, his gun, which lay beside Francisco. He found it! His left hand closed lovingly over the butt.

Like a flash, he raised and fired. The second shot, that which finished Pedro, had hardly rung out, when there were two more, in rapid succession.

Jack, the Killer, pitched crazily into the room, and fell on his face.

SHORTY NICCOLA fired once more. His bullet smashed into the table beside Spike's head. Twice more, Spike's automatic spat viciously. Shorty screamed in pain, and grabbed at his shoulder. Then, turning heel, he precipitatedly fled.

Now the apartment house was in an uproar. Windows banged open. Out popped heads. And, just as quickly, they popped in again. Loud voices were calling to one another. Women shrieked.

Down in the street, police whistles were shrilling excitedly.

In spite of his wound and his weakness, Spike got to his feet, his pistol still gripped in his hand. He knelt beside Celia's still form.

"Listen, honey!" he pleaded. "Wake up. I haven't got time to lose. Darlin', please snap into it!"

Her eyelids fluttered. Then, her liquid brown eyes were staring up at him.

"Spike!" she whispered.

"It's all right, honey," he soothed, stroking her hair. "You ain't hurt, mavourneen. But listen," he spoke rapidly. "I gotta go. If the coppers catch me here, it'll be a Chinaman's chance I'll be havin'."

"You're okay, Cele. Everythin' will come out all right. See my brother Tim. He'll tell you what to do. I'm goin' to beat it now. Tim'll tell you where you can get hold of me.

"An' listen, Cele. Hold on to that paper. There's somethin' to it, or

them guys wouldn't a come way up here after it.

"Remember — everythin' will be okay. Don't worry. So long—sweet-heart!"

She scrambled to her feet. "Spike!" she called. "Spike!" But he was already struggling down the fire escape.

A minute later, the police burst in to the room.

CHAPTER V

Tim Pulls a Fast One

NEW YORK.

In a small, shabby, downtown hotel, Spike Muldoon, drumming his fingernails in an endless tattoo on the sill, sat by the window of his meagerly furnished room. Snow was falling on the wet, glistening, black pavements. Passersby hurried over them, their coat collars turned up about their ears. Every now and then, a roar would fill the room as an elevated train, whose tracks lay right outside the window, thundered past. A dreary, lonesome scene.

With a sigh of sheer boredom, he got up and wandered about the room. He stopped in front of his suitcase and eyed it distastefully. At last, he reached over, opened it, and extracted from it a newspaper clipping which lay on the top.

For the thousandth time he re-read it. It bore the date of a month ago.

FOUR MURDERED IN CHICAGO APARTMENT

Jack, the Killer, Noted Chicago Gunman Slain

*Dragnet Out for Spike Muldoon,
Chief Lieutenant of Tony Mallow*

Gangster's Girl Tells Fantastic Story
of Hidden Tropical Treasure

Chicago, Ill., Nov. 12.—Early this morning the dwellers in Laura Court, northside apartment house, were aroused by a fusillade of shots. In the apartment of Felipe Gonzalez, a native of Central America, four men were found murdered, among them Gonzalez himself. His pretty daughter was the only living person in the place.

This wholesale murder is believed to be the outcome of gang jealousy and rivalry, in which the girl, Cecilia Gonzalez, had a prominent part.

Two of the murdered men are unknown to these parts. They were . . .

He relived the fateful night over again. What had brought those two spiggoties to the United States at this time, fourteen years after Gonzalez had been driven from his country? Who were they? Where had they gotten wind of the buried treasure? Were they acting on their own, or were there others in this country, waiting for the present situation to blow over, before they tried again to secure the letter?

These questions tormented Spike. Down in his heart, he had a conviction that Pedro and Francisco had been tools, albeit clever tools, for some one else. A mind, a will power, a trickery superior to theirs was behind it all. When would the toils, of her father's unwitting weaving, reach out for her again?

Such thoughts were too much for him. Spike sprang to his feet, and began his restless striding up and down his little cage.

THERE was Tony Mallow, besides. That Tony had intentionally and deliberately disregarded the orders of Spike was evident by the quick visit of Jack, the Killer, and Shorty Nicola to the apartment of Gonzalez. Spike knew what that had been about. Jack and Shorty had gone there with the intention of taking the alleged squealer Gonzalez for a ride. No doubt, if they had been successful, he,

Spike, would have been the next on Tony's list. That would have left the boss gangster a clear field with the girl. And, there would have been ways and means of getting around her.

It had been lucky that Tony Malloy did think so little of Spike's threats. If Jack and Shorty hadn't arrived on the scene that night, and, seeing the gun in Francisco's hand, hadn't opened up on him, it would have been curtains for Spike Muldoon and very possibly for Celia Gonzalez, too.

The room was not especially warm, but, nevertheless, sweat began to break out on Spike's temples. This worrying, this hearing nothing, this inability to do anything about the situation, had been bearing down on his nerves for days. When the police investigations were over, when the publicity had dwindled to nothing, Celia would be in a hot spot for certain. Then would Tony start the machinery going to take that which he desired.

It would be a race, a race in which the competitors were unknown to each other, a race in which each thought he ran alone. Who would win; the leering, greasy Tony Malloy, or the sinister, unknown power from Central America?

SPIKE stood in front of his window, his hands behind his back, clasping and unclasping nervously.

There came a knock on his door.

His heart quickened its beating. Whirling about, his hand on the gun in his hip pocket, he called guardedly:

"Who is it?"

Coming indistinct, muffled, through the door, a voice was speaking his name. Did he know that voice? Relief, happiness, like rays of sunshine, dispelled the gloom on his face. With one, joyous bound, he was at the door and flinging it open.

"Celia . . . darlin'! Oh, but I've been worryin' about you, sweetheart!"

His pent-up emotions overwhelmed him. He seized her in his arms, made her breathless with his kisses. Then, he held her off from him to see how she looked. Undoubtedly, she had changed a little. Who wouldn't—after what she had been through! She had thrown open her 'coon skin coat. Spike could see that she was clad trimly, charmingly in a dark traveling suit with white silk waist. A piping of white edged her chic, black turban.

BUT it was an older, a more serious Celia who tearfully returned his gaze. And, thought Spike, a sweeter, lovelier woman for all of that.

"Spike! Your shoulder?"

"Ah, good as new!" he grinned, slapping it to show her.

By now, the third person in the room felt that he should announce himself.

"Spikie, darlint! Have ye no word fer your brother after what he's brought ye?" Tim's red face beamed archly.

"Tim, you old devil!" shouted Spike. "I knew you'd do somethin' like this! You ain't a Muldoon for nothin', big boy!"

After Celia had been seated in the one chair of the room, and Spike and Tim were perched upon the bed, which sagged perilously, Spike demanded:

"What's the news from Chi?"

"Plinty!" grinned Tim. "An' right about now, I'm bettin' there's the divil himself to pay! Ain't it so, now, Celia, darlint?"

She smilingly nodded her head.

"He's wonderful, Spike!" she said. "I don't know what I'd have done without him."

"Sure," agreed Spike, grinning, and placing his arm around Tim's massive shoulders. "He's a Muldoon, Celia,"

"Well," continued Tim, "with wan

thing an' another, we had a helluva time. Poor Celia! It was disgraceful the way thim billygoats of policemin and reporters kept after her. But after a while, it all died down kind av gradual like.

"Thin we missed the letter."

"The letter?" repeated Spike.

"Sure. The letter that tells where the buried traysure is. Swiped, snatched. Psst! Just like that!"

A flow of questions were at the tip of Spike's tongue.

"Sure now, don't be interruptin' me!" protested Tim. "It was Tony Mallow himself that pinched it, the dirty, thievin' black-hearted wretch! Oh, he has a good eye, bad cess to it, fer anythin' that's goin' on, whither it be girrrls, buried traysure, an' sich like!"

"Has he got it now?" demanded Spike.

TIM thought the question the greatest joke in the world. He shook with laughter. Finally, before Spike's disapproving gaze, he quieted down. A cunning twinkle flamed in his blue eyes.

"It's me that has it, Spike, darlint." He winked, and tapped his breast. "Right here in me coat."

"But how——"

"Aw, aysey!" He waved his hand jauntily in the air. "Skeets Murphy an' me got it back."

"Skeets Murphy!"

"Fer sartin! Who else? Me an' Skeets are just like that." Tim put two fingers together. "After you left, I joined up with his mob. Spike, ye have the gr-randest reputation, darlint! Skeets' boys were that tickled to have a Muldoon fer their very own, that there wasn't a thing they couldn't do fer me.

"But the letter. Do be patient, an' I will come to it in the due course of time."

Here, Tim felt obliged to rock with laughter again, much to the impatience and growing mystification of his brother.

"Ow—it was the gr-grandest jokel! Ye'd av died laughin', Spikie, dear! Get a load av this now. The letter was in the safe, an' we lifted the letter, safe, an' all!

"It's me own chance fer a resarved seat in hivin I'd av given to uv seen his black mug whin he looked into the empty hole in the wall, where there was neither hide nor hair of his precious, old strong box.

"But it was the ayseyest trick in the wor-ld! Me an' a few av the boys got a truck on which was painted, nice as ye please, 'JOHN STRONG—SAFES AND VAULTS OF ALL DESCRIPTIONS.' With that, no less, we drives up, in broad daylight, mind ye, in front of Tony's place, *The Mirrors*.

"Is this the office of Mr. Tony Mallow?" we inquires swately of the John inside. 'Well, it might be,' he growls suspicious like at us. 'What would yez be after wantin'?'

"It's the safe in the back room, we come after," I says. 'It was Mr. Mallow himself who was after step-pin' into the store this very mornin', an' says as how he do be needin' a real safe to take the place of the tin box he has here. So, me boy, bein' always on the job, we comes up im-medjitly to remove the auld safe. An' whin the whistle blows one o'clock, we'll be back as soon as that with a gr-rand new cash box that Jimmy Valentine himself couldn't open.'

"The John scratches his head, an' looks kinda dubious like. 'Mr. Mallow didn't say nothin' to me about a new safe,' he says. 'I'll have to call him up to find out about it.'

"'Aw, that's all right,' interrupts wan av the boys. 'Here's a little mes-

sage to tell ye that everythin's okay.' With that, he shoves his rod against the John's ribs.

"From thin on, Spikie, dear, we had no trouble at all. With the safe safely aboard, we rattled away to Skeets' hangout where wan av the boys, who was kinda handy that way, opens the door in less time than it takes to tell it. An', sure enough, there was Celia's letter, just as big as life."

GRINNING broadly, Spike slapped his younger brother on his husky back. "Tim Muldoon, you'll be the death of me yet, with your scally-wag tricks!" With a pleased smirk on his moonlike face, Timothy glanced at the smiling Cecilia.

"Now," he stated complacently, "that we're all here together again, nice, comfortable, an' homelike, we'd better be makin' our plans."

A frown gathered the eyebrows of Spike Muldoon. In Chicago, he would have known what plans to make. Celia would marry him now. There was nothing to hold her back. Her father was dead. She and Spike would get a cozy apartment. A glowing vision.

But Spike was forced to shut his eyes to it. He was still a hunted man. The police connected him with the killings in Gonzalez' apartment, and it would be a long time before they would forget him. He could not ask her to share his life and future until this thing had blown over.

He turned to her.

"What have you thought about doin' Celia, darlin'?"

"Ow!" interrupted Timothy. "I'm surprised at ye! What would the poor girrrl be after doin' but goin' to that haythin country to claim the gowld that is rightfully hers?"

"We're goin' on a long, long trip, Spikie—to some outlandish place

they call Costa Belly. I'm thinkin' the cost av livin' must be as high down there as it do be here, from the name av it! Sure, Spike, darlint, it ain't you, me own brother, that would say no?" demanded Tim anxiously. "Would ye see a fortune that belongs to the girrrl of your heart fall into the hands of some dirrrty, brown-skinned devils?"

CHAPTER VI

Trailed

LET me see the letter!" requested Spike.

"Aw, ye big gossoon!" derided Timothy, taking the yellowed envelope from his pocket. "Ye can't read it! It's written in Spanish. Here, Celia, read it to him, like a swateheart."

The stiff, parchment sheets crackled as she removed them from the envelope. With a low voice that was none too steady, she began to translate.

"My little Cecilia:

"I hope that you may never see this letter, for, if our blessed Lord decrees that you shall see it, it will only be after I have left this world for the next. I hope, before that time comes, the cursed government of the Liberals will be exterminated, and the Conservatives, the true ruling race of Costa Bella, our dear homeland, will regain the high places, wealth, and power, which belong rightfully to them by virtue of birth and culture. I shall count myself a man justly rewarded by Heaven if that should be accomplished during my life, so that I may return to the ancient seats of our family, and give to you, my charming little daughter, the heritage which is yours.

"I am writing this in the event of my death, so that you will know the gold, the hereditary jewels and plate of the ancient Gonzalez family still lie buried on our *hacienda*, twenty miles from Las Vegas. During the infamous, bloody revolution, I was forced to consign our heirlooms, our treasures, our wealth to the keeping of the sacred earth of our native land. I counted myself fortunate

that I was able to escape from those terrible days with your life and mine.

"Some day, my daughter, the proud families of the Gómez, the Arias, the Calvo will regain their own. Then you shall return to Costa Bella, seek where I shall tell you, and take the place in the world which is yours. Like the name of the Gonzalez, the fortune of the family has always been the greatest in Central America. Your imagination, limited by our present, meager, mean life, is unable to comprehend the vastness of the riches which shall be yours. Use them wisely, my child. Live as a Gonzalez—which means an honorable, decent life, a life of service to one's family, to the people, and to the country.

"You are the last of the Gonzalez. Even you, I suppose, when you shall have come into your heritage, will not long bear that famous name. If your sainted mother had lived, my child; or, if the Fates had been kinder, perhaps there would have been a son. But, never mind, it is but another cross I have to bear.

"Here is my last wish for you, Cecilia. When you marry, and you will, marry well. Couple our name with one as old, as proud, as worthy of it. Do this, for me, my daughter. It is all that I ask."

At this point, Timothy stole a glance at his brother's face. But Spike's jaw was slowly working his gum. His face revealed nothing.

Celia's soft voice flowed on. Two tears, gleaming, in the corners of her brown eyes, were like twin diamonds.

"Now for the directions that will bring you to the buried wealth of the Gonzalez. Upon your arrival at Costa Bella, go to anyone of the families I have mentioned. They all will be happy to aid the daughter of Felipe Gonzalez. It may be, too, that your uncle, your mother's brother, Don Jose Preciado, will have returned by then, and will help you. The last I heard of him, he was still in Spain.

"I have already told you of the hacienda, twenty miles from the capitol. A man will have to climb to the roof of the house of the family. There, he will find a weather-vane, a golden arrow, which has been so fixed that it points in *one direction only*. Sighting along the line of the vane, a clump of palms, at about a half mile's distance

from the house, will be seen. But sight more carefully along the vane. *It points to a particular palm in the group*. Mark that palm well. Go to it. Now, with your back against the tree, face the house. Proceed forward *fifty paces*. Face *to the right*. Moving in a straight line, step off *twenty-eight paces*. Face *to the left*. This time, *seventeen paces*. Stop. The spot, doubtless, will be covered by jungle brush. No matter. *Dig*.

"God bless you, my daughter, and keep you. You have been the divine soothing balm of my tortured, unhappy life. Without you, I could not have gone on.

"Your loving and grateful father,

"Doctor Felipe Gonzalez.

"Chicago, Illinois, United States of America, May fifth, nineteen hundred and twenty."

Celia's gentle voice died away. Dropping her head upon her arms, she sobbed silently. For once, the Muldoon brothers were sober. The tragic life of the gentle, kindly, noble man, who had been Cecilia's father, awed them.

Moreover, it seemed that a strange personage had come among them—an unreal, regal personage. In the eyes of the brothers, the dead man's words clothed his daughter with a new personality. She was a creature out of an Irish fairy tale. She was a royal princess, beautiful and wealthy, masquerading as a lovely Cinderella. At any minute, she might change, before their wondering eyes, into a proud princess clad in silks and jewels. Haughty, bearded gentlemen would come for her, take her away to the kingdom that was hers by right of birth.

Tim stole another glance at his brother. Spike's jaw was moving slowly and thoughtfully. His eyes were fixed to one spot in the threadbare carpet.

When he looked up, it seemed that some of that brilliant, laughing light which habitually sparkled in his keen blue eyes had faded away. Like a man in a dream, he took the wad of

gum from his mouth, and tossed it into a far corner of the room.

HIS voice was gentle when he spoke.

"What party is runnin' things down there now, Celia?"

"I think the Liberals still have control, Spike."

He thought for an instant. Then, he looked up, and gazed full into her eyes.

"Well, no matter. We gotta go. Somethin's stirrin' about that dough of yours, an' if we don't get it, somebody'll get it, an' us, too.

"Gee," he smiled at her wistfully. "It'll be great when you're rich, an' have your own people, an' society, won't it, Cele?" Abruptly, he turned away to his brother who was now standing by the window. "Get busy, Tim. You make the arrangements. We're hoppin' the next boat."

Celia was puzzled by Spike's curious look, and his manner. She had never seen him as sad as this before. But before she could question him, Tim excitedly reached back, and grabbed his brother by the arm.

"Spike! Spike! Do I see right, or are me eyes playin' tricks with me? I'm a blitherin' idjit from Cork if thim two buckoes ain't Slim Johnson an' his auld pal Shorty Niccola!"

Spike leaped to the window. Tim's eyes had not deceived him! Despite their upturned coat collars, Spike recognized the pair. Indifferently, they leaned against a store window on the other side of the street. Cigarettes dangled nonchalantly from their mouths. And, every now and then, one or the other would cast a careless glance toward the hotel.

"Tim," demanded Spike. "How long did Tony have the letter?"

"A week. May the devil fly away with his sowl!" muttered the red head.

"Mm-mn!" Spike thought. There

were members of Tony's mob who could read Spanish.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," stated Spike to his brother Tim, "if we had a very pleasant trip."

Timothy Muldoon squinted down the barrel of his cannon, which he had dug out of the voluminous depths of his pants pocket.

"Ye think so?" he queried innocently. His right eyelid fluttered with a suspicion of a wink. "All me life I've wanted to do some travelin'," said the incorrigible fellow, "but what is travelin' without a little excitement to kape ye busy now an' thin?" He patted his gun lovingly. "A traysure hunt, no less, Bridget! An' maybe a shot or two at auld Tony thrown in fer good maysure."

CHAPTER VII

Revolution

NOTICE

TO ALL PASSENGERS DISEMBARKING AT COSTA BELLA

Wireless dispatches received on board this morning carry information that a revolution of severe nature has broken out in the Republic of Costa Bella, Central America. It is likely that the present government will be unable to cope with the situation. The insurgent army, under the command of José Preciado, is rapidly approaching Las Vegas, the capital city, where federal troops are gathering to oppose it. Intense guerilla warfare is being carried on throughout the interior.

The American minister at Las Vegas reports the country exceedingly unsafe for foreigners at this time.

Passengers are warned that they disembark at Las Vegas at their own risk. All passengers, who had originally intended to land at Las Vegas, may make arrangements today to be carried to the Panama Canal Zone, if they so desire.

SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICAN S. S. Co.

S. S. *Southern Cross*.

December 28.

Around the ship's bulletin board, an excited, jabbering, gesticulating crowd gathered. Dark-skinned, black-eyed men and women, who had been looking forward with impatience to being once more in their homes and among their friends and relatives, interrogated each other despairingly.

THREE happy people were descending the stairs which led from the promenade deck to the lobby in which the alarming notice hung.

Arm and arm, the girl in the middle, they reached the lobby. They had been up early, these three, for a brisk walk around the promenade deck. The stiff, healthy sea breeze had had its will with them. Not a semblance of a part could be seen in either Tim's flaming thatch, or in Spikes' sandy one. Despite the blue band bound tightly about Cecilia's mass of hair, black curls had escaped, and danced bewitchingly at every step she took.

Except for them, the lobby was now deserted. Splitting up into groups, the crowd had gone off elsewhere on the ship, to discuss the situation, to worry about it, to console each other.

"Hello! What's this?" ejaculated Tim.

In silence, they read the notice.

"Spike!" cried the girl. "Do you see that name? 'Jose Preciado.' It's the same as the one in my father's letter. Can it be . . . I wonder . . . my uncle?"

Spike shook his head helplessly. He could not guess. His sandy eyebrows came together in a straight line. His shrewd mind was busily thinking about this new addition to the state of affairs. The confounded country would have to spring a revolution. At a time like this! He searched through the notice again. ". . . exceedingly unsafe . . . at this time."

A few minutes later, the three held

a council of war in Celia's stateroom. "One more day, an' we'll be there," Spike was saying reflectively.

"An' thin the fun'll begin," grinned Tim.

"But what do you think we ought to do?" asked Celia, her eyes soberly upon Spike.

"I don't know, Cele," he frankly confessed. "As far as Tim an' myself are concerned, we don't care. It's you that I'm thinkin' about. It's your money. You have the right to go get it, if it pleases you. In fact," he added hastily, as if he feared that she misconstrued his meaning, "we want you to have it. If any girl is worthy of it, you're the one, Celia. But I'm thinkin' that Costa Bella, right at this particular time, is no place for a girl like you."

"I'm not afraid!" She tossed her curly head with spirit.

"I know, I know, darlin'," placated Spike. "Sure; there ain't a more courageous girl than yourself! But terrible things happen in them revolutions, I'm told. An' what's the good of havin' riches, if you haven't your health to enjoy them? Look at your father, now. He had to go away an' leave it all there on account of a revolution. Don't you think we'd better wait? I'm thinkin' this is just a little fuss, the likes of what they're always havin' down in them hot-tempered countries. It'll be all over in a little while, an' then we can sail in, nice an' easy like, an' grab the gold an' stuff that'll make you a rich an' famous girl."

BUT if we went back," she said slowly, holding Spikes' desperate eyes, "we would be in the same predicament as old Mother Hubbard. The cupboard would be bare. What about the others who are after the Gonzalez fortune? Some one in Central America knows that it exists. Tony Mal-

low knows. He even knows where to find it."

Distraughtly, Spike threw up his hands.

"Oh, I know, I know, darlin'," he cried. "Forgive me for the old fool, I am. I was only thinkin' of your own safety."

Now, Tim, hitherto an interested observer, although there were times when he threw looks of plain disgust and irritation at his blitherin' brother, interrupted.

"Hist!" he whispered, placing a stubby finger to his mouth. With his other hand, he pointed to the curtains, closed across the open porthole. Mystified, Celia and Spike watched him take a can of water from beneath the wash basin. Then, he made motions for Spike to draw aside the curtains.

Through the porthole, the occupants of the room had a glimpse of a face, ear turned towards them. Speedily, Tim heaved the contents of the water can. Tim's aim had been unerring. The deluge of water splashed full into the face of the surprised eavesdropper. For an instant, the fellow choked, clawed at his eyes with his hands. Then, the face disappeared. "We're being followed!" cried Celia.

"Sure," replied Tim, matter-of-factly, "since we got aboard in Noo York. Just a little boy friend of Tony's. Spike an' me spotted him the minute we gets aboard.

"The scoundrel is lucky," continued Tim, "that a boat is such a small place, or he'd av been swimmin' with the fishes long ago."

"You see?" said Celia, turning to Spike. Impulsively she took his hand. "Oh, Spike! I understand how you feel. You don't want me to go into this danger. But, dear, I've got to go. I've got to! I feel that it is my duty to my father to recover the heirlooms, the jewels of the Gonzalez family. He would never rest if he

thought they were in stranger hands.

"I shall go alone. It isn't fair of me to let you and Tim risk your lives for me. You have been so good, so wonderful to me. I cannot ask for any more.

"I will be all right. I shall go to my uncle. I am sure it is he who is at the head of the revolutionary army. Even now he is fighting for the cause for which my father gave up everything. He is winning. He is sure to win. The right always wins! He will protect me. The daughter of his sister. He will see that the fortune, the lands of the Gonzalez, are returned. And then . . . I will come back to you."

"No!" exclaimed Spike gruffly. "No! Until you have your father's treasure in your hands—until you are safe—we shall go with you!"

CHAPTER VIII

Tony Exults

SINCE early morning, the two thousand ton yacht, *Sea Rover*, had been cruising along at half speed through the choppy, sunkissed, blue waters. Evidently, the *Sea Rover* had seen better days. Once, she had probably been the property of some multi-millionaire, the scene of gay yachting parties.

Now, her former, whitely gleaming sides had taken on a dirty, streaked, yellowish hue. The brasswork was dingy. The mahogany panels were dented and scarred. On her soiled, cluttered decks, slouched a shifty-eyed, hard appearing, ratlike crew.

When the multi-millionaire had tired of his play-toy, or had gone broke on the Market, Captain Abel Masters had purchased it. Captain Masters was a long, lanky, cadaverous sort of individual, supporting a black, scraggly beard, and a cast in one eye. Few knew much of the goings and comings of Captain Masters,

and none sought to enquire. He discouraged contacts. Sufficient to say, however, that he had a price—for everything.

In the after cabin of the *Sea Rover* sat two individuals: one, stout, dark-skinned, greasy; the other, Captain Masters.

"Yes, captain, it's a grand racket," Tony Mallow was saying. "Really, you should come to Chi some time. A guy like you would do well there."

"**YEAH,**" replied Masters noncommittingly.

"Yeah," echoed Tony. "But I'm gettin' tired of the racket, though. Too much competition. You make the dough, all right. But the thing of it is, to retire to enjoy it. There's the hitch, see? Nobody'll let you do it; the cops, or nobody. You know too much, see?"

"So I grabbed this chance to jump. They think, back at Chi that I'm comin' back, but I ain't. I got most of my jack out of it. An' when we put through this little deal, I'll have plenty more. And a girl . . . oooh! Captain, you should see her. Ah!" Tony kissed the tips of his fingers expressively, and rolled his eyes at the ceiling.

"Yeah?" said the captain, apparently not a whit moved.

"She is mine! Her gold and her jewels are mine! I, Tony, will have everything. I shall buy a boat like yours, captain. We shall sail all over the world. She will love me, yes, after that? Ah, Cecilia!" He rolled the syllables of her name across his thick tongue.

"Yeah," grunted the captain. He wasn't any too fond of the tricky gangster in whose hire he was. But, Captain Masters himself was no nitwit. He knew a thing or two. Perhaps he would grind an axe of his own in this affair.

A seaman entered.

"Message fer yuh, Cap'n."

"Yeah?"

Captain Masters opened the soiled piece of paper, looked at it, and then silently handed it to Mallow.

Tony read it once to himself, and then read it aloud to Masters.

"CAPTAIN ABEL MASTERS,
SEA ROVER, AT SEA—"

"S. S. SOUTHERN CROSS, AT
SEA, DEC. 28—"

"Revolution not stopping them.

"BAYER."

Tony chuckled slyly. He rubbed his pudgy paws together.

"Right into our hands, captain! Full speed ahead, if you please!"

"It's lucky fer you," said Captain Masters dryly, "that I'm well acquainted with this spiggoty Preciado. I done all his gun runnin' fer him. He's got the upper hand down there now, or leastwise he soon will have. He's a slick hombre, that one. When the spiggoties get through with this revolution, they won't have a shirt t' keep their bellies warm. Preciado'll have it all.

"He'll see ya through, all right. It'll cost ya a right smart amount o' jack. But I guess ya figgers it's worth it to ya. But here's a little tip from me. Don't let Preciado get the real wind o' what your after. I'm tellin' ya."

Captain Masters rose from the table and departed to give the orders for increased speed. Tony still rubbed his hands, a pleased grin parting his thick lips. It was too easy! A sure thing! With the country torn asunder by revolution, with the purchased help of the strongest man in it, with Tony's own cunning, why—it was better than Chicago! Before Preciado himself knew what was actually going on, Tony Mallow would be out of the country, on his way, with the girl and the fortune. Again Tony chuckled aloud.

But Tony had overlooked one thing. He had not associated Preciado, the revolutionary leader, with the Preciado mentioned in the letter of Celia's father. There had been other names in that letter, and none of them had meant anything to Tony. He had been chiefly interested that there was a fortune, and in the directions for finding it. And, before he had had an opportunity for a more detailed perusal of the letter, he had lost it.

Over the small, almost land-locked harbor of Las Vegas, the setting tropical sun was casting its last, golden orange rays. Two long arms of land extended out from the city, and seemed to clasp in their embrace the silver surface of the bay. One of these arms was high, jungle covered, a continuation of a mountain range, which finally sought the depths of the sea. The other arm was a causeway, artificially built, made to shelter the harbor from the rages of the sea.

Along its entire length were dignified palms, like a long line of immobile soldiers. At its tip was the Morro Castle, a round, grim, gray fort. Every harbor, which had once belonged to Spain, had its Morro Castle. These gaunt, toothless relics serve to remind the present day tourist from the north that he was entering upon a civilization, a culture, ideals, different than his own. This part of the world was an infant in the mailed arms of Spain while the northlands were still vast, undiscovered wilderness.

SLOWLY, the yacht *Sea Rover* slipped through the channel between the points of the arms. Already the brief, gray advance guard of the coming night was upon the calm, hushed bay. Before the yacht, in the distant town, lights were beginning to twinkle.

Captain Abel Masters was on the

bridge of his ship, peaceably smoking his stubby, blackened pipe. The balmy air, the star-studded sky, the unmistakable, undefinable smell of the tropics, which came stealing from the waterfront of the city, from the tangled jungles round it, moved him from his taciturnity.

The short, fat man beside the captain was nervous, excited. Tony Mallow was within sight of the goal. Here would be the girl. Here was her fortune.

"When do you think the *Southern Cross* will get here?" he demanded.

"If I ain't mistaken," the captain calmly replied, "that's her over yonder."

STRAINING his eyes, Tony made out a black hull studded with yellow, blinking light. H cursed.

"Keep ya shirt on!" advised Abel. "I kinda thought she'd beat us in anyway. But she can't dock 'till mornin'. She musta got in too late for the harbor officials to inspect her, or she wouldn't be anchored out in the bay. Nobody'll go ashore. Don't worry.

"See that black patch over there?" the captain pointed with his pipe. Tony looked, but could distinguish nothing remarkable. There seemed to his unfamiliar gaze to be many black patches.

"That's the mouth of the Rio Olaya," continued Masters. "An' it's Able Masters that knows it. Many a cayuca load of rifles I sent up that there stream. Well, no matter.

"That's where you're goin'—tonight—mister. As soon as we anchor, the first mate'll sneak ashore in one of the small boats. He'll make the arrangements. Preciado's got lotsa friends over yonder. When the mate gets back, he'll have some Indians, an' a cayuca. He'll take ya an' your two pals up the river, an' nobody'll

ever be the wiser. Somewhere along the river you'll run into Preciado's bunch. The mate'll make the introductions, an' after that it's up to yourself, mister."

The captain turned to go below. Tony seized his arm.

"You'll be waiting for us, Masters?"

"Sure. Right by the river. Ya oughta be back in a coupla days or so. When ya reach the mouth of the river, just give a hail, an' I'll pick ya up. An' nobody'll know ya ever been near the country."

"That's the ticket!" laughed Tony, slapping Abel Masters' bony back.

AND Abel Masters, unseen by Tony, grinned into the darkness.

Leaning against the deck rail of the *Southern Cross*, Spike Muldoon gazed moodily through the velvet darkness at the lights of Las Vegas. The splendor of the tropic night, the strange, subtle smell in his nostrils, the mysterious, far away noises of the town, all were bitter to him. This was her country. Ashore, were her people. Tomorrow she would be among them. In a few days more, she would be wealthy.

Spike spat his gum distastefully over the side. Nothing seemed good any more. Fiercely, he tried to check the trend of his thoughts. He should be glad. Celia had a grand break. Lord knows, she deserved it. Fat chance Tony Mallow and his mob would have of pulling off anything on Celia with her uncle, boss of a whole army, around!

Old Gonzalez had been right. The words of his letter were etched in lines of fire on Spike's brain. "When you marry—marry well. Couple our name with one as old, as proud, as worthy—" He didn't want his daughter marrying no nameless, good-for-

nothing bum. She was meant, by every right of heredity and wealth, for better than that.

Spike gripped the rail with his lean, strong fingers. It was finished. They were here. No more monkey business. He would see that she reached her uncle in safety, that all was going well for her. And then, back to Chicago, to Skeets Murphy and his gang. She would feel badly now. She wouldn't understand. But, there would come a day when she would understand, and thank him for it.

"Isn't it wonderful!" a soft voice beside him breathed. "Look over there, Spike! Isn't it picturesque?"

SPIKE followed Celia's gaze. Another ship was in the harbor; a square, bulldoggish vessel. From her cage mast, twin lights blinked rapidly on and off.

"A battleship," Celia explained. "An American warship. I was told that it just got in a little while before we did. It was sent here on account of the revolution—to protect American lives and property. Doesn't it thrill you? You know," she whispered, snuggling against his broad shoulder, "I'm glad I'm an American, aren't you?"

"You bet!" Spike tried to force a smile, and choked. Hastily, he changed the subject. "We'll go ashore first thing in the mornin', Celia, and see the American minister. I'm sure he can fix us up to get in touch with your uncle. After that, everythin' will all be okay for you. Then I'll have to be leavin' you, Celia, darlin'. You see. I'm kinda anxious to be gettin' back to Chicago."

"Spike!"

"Well, you see," he concluded studiously, "there's my mother."

"Oh!"

CHAPTER IX

Don Jose Makes a Bargain

ON BOTH sides of the murky, silently flowing waters of the Rio Olaya, the victorious rebel army lay bivouacked. In groups, without a semblance of order, the ragged troops slept on the ground, their new, American-made rifles cuddled in their arms. They slept the deep slumber of fatigued, but contented men. Little thought gave they of the perspiring, hurrying gangs, working under torchlight, in the city of Las Vegas, twenty miles away, constructing earthworks, trenches. The capital would fall as yesterday fell Las Palmas, the second city in size of the republic.

Everywhere, the revolution had succeeded beyond the wildest dreams. Throughout the country, subordinate commanders of Don Jose had taken town after town. Now, there remained nothing but the capital city itself. And that, Don José Precido would take within a day or two.

Although it was four in the morning, the sentries, dozing over their rifles, saw lights still shining from the windows of the homestead of the Gonzalez, a once famous, but now extinct family. Now the house contained General Don José Preciado and his staff. Apparently, Don José was still poring over his plans, as must every general who would be successful.

Inside, Don José paced agitatedly up and down the long, low-ceilinged living room. Beside a paper strewn table stood a civilian, an elderly Central American. His troubled eyes stared at Don José.

The general paused. He, was indeed a commanding figure in his dark blue uniform, his black boots, his golden epaulettes. In spite of his evident age, he carried his tall, well-built body like a young man of thirty.

His hair and his carefully trimmed beard were iron gray in color, and gave him a most distinguished appearance. Now his keen, black eyes were flashing fire. That gentleman quaked visibly.

"You have failed!" roared Don José. "You are a traitor to the cause!"

"I have given my two sons," said the man pitifully. "Juan and Francisco, they were the joy of my life."

"Bah!" snarled Preciado callously. "Bunglers!"

"I cannot understand what happened," the father of Juan and Francisco continued sadly. "All night I waited for them. I gave them your instructions most carefully. They were to ask Gonzalez to give his money for the support of the revolution. If he refused, they were to force him to give up the secret of its hiding place. They were to be careful—most, most careful. Such a terrible thing! I read about it in the newspapers the next morning. Ah, *Dio mio!* I do not understand."

"Stop that whining!" shouted Preciado, beside himself with rage. "You will die in the morning, bungler! I, Don José Preciado, say it!"

THE wrinkled brown face of the civilian quivered.

In his great disappointment, in his anger, Don José addressed the walls of the Gonzalez.

"Here," he raised and shook his arms vehemently, "is the vast wealth of Felipe Gonzalez! It is hidden somewhere about! Perhaps under my very nose, and I am unable to find it. It is listening to me, mocking me!

"God's curses on Felipe Gonzalez! He never did like me, that smirking, lily-livered dog! And I hated him for the wealth that he had, and I had not! Were that it had been my hand that twisted the knife in his bowels.

I'd have gotten the hiding place out of him!"

There came a discreet knock at the door. But Don José, still wrapped in his temperamental ravings, did not hear it.

"If we do not succeed within a week, we are ruined, do you hear? The Federal government has money. They will buy bullets and guns. They will buy our generals, our soldiers, right out from under us. Do you think I can take Las Vegas in a week? Do you? Do you?"

Preciado laughed. It was a grating, mirthless laugh, unpleasant, deadly to hear.

"You, Gómez, will die. I, personally, will witness the execution."

"Wait! Wait!" pleaded Gómez. "You have not heard all yet!"

At last, the general composed himself. With a cold face, he listened to the servile, fear-filled voice of Gómez.

"The girl is here. Gonzalez' daughter. We were passengers on the same ship. She is still on board. She cannot land until the harbor officials have inspected in the morning. *Senor*, she must know the hiding place of the Gonzalez gold. It must be that she has come to secure it."

"The girl?" demanded Preciado unbelievably. He seized Gómez by the throat. "Don't lie to me!" he gritted. "If this is a trick to save your wretched carcass—the little round hut, with one door and no windows, for you! Understand, dog?"

Gasping for breath, clawing at the sinews of steel about his windpipe, Gómez screamed, "I swear to the Virgin that it is true! I saw her! Felipe Gonzalez' daughter. She knows the hiding place of the gold! I swear it! Oh, oh! Let me breathe! Oh, *madre de Dios!*"

With a single movement of his

powerful frame, Preciado flung the hapless man from him. Gómez struck the floor heavily, where he lay, moaning softly, and fingering his tortured throat.

The knock at the door was louder this time. At last, Preciado heard it.

His eyes widened in astonishment as he watched the procession of uncertain men, guarded by two somber sentries, file into the room. Don José recognized Smith, the bald-headed, hard-faced, tobacco-chewing mate of the *Sea Rover*. What was he doing here? What devilment lurked up the sleeve of the wily Captain Masters now? And, who were these others—these strangers? Don José's black eyes flashed from the short, fat man to the tall, slim, sour-faced individual, to the swarthy Shorty Niccola.

Smith indicated Tony Mallow and his gunmen with a wave of his hand. Then, speaking in bad Spanish, he said, "These men are friends of Captain Masters. They wanted to see you on a little business. They're okay."

Don José bowed ceremoniously. It was best to be diplomatic until he learned the nature of the strangers' business.

Tony got directly to the business at hand.

"You speak English? Yes? All right. A little while ago, Mister Preciado, I heard you mention that you were kind of short on cash." Tony grinned ingratiatingly. "The door, you know, is kinda thin; and you were speaking kinda loud, I guess to that gentleman there." Tony grinned more broadly, as he indicated the still prostrate Gómez. This fellow, thought Mallow, was a man after his own heart.

Silently, the general waited for him to continue.

"Well," boasted Tony, "I'm the fellow who's got the cash." And before the widening eyes of the general, he

drew from a brief case five packages of bills, and tossed them on the table.

"Twenty - five thousand dollars. Good, American money—known and appreciated the world over. It's all yours, Mister Preciado."

The general's eyes opened still wider.

"And why are they mine, *senor*?" he politely inquired.

"They're yours — and seventy-five thousand more like them." Tony tapped his brief case suggestively. "For just a little favor . . . a small job."

Pinpoints of light were beginning to dance in the eyes of General Don José Preciado. But his outward demeanor remained as calm as ever.

"The favor, *senor* . . . or, the job, as you call it?"

MEASURING his words carefully, Tony stated his proposition.

"There is a girl—I'm interested in, who arrived today in this country from the United States. She is very beautiful, this girl. Wonderful . . . superb! Ah," Tony grinned fatuously at the general, "you have been in love, mister?"

"But she is so foolish, this girl. Some one, some enemy of mine, has filled her pretty head with silly notions of buried treasure."

Tony failed to see the sudden flicker of surprise that crossed the general's face.

"Though she loves me very well," the gangster glibly continued, "she will see nothing of me until she has searched for this buried treasure. My heart, it is broken. I am desolate when I think of that pretty, little house I have furnished with my own hands.

"But will she listen to me? No. She says, 'Now Tony, you must be patient. I will not marry you until I find the treasure. When I do, I will come back. We will be rich, my Tony.'

"It is not," said Tony dolefully, "that I care if she looks for the buried treasure—if there were any buried treasure. But, ah, I know that my poor rose flower is suffering from a delusion! There is no buried treasure, mister. That, I know for sure. It is just the devilish work of some one who wishes to keep us apart. I think, I am almost sure, that he wants her for himself. Oh, I am crazy!

"You know how I feel, Mister Preciado! My poor heart is torn and bleeding." The general hid a smile. This well-fed, overstuffed pig looked as if his heart was broken! "I cannot sleep nights for thinking of my little dove, so innocent, so blind to the wicked ways of this terrible world, running about this unhappy country. Oh, it is terrible! With a revolution going on, too! And," Tony shook his head sadly, "she has no one to help her except those wretched brothers, the same two men who have caused all my troubles.

"She will listen to them, who mean nothing but harm to her; and not to me, Tony, her promised lover, who loves every little hair in her so adorable head."

"It is all very sad, *senor*," consoled Preciado. "It is true that a silly woman is the greatest thorn in the side a man may have. You have my sympathies. But what, may I ask, can I do that will be of help in your troubles?"

"Everything, mister, everything. You are powerful. You can do things where Tony cannot. I have a wonderful scheme! Listen. If she were captured, my angel—but you must be so careful not to hurt her! Kidnaped by the wicked revolutionists, and I, Tony, her lover, miraculously rescued her, what then? Do you not think that she will have a good scare? That she will be content to forget her foolish dreams of buried treasure, and go home to the pretty little house with Tony?"

"You can do it, mister!" continued Tony eagerly. "You have—friends—in Las Vegas, have you not? A little job. I will pay well . . . seventy-five thousand dollars more."

Anxiously, Tony waited for the pondering general to speak.

"You say that there are two men with her?" questioned Preciado.

"Yes. Two dam' micks—Irishmen. I would have them killed, if possible."

"And the name of the girl?"

For a second, Tony hesitated. This was opening the bag dangerously wide for the cat. But, there was no help for it.

"Celcilia Gonzalez."

It was a good thing for Tony's peace of mind that he, at that moment, could not see into the general's brain.

"Yes, *senor*," said Preciado in a smooth, polite voice, "it can be done. Tomorrow night I shall restore to your arms your lost one. I, Don José Preciado, have said it. Now, gentlemen, you must be tired. It is very near morning. I shall have the orderly show you to a room."

WHEN their footsteps could no longer be heard down the hall, Preciado, his face flaming with cunning and joy, turned to seek out Gómez.

"Gómez—Gómez!" he cried. "Where are you, my good Gómez? You heard, did you not? Ah, but the good God has been kind to me! One hundred thousand dollars! The *Americano* pigs! The swine! I shall let the hoggish one have the girl. The fool! He thinks the buried treasure of the Gonzalez is but a myth! Ah-ah-ah!" Preciado laughed gleefully. "What care I for the girl? She is not worth a hundred thousand dollars to me. But the fortune of Felipe Gonzalez—it shall be mine, mine—do you hear, Gómez?"

But Gómez failed to answer. On Preciado's face perplexity quickly changed to rage as he searched about the room. There was no doubt about it. The villainous Gómez had disappeared!

"Cetano! Arango!" cried the general. The alarmed sentries rushed in.

"Go," ordered Don José. "Bring el Teniente Huertmate to me at once!"

The general was pacing the floor like a caged wolf when Lieutenant Huertmate, his brain still befogged with sleep, reported.

"Teniente, *el Senor* Gómez has left this headquarters without my permission. Organize a searching party immediately. He must be brought back, do you hear?"

"Yes, general."

"One more thing, Huertmate. Tomorrow evening, you will be in Las Vegas. You will carry a message for me. You know to whom it goes. See that my instructions are carried out there."

"Yes, general."

MEANWHILE, upstairs, Tony complacently composed himself to sleep on the floor of the bare room.

"Was that not clever?" he demanded of Slim. "What a love-sick Romeo that old fool must think me. If he only knew!" Tony gazed fondly around at the discolored, old walls. "Just half a mile from here, boys, is the stuff! Tomorrow night this time, we shall have it all—and my beautiful Cecilia."

"Ss-sh!" cautioned Shorty Niccola. "That bald-headed monkey of a Smith will be in here in a minute!"

"But I don' see where yuh had to throw away them hun'nerd thousan' berries, chief," grumbled Slim Johnson. "We coulda nabbed the dame off ourselves in Las—Las Vaygus. An' plugged them two bums besides. We

coulda got away wit it okay, wit the boat right handy, an' all."

"Ah, shut up!" sneered Tony disgustedly. "That's why you guys ain't never got any place. No brains. No brains. How did you figure we were goin' to get out here to get the swag? You think those revolutionists were going to let us poke around here for nothin', without an excuse? Now, we got an excuse—thanks to *my* brains. An' a good one, too. This dam' army moves forward tomorrow. An' tomorrow night we'll be alone. See? We can dig it up, load it in the canoe, an' when Mister Preciado delivers the girl, we shove off. Nobody'll be the wiser. Who'll guess that we lifted a bunch of coin out of this place? An' in the morning, we'll be aboard the yacht."

Unknown to Tony and his companions, a furtive figure had tiptoed down the hall, and was hovering in the shadows outside the door, listening.

Ike Smith, chief mate of the *Sea Rover*, grinned silently to himself. Nobody'll miss them three when we drop 'em overboard in the middle of the ocean, he thought. I wonder what the girl is like?

CHAPTER X

The Trap

LINES of worry crossed the forehead of the American minister to Costa Bella. For several days now they had been there, sinking deeper and deeper as the chaotic condition of the country increased. Each day, all day long, he listened to pleas of frightened American and British tourists for immediate transportation out of the country. His head ached from hearing the excited complaints of the representatives of American and British engineering and oil concerns. This property had been damaged by the revolutionists. That firm was being threat-

ened by the Federals with loss of concession unless an immediate donation of gold was received. His mind was weary with composing detailed reports to Washington.

Nevertheless, he bent a kindly, attentive face to Celia Gonzalez.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that there isn't very much I can do at this time. However, I shall take the matter up with the Costa Bellan government immediately. It may be that they will give you and your friends a pass through the lines."

He gazed seriously at Celia.

"Do you know your uncle very well?"

"I never have seen him," she confessed.

"Mm-uh!"

MANY things were on the point of the minister's tongue. He did know Don José Preciado. But, this girl, with her strange request, seemed so sure of herself. There was no question about her eagerness to get to her uncle. After all, an uncle was an uncle. And these Central Americans were very clannish in their family matters. Yet, the minister didn't like it. War was war, and he had to be most careful.

He rose wearily.

"Please come in to see me tomorrow morning," he said. "I hope to be able to give you some definite information then."

Outside, in the narrow, dirty street, Tim spat disgustedly into the gutter.

"Red tape!" his high voice squeaked. "It'll be a month o' Sundays that we'll be here, I'm thinkin'. Spike, darlin', let's go hunt up this Press—this Press—this domned ribil ourselves."

"Oh, no!" smiled Celia, placing her hand upon his bulky arm. "I'm sure it won't be as bad as that. I bet we'll be with my uncle by tomorrow night."

A decrepit car slid to a stop in front of them.

"Taxi, boss," a grinning black face invited. "I speak good English. I work in Chicago six months," he stated proudly.

"Yeah?" grinned Tim, unbelievably.

"Yes, sir, boss! Know that old place mighty well. How 'bout a nice little ride down to the plaza? Big doin's down there tonight. President goin' to give a speech an' everythin'. Right after the band concert. What say, boss?" his voice wheedled. "Take you all around the town. Show you the sights."

"Let's go!" cried Celia, getting in.

THEY were passing through odorous, rutted streets of a waterfront. The section was silent, almost deserted. Black, foreboding warehouses lined both sides of the way. Occasionally the murkiness would be broken by a *cantina*, from whose dirty windows escaped a small measure of sickly yellow light. From behind the bars of these places, yellow faces stared out inscrutably. Into them, now and then, a furtive shadow would slink.

"Say, you!" called Spike angrily, when the full consciousness of where he was had finally sunken into his mind. "Where you goin'?"

The driver turned and showed his double row of huge, white teeth. "To the band concert, boss."

"Where are we now?" demanded Spike.

"That's the Rio Olaya, boss."

Spike reached forward and grabbed the fleshy, black neck with his fingers.

"Stop!" he commanded. "Turn around. We're goin' back, by bucko!"

The driver jammed on his brakes. His battered auto screeched to a standstill.

"But, boss——" he expostulated. His white eyeballs rolled. Dimly in

the darkness he discerned stealthy forms surrounding the car.

Suddenly, from all sides, small, silent, wiry men descended upon the car. They leaped upon Spike and Tim. They dragged at Cecilia.

The girl screamed once. Then a sweaty palm smashed across her mouth, bruising her lips. She felt herself being hauled bodily from the car.

TIM cursed. Spike's teeth were clamped grimly on his gums. Fiercely, both men fought. They were splendid rough-and-tumble fighters, those two, and well used to the game. But, as they hurled one man, writhing with pain, from them, two more leaped at them to take his place.

"Celia!" roared Spike, in mad rage and blind fear. He had caught a glimpse of a small, struggling group moving off into the darkness.

With a sudden surge of superhuman strength, he threw off the assailants clustered upon him, and started from the car. At the same time his brother Tim had managed to get one hand free. Down into his voluminous pants pocket it dived.

There was a tiny flash of steel in the pale moonlight. It was descending in a swift arc directly to Spike's back. Tim's gun roared once, and a spurt of orange flame stabbed the darkness. The knife faltered in its arc toward Spike's back. The possessor of it toppled out of the car into the street.

"Talk to thim, Bridget, girrrll!" squealed Tim. There were three more explosions, and three orange spurts in the dark. The driver of the car rolled his white eyeballs up to the moon, and crumpled beneath the steering wheel. One of the unknown figures milling about screamed horribly in pain.

SPIKE was out of the car. He started to sprint toward the blackness into which Celia and her captors had disappeared. But he was tripped. Many hands bore him down. He was up again, straining madly.

Tim stood alone in the deserted back seat of the car. He leveled his gun at the group around Spike. He paused, and dropped it. Then he leveled once more.

"Spike, darlin'" he yelled. "Stand clear, like a swateheart now, an' let me knock the divils off!"

But Spike was unable to stand clear. There were half a dozen at him, clinging like leeches. Understanding this, Tim scrambled out of the car.

Now, the section was awakening. Whistles were shrilling. In the darkness many feet clattered.

An imperative command in Spanish rang out.

Just as quickly as they had materialized, the attackers faded into the night. They had barely disappeared when a half dozen Costa Bellan soldiers arrived and surrounded the brothers.

Spike charged at them.

"Get out of my way!" he yelled. "They've got her, you blitherin' idiots! They're takin' her away!"

Wisely Tim caught his almost insane brother, and by sheer strength held him back from the bayonets that pointed unwaveringly at his breast.

"No, no, Spike, darlint," he whispered. "Ye can do nothin' now. These ignorunt foreigners here don't understand ye, and ye don't understand thim. Careful is the word, or it's a few inches o' steel ye'll be gettin' thin. An' thin who's to help Celia?"

A pompous noncommissioned officer discharged a flow of Spanish at them. Finding that they could not understand him, or that he could not understand them, he gave a mouth-filling order. The soldiers closed in

about the brothers, and started to move off. Perforce, Spike and Tim had to move with them.

Despairingly, Spike cast a glance over his shoulder at the spot he had last seen Celia. His gaze took in also the patchy, silver-spotted waters of Rio Olaya. Was that a boat he saw on the river's bosom, or was his imagination playing him tricks?

CHAPTER XI

Treasure Madness

AS THE blood-red sun cast its first spears over the hills, and upon the vast green jungle lands, the country around about the Gonzalez *hacienda* became infected with a vast activity. Everywhere columns of blue smoke spiraled skyward from camp fires. A loud hum of voices rose upon the fresh morning air. The revolutionary army was awake and at its breakfast. It was preparing for another day's march toward Las Vegas.

Shorty Niccola stirred, sat up and rubbed the bruised muscles that had been in contact with the hard floor. He reached over and awakened his still sleeping companions.

"Whadey yuh wanta do? Sleep all day?" he surlily greeted. "Le's go an' rustle some grub. I'm hungry."

Tony sat up and commenced stretching himself. No beauty normally, he was worse now. His slick, shiny hair hung down over his greasy face. His eyes were puffed and red-rimmed.

Suddenly he announced, "I'm going downstairs and take a look."

They knew what he meant. The golden weather vane!

Slim and Shorty rose with alacrity. Ike Smith was missing, but sailors were used to early rising, and he had probably gone out long ago in search of food.

Together the three clumped down

the stairs, and out of the house. In accord they shaded their eyes from the morning sun and gazed up to the roof. Sure enough, on a spindle was the arrow weather vane! The gold paint had long ago been removed from it by the beating tropical rains and the scorching sun. But if it had been made of solid gold it could not have looked better to Tony Mallow and his two companions.

THEY turned to see where it pointed, and saw, in the distance, a small group of palms. Their breath came fast. Their jaded eyes glistened.

"Ah!" breathed Tony, licking his thick lips.

"Good morning, *senores!*" A smooth voice from behind addressed them. Each of the three could not repress a slight start.

"Are you observing something interesting?" Don Jose Preciado smilingly asked.

"No," replied Tony hurriedly. "We were just observing the wonderful sun over the roof of your house, weren't we, boys?"

"I see," said the Don courteously. "Well, *senores*, this is a most uncomfortable hour to be rising, I know. But the army moves forward today. I and my staff must go ahead to reconnoiter. War, especially in behalf of one's beloved country, is serious business, you know.

"I am most sorry to inform you that you will be left here practically alone. Of course, there will be some soldiers at my headquarters. They will serve you food, and take care of you.

"I, you shall not see until late this evening, at which time I hope I shall be able to deliver into your rescuing hands, *senor*, your loved one." He smiled and bowed slightly to Tony.

Mallow beamed.

"Okay, mister! Don't worry about us. We'll be all right. In fact, we don't mind being alone at all, do we, boys?"

The sun had climbed to its meridian. From directly overhead it poured its fierce rays down upon the suffocating earth. In the vicinity of the Gonzalez *hacienda* there was not a living creature in sight. Where all had been life and bustle that morning, now was silent and deserted. Forlornly, in the vivid glare of the white sunlight, the aged owner's house, with its crumbling steps and corners, with its cracked, weatherbeaten walls, stood among its untidy, overgrown gardens and its company of shabby outhouses and stables.

A group of four men cautiously emerged from the dark mouth of the main door of the house. One carried a pick; another a shovel. Both implements were thickly coated with rust from their long rest in the mouldy tool shed near the house.

"You sure you got the right tree picked out?" whispered Tony Mallow to Slim.

"If I ain't," grumbled the latter, "somebody else is goin' on the roof the next time. It nearly burned me up."

"Ss-sh!" cautioned Ike Smith. "We ain't got no time t' lose. Everybody is takin' their *siesta* now. Even the two sentries on duty are dozin' in the back of the house. But they'll be wakin' up after a while. An' we won't get another chance."

KEEPING close together, stepping warily, the four moved across the wide veranda, with its crumbling floor of blue tiles, and down the steps. Then they headed for the small group of palms which shimmered through a half mile of dancing heat waves.

When they finally reached their destination, perspiration ran freely from their faces. Their soaked shirts and trousers clung to their tortured bodies. Tony's bristle mustache quivered. He mopped his round, flushed face with a soiled handkerchief.

"Phew!" he muttered. "This is worth a million dollars! What heat!"

"S'all right, boss," grinned Slim, who suffered the least from the terrific heat. "It's good fer yuh. Take a little fat off yuh."

ARRIVING in front of the palm, which Slim emphatically stated was the one, all four forgot the heat, forgot their bodily discomfort. They were all but trembling with excitement.

Although there was no longer any need for such strict silence, Tony began to whisper orders, his beady eyes glittering for the sight of the fortune that would soon be his.

"Smith, you hide in the bushes at the edge of this woods, and watch the house. We don't want anybody taking a walk in this direction."

Smith hesitated. He, too, wanted to be in on the find. However, his hesitation lasted but a few seconds. He could see that they were nervous, these men; anxious to get at the digging. Their tempers had been shortened, both by the heat, and by the nearness of what they sought. A false step now would ruin things. If he showed too much interest in their affairs, they would not hesitate an instant in bumping him off.

So, Ike Smith spat a stream of tobacco juice against the foot of the lucky tree, and then turned, and indifferently made his way to the edge of the palm grove.

It was Tony himself, in the cooling shade of the grove, who counted off the paces. His two companions looked on and followed with intense concentration. He had placed his broad back squarely against the tree, and had looked toward the house, which could clearly be seen through the surrounding palms of the grove.

"... forty-nine . . . fifty . . ." he counted. "So." He faced to the right.

Off he stepped again, Slim and Shorty keeping pace with him.

"... twenty-six . . . twenty-seven . . . twenty-eight! Face to the left," he mumbled to himself, and suited the action to the word.

THE silence of the place, the straight, tall, gray trunks of the palms, their tufted heads forming a bright green canopy over all, made these actions take on the form of some weird, fantastical religious devotions. The tense expressions on the faces of the devotees, Slim and Shorty, heightened that appearance.

It seemed uncanny the way those paths avoided colliding with the trees everywhere about. They were invisible aisles, cunningly selected by the mind that buried the Gonzalez wealth there fourteen years before. Due to the shade of the palms, jungle vegetation had not grown up to obstruct the passageways.

But the path now was leading to the edge of the grove, on a side out of view from the house. On his tenth step, Tony stopped. An impenetrable wall of tough, tangled grasses, the height of a man's head, was before him. He stared at it hostilely.

"Get busy, you guys," he snarled at Slim and Shorty. "Hack a way into this stuff."

In spite of the blazing sun which now beat down upon their bodies, in spite of the sweat which poured down from their faces and arms, the two went to work with a furious vigor, attacking the matted, tropical vegetation with the pick and shovel. With every few inches they gained, Tony was at their heels, counting the pace.

"... seventeen!" The number came hoarsely from his parched throat. "Dig."

The flying dirt became mud on their faces and arms. Down . . . down. At last, Shorty's pick struck something that gave forth a dull, metallic sound.

Working feverishly, they uncovered a small, steel box no larger than twelve inches by eighteen inches, and possessing a convex cover. This they lifted to the top of the pit, beside Tony's feet.

WITH renewed energy, they attacked the earth again. A long, rectangular wooden box next came into view. Into this, Shorty drove his pick. The wood was rotten, and its spongy fibers kept a tenacious hold upon the point of the pick. Giving a terrific wrench, Shorty tore the pick free. With it came a section of the box.

Before their wide, glistening eyes a cascade of gold coins, tarnished and green, poured out. And through the breach, their prying eyes saw bundles of faded bank notes.

"God!" breathed Slim Johnson. "God!"

"Hurry up!" commanded Tony thickly. "What's that? A burlap bag? What's in that?"

The rotted burlap tore away at the touch of the pick. Articles of silver, blackened from their long contact with moist, tropical earth, lay mute and sad before their covetous gaze. Mixed indiscriminately together were silver plate, silver goblets, silver crucifixes, and a score of other objects, the names and uses of which the despoilers of Felipe Gonzalez's cache did not know.

A dozen stout blows from the pick were necessary before the cover of the steel box sagged open. At the sight of its contents, involuntary gasps of sheer amazement escaped from all three.

Down upon his knees sank Tony. He plunged his pudgy, trembling hands into the box. They came out with a necklace of fire and blood.

"Diamonds! Rubies!" he whispered.

Into the box he sank his hands again. When he brought them up,

they were filled with rings, brooches, pins, and more necklaces. Like dripping tears, a necklace of pearls escaped from his fingers.

With bulging eyes and wide open mouths, Slim and Shorty stared at the scintillating jewels in the hands of their chief. Then they looked at each other. Understanding, as complete as it was sudden, passed between them. A fortune beyond their wildest dreams was before them. It was theirs for the taking. They gave no thought to their fealty to Tony. This was not Chicago, where he had had a well-trained, dominated following of men to back him up, to protect him. For their assistance in this job, Tony had promised each of them ten grand; win, lose, or draw, as far as the treasure was concerned. Ten grand—and there, in that jewel box alone, was a hundred times ten grand!

THE eyes of Tony's two subordinates glittered evilly. This was a cinch. They didn't have a girl to wait for. They had merely to put Tony out of the way, sneak to the river, and make their getaway in one of the canoes.

Slim drew his gun.

Shorty shook his head. The report of a pistol would carry to the house, where the sentries dozed.

So absorbed was Tony in his gloating over, and appraising the precious contents of the box, that he failed to see the pantomime behind his back, or notice the footsteps stealthily drawing closer to him.

Suddenly they sprang upon him.

In his youth Tony had been the possessor of prodigious strength. In the early days it had been due chiefly to it that he had survived. But, in later years, he had grown more and more to depend upon his cunning brain. Yet, all was not fat and flabby muscles in his stocky body. The years

act slowly in dissipating that which is carefully nurtured in youth.

With a snarl of rage, he hurled himself backward. His huge arms flung themselves outward. For just a split second he was free. And, in that second, he had possessed himself of the knife his race always carries.

HE viciously drove the weapon into the chest of the man whose fingers clutched his throat. Shorty Niccola collapsed with a groan.

Realizing that he was fighting alone, Slim Johnson jerked free. He reached desperately for his automatic, and got it out only in time.

At the sight of the gun barrel glistening in Slim's hand, Tony stopped. Moments passed while the two men narrowly eyed each other. Slim was afraid—now. Tony knew it and Slim would fire, if he were forced. Tony knew that, too. Consequently, he was the first to break the silence.

"Don't be a fool, Slim," he began conciliatingly. "Put down that rod. You and me are too old friends to get heated up by this foolishness. I know it's that rat Niccola's fault. He must of turned your head, Slim."

All the while he was speaking, Tony was stealing nearer and nearer to Slim, who seemed to be hypnotized by the sudden turn of affairs.

"Stay where you are, Tony!" he suddenly commanded, at last realizing his danger. Tony halted.

"Aw, Slim," he begged. "Put down that gun."

"Listen to me," Tony began to reason. "Let's forget this foolishness. What you say, huh? What can you do without Tony? You think you got his brains, huh? You think you can get away from here? How you gonna get by Mister Preciado's men? Don't you think he watch the river?"

"Come on, Slim. Be a gooda fellow. We'll be partners. You have half, and I'll have half. Together, we get away

with it. You just leave it to me. What you say, Slim?"

Slim realized that Tony was talking sense. Slim was not the kind who fared best alone. He needed Tony. But he was still afraid. If he knew Tony, the former mob leader would never forget this treachery. Better let him have it now, and take chances. There was Ike Smith out there at the edge of the grove. Ike and he could make a dash for it.

The sweat poured down Tony's face. Yet he was not particularly warm. He knew what was passing through Slim's mind. If he could get Slim to drop the muzzle of the gun for just a second . . .

"Ah, what have we here, *senores*?"

Both Slim and Tony whirled about at the sound of that deep, smooth voice.

A few feet away stood Don José Preciado. Behind him, stepping from their places of concealment behind palms, were many ragged, bare-footed brown soldiers. The tall, straw sombreros of more were rising out of the tall grass round about.

Don José advanced to the pit. He poked into the jewel box with his riding crop.

A sardonic smile was on his thin Spanish lips. He bowed mockingly to the worried pair from Chicago.

"Many thanks, *senores*! I have been searching for these very things for so long a time now."

With an indifferent toe, he kicked the inert body of Shorty Niccola.

"*Valgame Dios!*" he grinned. "That is one dead, I think."

CHAPTER XII

Uncle and Niece

ONCE more the swift tropical night blanketed the *hacienda* of the Gonzalez, and the sluggish flowing waters of the Rio Olaya beside it. On this second

night, however, the thousand troops of General Preciado were not bivouacked in the vicinity. They now lay in the depths of the jungle, twelve miles nearer Las Vegas.

However, in the stables of the *hacienda* a score of horses stamped restlessly, while their masters sought slumber in the various outhouses of the ranch. The home of the Gonzalez was still the general's headquarters, and this was a troop of cavalry, the sole one in the revolutionary army, his personal guard.

To the three prisoners in the living room of the house the hours of the night were dragging by on feet of lead. Dispiritedly, they looked at the two expressionless sentries at the door. Then they turned their eyes to the table in the center of the room. There sat Don Jose. All night long he had been doing the same thing: counting, checking the treasures of Felipe Gonzalez. He listed them in a notebook. Then he would sit back in his chair and stare with speculative eye, at the ceiling.

Finally he was through. Into new boxes that he had ordered procured, he, personally, deposited the plate, the gold. Into their own box, he carefully placed the jewels.

He glanced at his watch. Almost morning. What was keeping Huertemate?

BREAKING the silence, which had been upon the room for hours, he spoke at last.

"I am afraid, *Senor* Mallow, that my emissaries are late! I am indeed sorry. If they do not come soon, it will be too late for you to make the start down the river. It will be necessary for you to wait until tomorrow night. You would not succeed in getting the girl past Las Vegas in the daytime."

Tony did not reply. He was mystified. He had been perplexed ever

since Don José had discovered them in the palm grove. What was in this spiggoty's mind? By every rule of the game, he should have been full of wrath when he found them at the treasure. He must have suspected that it was that they had come after, when he laid his trap to catch them. Yet, if anything, he was more polite than ever. In fact, he had been full of gratitude to them for finding the treasure for him.

All night long Tony's weary brain had revolved about this astonishing state of affairs. He had even asked the opinions of Slim and Ike, in the hope that they would have some idea that would be the key to the riddle.

AS if he had divined what was in Tony's mind, the general spoke again.

"Do not worry for your loved one, *senor!* I can see that it weighs heavily upon your mind. Never fear. What Don José Preciado has promised, that he will fulfill. By dawn, at the latest, I swear it, she will be here, in your arms.

"But one thing, *senor.* You must take her immediately from this country. You and she must never return again. Understand?"

Tony surlily nodded his head.

Silence again took possession of the room.

Don José's keen eyes wandered over the faces of his prisoners, as he thought. A precious trio of rascals! They thought to trick him, did they? That fat one, especially. Well, they had learned, as must everyone who ventures to cross swords or wits with Don José Preciado. A cunning smile flickered across his dark features. How well Fate had played into his hands! The girl now, this daughter of Felipe, she would be well taken care of.

This *Americano* who desired her, saved him the necessity of putting

her to death. Kill Gonzalez, Don Jose would have cheerfully done. But the daughter of his sister, even though he had disliked that sister, would it not be bad luck to kill her? A much easier way, a way which saved his own conscience, and perhaps his good luck, was to let the fat one have her.

The door opened.

Lieutenant Huertmate entered. Behind him followed a frightened, bedraggled, utterly weary girl. Two soldiers, on either side of her, assisted her.

"General Preciado——"

At that name, life returned to Celia. She looked toward Don José, and cried out aloud:

"Uncle! My uncle! Save me! I am Cecilia Gonzalez. My father was Felipe Gonzalez."

She rushed to him, arms outstretched, sobbing.

AS always, Don José was the gentleman most courteous. He received his niece in his arms. He let her rest her poor, tired head against his chest. But over her dark, tangled curls, he winked an eye at the intently watching Tony.

"There, there, child," he soothed, patting her slender shoulders. "It is all right, Cecilia. Nobody will harm you now. See, here is your lover, come to save you, to take you back to a pretty little home he has built for you."

"Spike!" the girl cried unbelievably, gladly. She turned.

The sight of her fanned the old flame in Tony Mallow's breast. It blazed more fiercely than ever before. With that fire dancing in his small eyes, he was advancing toward her.

"Tony . . . Mallow!" The words came from her in a horrified whisper. She shrank against her uncle.

"It's me, Celia!" cried Tony. "I shall save you, baby. Tony will take

you away from here. Come to me, kid."

LIKE a man gone mad, Spike Muldoon strode up and down the narrow confines of the mouldy cell into which the brothers had been thrust. From the tiny, barred window, high up in the slimy stone wall, a few beams of moonlight found their way into the foul hole.

"God . . . God!" he kept repeating to himself.

Tim, from where he squatted on a filthy pallet of straw, cried out:

"Holy Moses, Spike! It'll be crazy you'll be drivin' me if you don't kape still!"

"I'll get him!" Tim could hear Spike's teeth gritting in the darkness. "If it takes all my life, I'll get him! Oh, poor, poor, little Celia!"

After an interval Tim presented an idea.

"Maybe it wasn't Tony after all, Spike! Maybe it's the same divil that tried to get the letter in the United States! If it is, he won't be after harmin' Celia. It'll only be the tray-sure that he'll be wantin'."

This fresh angle of the situation drove Spike to his feet once more. And all through the night he paced restlessly up and down. For short intervals of time Tim slept. But always he would reawaken. In the darkness he could hear the dull sounds of Spike's never-ceasing footfalls.

At last there was a noise at the door. A slot in the bottom of it opened and some one from the outside pushed in a hunk of bread and a couple of tin bowls.

Spike leaped to his feet. He pounded on the door.

"Hey!" he cried. "I want to see the American minister! We're Americans. You can't keep us in here like this!"

"No sabe," came the muffled reply from outside.

"What do ye suppose he means by that?" queried Tim.

"I don't know," returned Spike discouragedly.

It was after ten o'clock before the American minister, Mr. Davies, arrived. With serious face he listened to the story of the attack by the warehouses.

"You know," he said thoughtfully, after they had finally finished, "I don't believe that your friend, Tony Mallow, is connected in this. It is my guess that it is the work of her uncle, Don José Preciado."

"Her uncle!" cried the brothers in the same breath.

YES. In the first place, Mallow wouldn't be able to manage anything like that so soon. But if it was he, we'll have him very soon. I'll get the city authorities busy on it right away.

"However, I doubt it. You don't know Preciado. He is the cleverest man in Costa Bella. He is as ruthless and as dishonest as a snake. If he knew that Miss Gonzalez was coming here to recover the fortune of her family, nothing would stop him from doing his utmost to get it."

"But, man!" interrupted Tim. "The poor child is his niece! His flesh and blood! Surely he has a heart!"

A melancholy smile passed across Mr. Davies' face. Seeing that smile, Spike felt his blood turn cold in his veins.

"But suppose this Preciado has got her?" he demanded.

Mr. Davies' voice was sympathetic.

"Then I'm afraid, Mr. Muldoon, that there is nothing we can do. You say that she is not a citizen of the United States. Her father never became naturalized. What can the United States do? I can only take the matter up with the Costa Bellan government. And I'm afraid it has enough trouble right now. I'm sorry."

"Listen, Mr. Davies!" Spike's lips were a single straight line. "Get us out of here—right away. Start the works goin' to locate her, if she is in the city. But, above all—get us out now."

"I shall have you out of here in ten minutes," promised the minister. "Then if you will please go to my office and wait for me, I shall go to the government and see what can be done."

AN hour later Mr. Davies entered his office. Anxiously the brothers rose to greet him.

"I was right!" he cried. "And, I guess," he added, "so were you! While I was in the office of the chief of police at the capitol building, a Costa Bellan was brought in. He was in terrible condition! Said that he had come from the headquarters of General Preciado. He had been traveling for nearly two days through the jungles without a bite to eat or a drink of water. His name is Gómez. He——"

"What did he say?" demanded Spike, impatient at the Minister's wandering, but excited, recital. "What did he say?"

"I asked him, and he said that Preciado had given orders to have some girl seized. He said that four strangers—Americans—had paid the general to do it."

"Tony Mallow!" snarled Spike.

"Himself!" breathed Tim, like an echo.

"Where does this Preciado hang out?" demanded Spike.

Mr. Davies shrugged his shoulders slightly. He indicated a vague direction with his hand.

"Nobody knows — exactly. The rebel army is about eight miles west of Las Vegas. It is probable that he is there with it."

"Where did this guy—Gómez say he saw Tony Mallow and his crowd?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed the Minister. "I forgot. It slipped my mind for the instant. Gómez said that he was a prisoner on the Gonzalez *hacienda*. Goodness, what a coincidence! I wonder if the girl is now a captive—I wonder——"

"Yes!" gritted Spike, standing over the Minister and clenching his fists.

Minister Davies was growing alarmed. The glittering-eyed person before him looked like a wild man.

"I was just wondering," he concluded hastily, "if she really was a prisoner in the very homestead once possessed by her family!"

"How can I get to this place?" cried Spike.

THE Minister rose and placed propitiating hands upon Spike's chest.

"My dear fellow, calm yourself! There isn't a single thing you can do about it. Please be sensible! It is impossible to get outside the city, to say nothing of penetrating the revolutionary lines, and getting to the Gonzalez *hacienda*. And even granted that you should, by some miracle, get there, what could you do? You, alone in a country swarming with Don José's men? Impossible, I say. Not to be thought of. There is but one thing to do. If this man Gómez is right, then perhaps Preciado will give this—this gangster the girl. If they intend to get out of the country, they will have to pass by Las Vegas somehow. I shall have the word sent out, and when they come through, we shall catch them."

Spike roughly dashed the kindly hands of the Minister from his chest.

"No!" he yelled into that gentleman's astonished, frightened face. "No! What will be happenin' to Celia in the meantime? You can't tell what those devils will do! I've got to get her! You understand! I've got to! You've got to find a way, Mr. Minister!"

CHAPTER XIII

Spike Finds a Way

IN a frenzy of despair Spike, with an extremely sober Tim by his side, tramped the dirty, narrow, humanity-clogged streets of Las Vegas. His thoughts were torturing him. What kind of fiend was her uncle to sell her into the hands of a toad like Mallow? A man capable of that was capable of anything.

People passing them by on the street stared at Spike's drawn face. Women and timid men drew aside to let them pass.

They sought everywhere for a way of reaching the Gonzalez *hacienda*. At the hotel clerks whispered behind their backs and tapped their foreheads significantly. They went down to the banks of the Rio Olaya, near the spot where Celia had disappeared. To their questions the river men stared at them curiously and invariably replied, "*No sabe!*"

They walked along the docks fronting the quiet waters of the bay. The sun's rays reflected from that calm surface, nearly blinded them.

Suddenly Spike gripped Tim's arm with such force that he squealed aloud protestingly.

"Look!" he ordered.

As they watched an airplane shot out from the side of the ship. Straight as an arrow it came toward the city. Then it circled and began rising higher and higher. When, finally, it was no larger than a bird against the cloudless blue sky, it turned and headed for the interior. It was the patrol going out to spy upon the progress of the revolutionary army.

TIM, too, became excited. However his momentary flash of enthusiasm soon died.

"Aw, Spike, they won't do nothin' fer us! If we was John D. now, an' that was some friend o' the family's,

it ud be different. But fer a couple o' mugs like we be——"

Captain Fred Mainwaring, U. S. N., fortunately was not without a little Irish blood in his veins. With growing sympathy he listened gravely to the earnest, desperate story told by the tall, lean, clean-cut young man across the mahogany desk from him. At times he had to hide a smile with a polite hand when the red-faced, roly-poly one seconded emphatically in his rich brogue the statements of his companion.

At last Spike had made his daring request. Balancing himself on a tiny fraction of his chair, he leaned forward, his blue eyes desperately pleading. Timothy Muldoon held his breath.

While he thought Captain Mainwaring drummed his fingers on the glass-covered top of his desk. The romance and the adventure of the thing appealed to him. Yet how did he know but what he was being treated to some cock-and-bull story? What did he know about these two men? He had never seen nor heard of them before they had been brought to his quarters by a suspicious sailor. Some native cayuca had brought them out to the ship.

HIS keen glance searched Spike's face. Then it turned upon Tim's. Guilty men, men with something to hide, sailors who were trying to get away with something, had dropped their gaze before that keen stare of Captain Mainwaring.

Captain Mainwaring had spent many years in the United States Navy. He considered himself a fairly good judge of men.

"There is nothing I can do—officially," he began slowly.

The hearts of Spike and Tim dropped sickeningly to their shoes.

"However," continued the gray-haired captain, a twinkle beginning to

dance in his gray eyes, "there will be two ships, instead of one, dispatched for the afternoon patrol. If you men would like to go along as observers, I think I can arrange it.

"If you should happen to fall out of the planes, it would be very regrettable. But I don't see what I could do about it, do you?" he asked innocently. "Of course, you will be wearing parachutes. They are required by regulations for everyone who goes up.

"However, understand this." The captain shook a warning finger. "You go up entirely at your own risk, and fall out the same way."

He rose to his feet. Spike and Tim, their glad eyes shining with gratitude, rose with him.

"I am going to send you to Commander Ewing, who will fix you up.

"Well," he shook each by the hand, "good luck to you, men! Don't lose your nerve! Give 'em hell!"

CHAPTER XIV

Tony Schemes

CECILIA GONZALEZ stood sorrowfully by the open window of her second-story room. Her untouched lunch, consisting of some fried cakes, a bowl of corn mush, a couple of hard crackers and a cup of wine, lay on the battered table in the center of the room. Whenever she turned her eyes in that direction she could partly see, leaning stolidly against the jamb of the door, the very dirty shirt, the frayed trousers, the scarred bare legs, the ground rifle of the sentry guarding her.

Gnawing at her trembling under lip she stared out into the turquoise sky. Within two months—sixty days—how her life had changed. She had been contented in Chicago with her gentle, kindly father. She had been wondrously happy in her love for Spike.

Now her father was dead; killed by an assassin's hand. And Spike—strong, handsome, careless Spike—she would never see him again. She knew it. She had made up her mind to it, in the long, hot hours of that day. Before she would let Tony Mallow put his hands upon her—

She hid her face in her hands and sobbed unrestrainedly. The sentry, hearing the sound, peered in, and, turning his head away, sneered disgustedly

To think that her uncle, her mother's own brother, was responsible for all this! Cecilia shuddered. Now she was sure that it had been he who had been responsible for the murder of her father. He had captured her—to hand her over to a creature like Tony Mallow. And for gold. Her own uncle!

Terror seized her heart. Perhaps, too, his agents, his hired thugs, who had abducted her that night in Las Vegas, had killed Spike and Tim also. To her repeated questions and frequent pleadings, they had returned silence.

A persistent droning sound, growing louder each second, came in through the window. Airplanes!

Celia looked out and up. There, high over the *hacienda*, their silver wings glinting in the sun, she could see two planes. Straining her eyes, she made out the blue letters on the under wings. "U. S. NAVY."

FOR an instant hysteria seized her. She cried out to them. She waved her arms wildly. Then reason told her that her actions were utterly useless and silly. The pilots of those planes could not see her, let alone hear her tiny earth voice.

Wearily, resignedly, Cecilia let her arms fall.

Outside on the veranda three men squatted in the shade. Their heads were close together. They spoke in

low voices, glancing occasionally at the two sentinels, on the other side of the veranda, watching the group with suspicious, glowering looks.

"You guys listen to me!" demanded Tony Mallow. "You going to let that spiggoty get away with all that stuff, huh? Why, there's a cool million in that little jewel box alone. And one man can carry it."

"What's your idea, Tony?" asked Ike Smith.

Lowering his voice further, Tony began: "Watch for the breaks, I say. There's always a break, if a fellow is on the lookout for 'em. I know. I've seen and had plenty myself.

"Listen! This old bird, Preciado is coming back here tonight. He'll only have a few of these spiggoties with him. They ain't much good, when it comes to a real scrap. Watch me. Keep your eyes skinned. If there's a break, I'll give the signal. We'll jump 'em. We oughta be able to do it. There's three of us here. We'll give 'em the Chicago treatment, huh, boys?" He grinned. "We'll grab the stuff and the girl, and make a break for it. Down to the river. They'll never catch us in the dark."

"Yeah," sneered Slim disbelievingly. "They won't be no breaks! That spiggoty is too slick. You ain't catchin' him that way. Besides, they ain't none of us got a rod. What the hell can yuh do wit'out a rod?"

TONY ignored the objecting Slim. "What do you say, Ike? Are you going to let that spiggoty get away with all those rocks and rubies and pearls, without a kick? It belongs to us, anyhow. Think of it!" Tony's face was crafty, avaricious. "Must be a million at least!"

Ike Smith, first mate of the *Sea Rover*, thought for a minute. He had been in tight positions before, and had wriggled through, leaving the other fellow on the bottom. There

sure was a lot of kale bound up in those trinkets in the steel box. A man could carry it under his arm.

He spat a stream of tobacco juice into the sunlight.

"Deal me in, mister. But make sure we got a honest-to-goodness chance. I don't hanker to leave my bones rot-tin' in this part of the world. Yuh can depend on me. I'll do my little bit when it comes to sluggin'," he grinned.

"Well—what about you, Slim?" Tony shot a hate-filled glance at his gunman.

"Ah, I suppose it's okay. But leave the moll out. We won't have no time to be luggin' her 'round the country."

"She goes with us—see?" Tony narrowed his eyes.

NIGHT, following speedily upon the heels of the departed sunset, once more dropped its black mantle over the world. Lights shone in the house. Soldiers lounged on the veranda. Don José Preciado had returned.

In the living room two immobile sentries kept guard at the door and watched, with disinterested eyes, the scene before them.

"You are ready to start, *senores*?" queried Don José politely. "I have a *cayuca*, with Indians, ready at the river. They will pilot you safely downstream to your yacht, the famous *Sea Rover*, isn't it?" he said, bending an amused gaze at Ike Smith.

The door opened and Celia was pushed in.

"Ah, *Senorita* Gonzalez!" Don José bowed deeply. "You are just in time! I have the most happy news for you. Although it is with much pain that I part so soon from the charming daughter of my old friend, Felipe Gonzalez, yet I am most delighted that I have been the humble instrument in bringing you and your loved one together again. In a few min-

utes you are starting out on that happy voyage that will take you far away from this poor, sad war-torn country. My best wishes go with you, *senorita*, and may you be very happy."

Cecilia's black eyes smouldered as she listened to his lying, hypocritical speech. Although her thumping heart threatened to burst, she drew herself erect. She had fought out the battle with herself. She knew the part she was going to play. Ghosts of former women of the Gonzalez, women who had endured the hardships and perils of the New World, had gathered around her this night, prompting her words and actions, lending her courage.

Her proud bearing, her scornful eye, served only to heighten her beauty. As he watched her, Tony's little, piggy eyes glistened with desire. Ike Smith, Slim, the Central Americans in the room, could not help but catch their breaths in admiration.

"No, Don José," she said, holding his glance meanwhile, "I am not going. See!"

Suddenly she snatched from her dress a blunt, rust-stained knife. It had been served, during the day, with one of her meals. With rigid hand she held the point a few inches from her breast.

"Stop!" Preciado commanded. Like a striking snake he lunged at her.

It was then that Tony Mallow realized that "the break" had arrived. He nudged his companions significantly. Slim and Ike dove across the room at the sentries. Tony himself hurled his bulky body square at Don José.

CHAPTER XV

Shadows

MEANWHILE two shadows were silently stealing their way through the jungle brush toward the lighted windows of

the house. Every now and then these two moving black blots on the face of the night would halt to check their direction. Perhaps a short, whispered consultation would ensue.

Spike was crouched down in the tall grass, peering intently at the house not over five hundred yards away. It was too far away for him to hear any sounds coming from it. In fact, he could not even see whether there was anyone around it or not. They would steal closer.

"Come on!" he shot at his brother.

Tim, taking a fresh grip on the bulky Bridget, prepared to follow.

"*Que passe?*"

THE guttural challenge shattered the stillness of the night. The two brothers, tensed, remained rooted to their tracks. Their staring eyes made out a huge, conical hat rising out of the bushes a few paces away.

It appeared that the sentinel was looking straight at them. Tim silently blasphemed his heart for making so much noise. But, after a few minutes of peering about, the sentinel apparently became satisfied that his imagination had been playing tricks upon him. He sank down into the bushes to resume his dreams of the glory and loot that were to be his in Las Vegas.

Once more the brothers resumed their cautious advance toward the house. Suddenly, they jumped. It came again.

"*Que passe?*"

It seemed that this command had been shouted into their very ears. Now, on the other side of them, a second sentinel arose. Immediately, he saw them. The report of his rifle smashed all hopes of the brothers for concealment.

"Let's go!" Spike yelled. "Into the house!"

Around them, orange flashes cut the night. Their ears heard the whine

of lead. Shouts and curses pursued them.

ACROSS the clearing in front of the house, they raced. Spike led; but Tim, for all his short, stubby legs, was not far behind. They dashed up the steps, and across the veranda. The soldiers who had been lounging there a minute before, scattered at their approach.

Inside, Tony and his confederates were in the process of winding up their coup. Slim and Ike had wrested the rifles from the hands of the surprised sentries, whose bravery had melted away before the fierce onslaught of grim-faced Americans. Once a soldier himself, Ike dispatched his opponent neatly with a single thrust of the bayonet. Slim took Chicago's messier method. The *soldado* shrinking from him, dropped to the floor with a crushed head.

Meanwhile, Tony and Don José, in a death struggle, writhed together on the floor. Cecilia, one hand to a bloodless cheek; the other, still holding the knife, hanging by her side, watched them with fascinated gaze. The sudden turn of events, the commotion, had driven the thought of self-destruction from her mind.

At first, it seemed like an equal struggle. But the Spaniard's age soon began to tell on him. Tony's gripping hands found his throat. Slowly, inexorably, those stubby fingers squeezed.

FROM outside came the reports of rifles.

Slim and Ike Smith, having just completed their work, turned, at the noise, and dove at Tony. Bodily, they dragged him from the purple-faced, gasping Don José.

"Let him go!" they yelled. "They're on to us! We gotta get away!"

It was Ike Smith who snatched up

the steel box containing the jewels. Tony flung himself suddenly upon Cecilia. He twisted her arm cruelly, and the knife clattered to the floor. Then, with Slim leading the procession, Ike in the middle, with the box under his arm, and Tony behind, relentlessly dragging with him the struggling girl, they crossed the room.

The door burst open in their faces.

Spike Muldoon, wild-eyed, gun in hand, halted for a second, and stared at what he saw before him. Tim, down the hall, was slamming shut the outer door of the house. His cannon barked twice in farewell to the orange flashes out beyond. An answering screech tickled his soul.

Slim Johnson acted instinctively. Up went the muzzle of his rifle.

Spike fired from the waist. Slim sagged to the floor.

Ike Smith, with the jewel box under his arm, could do nothing but stand there, estimating the situation. Tony stared at Spike with popping eyes. If the whole of Don José's army had been crowding in the door, he would have been less surprised.

"Spike!" screamed Cecilia, wrenching herself away from the astounded Tony.

With his gun, Spike waved her back.

At this juncture, Tim crowded in to the doorway beside Spike.

"Spikie, darlint!" he squealed excitedly. "I do belave the devils are surrounding the house. It's in a hel-luva fix we be, I'm after thinkin'!"

WITH the speed of lightning Spike's brain summed up the situation. He noted the rifle in Ike Smith's hand.

"Listen, you guys!" he snapped out. "Play the game with us, an' maybe we'll all get out alive. If you don't,

you two won't, that's certain!" he stated grimly.

"What d'yuh mean?" asked Ike Smith.

"Stick together. Fight off that mob. You two have got rifles."

Ike Smith put down the box. Under stress, he had made instantaneous decisions before.

"Okay."

Without another word, he crossed to the window, poked his rifle out, and fired at an orange flash.

"What about you, Tony?" Spike's voice was deadly. "Will you take it now, or do you want the chance of gettin' it later?"

"Yea-ah!" snarled Tony venomously. "This is one hot spot you ain't getting out of, Muldoon!"

"Maybe," agreed Spike, his eyes glittering. "But that ain't the question. Are you goin' to string along with us now, or . . ."

For answer, Tony picked up the rifle which lay beside the body of Slim Johnson.

"Okay," said Spike. "You an' Tim to the back of the house. No tricks, Tony! This guy," he continued, indicating Ike, "will hold 'em off in front here. I'll take care of both sides; an'," he looked significantly at Tony, "I'll be tourin' around wherever needed."

At last, Spike turned to the girl.

"Cele, darlin'," he said, with a world of love and tenderness in his voice, which expressed to her, better than words could tell, the suffering he had endured, "will you please 'o go-in' over to that corner there, an' lyin' down? Soon they'll be throwin' lead in here so fast, you'll not be able to cut the air with a knife."

"Oh, Spike!" she cried. Fear for him filled her voice.

"Don't you worry, darlin'," he smiled at her.

FOR the next few minutes, fire on both sides, was furiously exchanged. The house was constantly ringed with orange splashes.

Bullets whined in through the windows and thudded into the walls of the rooms, scattering plaster everywhere. High, shrill yells and curses came from the besieging cavalry troops outside. The frantic voice of Lieutenant Huertmate, commander of Don Jose's personal guard, rose above the rest, ordering and counter ordering. He was bewildered. The general, Don José Preciado, was still inside the house.

Suddenly, Ike Smith gave a strange wheezy cough. The sound of his rifle dropping to the floor, and echoing through the house, sent chill ripples down the spines of the defenders. They knew that the hardened, bald-headed mate of the *Sea Rover* had at last cashed in his chips.

THE fire from outside lessened. Now, only an occasional spurt of orange stabbed the night. Lieutenant Huertmate had called his men to a council of war.

On his hands and knees, Spike crept to Celia's side. While he held her hand to comfort her, and reassure her, his brain worked desperately. At every turn, it met a blank wall.

With tender hand, Spike smoothed Celia's curly hair. A lump, as big as an ostrich egg, was in his throat, choking him. Unconsciously, he clenched his fist, cruelly hurting the small hand buried within it. They were not going to die! There was a way out of this—somehow!

From the dark shadow, cast by the table in the center of the room, came a groan.

"Saints preserve us!" ejaculated Tim. "What's that now?"

Celia bent forward. Faintly she could make out the tall form of Don José. He was just recovering the

consciousness he had lost at the hands of Tony Mallow. The old general reached a hand up to the table, and slowly drew himself to his feet.

"My uncle!" she cried.

"Your uncle?" repeated Spike. "Preciado? The boss guy around here?"

LIKE a sunrise bursting upon a dark world, a plan, full-formed, entered his mind. The revolutionists certainly would not kill their leader.

With quick strides, Spike crossed the room to the side of the swaying Don. Full consciousness of where he was, and of what had happened, had not yet come to Preciado.

Spike's gun bored into the ribs of the Spaniard.

"We want to get out of here . . . alive . . . get me? If you're wantin' the same, you'll be doin' as I tell you—no questions asked, an' no tricks! Understand?"

Like nothing else would have done, the prod of the gun had awakened fully the senses of Don Preciado. Through the darkness, he glowered at the figures around him. From outside, came another crack of a rifle. Plaster showered down upon the head of the general. He grasped the situation.

"You'll be tellin' your friends outside to cut out the shootin'. You'll also tell them that you are escortin' us to the river. It is your wish to see your prisoners depart friendly an' peaceable like. If you will be doin' that, we'll leave you behind, unharmed, though it goes against my nature to let a black-hearted skunk like yourself go unkilld."

"If I don't do as you ask, *senor*?" demanded Don José calmly, while his eyes swept about estimating possibilities.

Spike jammed in the muzzle of the gun deeper. Even in the dim light of the moon, the Spaniard could see the

glitter in the eyes of the Irishman.

"I've let daylight through better men than yourself. An' my finger is gettin' more unruly by the second. Are you steppin' to the window, an' sayin' a few words, or are you not?"

FOR a breathless minute, the two men stared at each other. Don Preciado thought rapidly. He knew that he was in a tight hole. He had no foolish doubts as to what Spike would do. The general was no coward, but he, too, knew that discretion, sometimes, was by far the better part of valor.

Under his breath, Spike Muldoon was offering up a prayer. This was their only chance. If Preciado refused, they were done for.

The general stepped to the window. "Huertmate! Huertmate!" he called into the darkness. There came an answering, surprised hail.

Preciado spoke rapidly in Spanish. "No tricks now!" warned Spike. It worried him that he could not understand the general's words. "The minute you double-cross us is the minute you meet your Maker, my lad."

After Preciado had finished speaking, a silence fell. Then, finally, came a short, doubtful sounding reply, in Spanish, from Lieutenant Huertmate.

A cold, dignified Don Jose turned to Spike.

"They will allow you to pass to the river unharmed," he said in English.

By now, Tony had come into the room. At the words of Don José, the Italian fumbled in his pockets for matches. He found the box.

As the yellow light flared up, outlining their bodies to those outside, Spike stepped forward, and dashed the match from Tony's hand.

"Put that out, you fool! You want 'em to pick us off!"

But Tony saw what he had been looking for. He reached down into the shadows beside the desk. When

he straightened up again, the steel box containing the family jewels of the Gonzalez was under his arm.

"What have you got there?" demanded Spike suspiciously.

Don José watched the play. His eyes glittered with hate.

"Diamonds . . . pearls . . . everything. You think we leave them behind, huh?" Tony grinned slyly. "Worth a million, maybe . . . or more. We split it."

But Tony Mallow had no intentions of splitting. Everything was working out splendidly for him. They were going to get away . . . down the river. And at the mouth of the river the *Sea Rover* would be waiting. Tony laughed to himself. What luck! These so wise brothers were helping him to get away with that which they had come to get themselves—the girl's inheritance. He, Tony, would get her, too! Upon the two brothers, he would be able to wreak his long-stored vengeance.

Spike stared at the box under Tony's arm. In the excitement of Celia's capture, in the events which had crowded after, he had not thought of the treasure that had brought them from the United States. Whatever that box contained—gold, precious stones—was hers. "Worth a million maybe—or more." All of it was hers.

"All right. Take it!" he snapped.

CHAPTER XVI

Undersea Death Struggle

THE white eye of the heavens solemnly gazed down upon the little group as it crossed the silent clearing which surrounded the house and buildings of the *hacienda*, and led down to the river's edge. From the black edge of the jungle, a few hundred yards away, other eyes watched them.

The stillness was uncanny. Only

the plaintive cry of some night prowling jungle bird disturbed it. Occasionally, however, faint crashings in bushes came across the clearing, and told the keen-eared Spike that Preciado's men were keeping up with their progress.

He and his captive, Don José, were in the lead. Never once did Spike release the pressure of his automatic upon the space between the general's shoulder blades. His eyes and ears were on the alert for the first sign of treachery.

Now, the black, rippling waters of the Rio Olaya came into view. A long cayuca was drawn up on the shore. No one was about. The Indians, who were to paddle Tony and his companions down the river, had evidently fled.

All during the march from the house, Don José had been thinking deeply. He could not forget that precious box which Tony carried under his arm. That one necklace, of diamonds and rubies, was worth a king's ransom, to say nothing of the long rope of milky, iridescent pearls. *Madre de Dios!* He could not let those precious things escape from his hands!

They had reached the river bank. Suddenly, Don José whirled about. He shouted a command in Spanish.

At the same instant, Tony leaped from the bank. He placed the box into the boat. He was in the act of shoving off into the river, when Tim landed beside him.

CLUTCHING the roll of fat at the nape of Tony's neck, the Irishman growled:

"No ye don't, ye double-crossin' rat! Lave us behind, would ye? I've a good mind to lave ye behind! Into the boat now. Lively!"

Meanwhile, from the blackness of the nearby jungle, came shouts in answer to Preciado's cry. Spike could

hear the noise of many men crashing through the undergrowth.

With a terrific heave, Spike cast the clawing Spaniard from him. Quickly he shifted his gun to his left hand. And, as Don José came at him again, he drove his right fist forward. General Don José Preciado sagged to the moist earth.

Sweeping Celia up into his arms, Spike leaped from the bank. Not taking time to put her down, he scrambled into the boat, which the ever useful Tim was holding.

After giving a prodigious shove, which came perilously near to upsetting the boat, Tim clambered into it from the water.

Spike was in front. Tim was in back. Tony and Celia crouched in the center. The boat was in mid-stream. Taking up the paddles, which had been lying on the bottom of the cayuca, Spike and Tim began to paddle furiously.

They saw a cluster of dark forms gather on the river bank. Again, the brilliant orange flashes spurted into the night. Lead whined over their heads, and splashed into the water uncomfortably near.

At last, they swept around a bend in the river. Don José's men tried to follow on shore. But the determined jungle resisted their furious efforts at speed.

ALL through the long night they fled past the mysterious, inscrutable, black walls of the jungle, which rose up, on both sides, from the river. Silver streaks cut the ripples of the water. Straining their eyes, they could make out the knobby, glistening backs of alligators, waiting, searching for prey.

The weary, trouble worn Celia had slept through most of the journey, her curly head resting on one crooked arm. Tony had spent the hours bent forward in one position. The

brothers had thought him asleep. His cunning mind, however, was far too active for that. While he sat gnawing his lip, he was waiting, waiting for the mouth of the river to come into view. There, the good *Sea Rover*, under the command of the capable Abel Masters, would be waiting.

A few, jagged, gray spears were beginning to thrust themselves into the sky, prying apart the fastly closed gates of night. The *cayuca* rounded another weary bend, and there, before the tired eyes of Spike and his brother, the lights of Las Vegas' waterfront glowed in the grayish mist which was now beginning to rise from the river.

With new strength, they headed the boat for shore.

Tony lifted his head, and peered anxiously about. That damned mist! Suddenly, his heart gave a glad bound. Not far from where they were, the Rio Olaya gave its all to the bay. And there, the *Sea Rover*, looking, through the mists, like a ghost ship, was anchored. Masters had kept his word.

The steel box was at Tim's feet. The canny Irishman had taken the precaution of placing it there shortly after they had begun the voyage.

Suddenly, Tony stood up. He yelled at the top of his voice.

"Hey, *Sea Rover*! Masters! Masters!"

At first, the tired brains of the brothers failed to function. With red-rimmed eyes, they stared at Tony. Had he gone mad?

From the *Sea Rover* came an answering hail. It boomed hollowly across the calm water. It was followed shortly after by the noise of creaking blocks. A boat was being let down into the water.

Spike was the first to comprehend something was wrong.

Tony Mallow had friends on that boat!

He lifted his dripping paddle from the water, and aimed a vicious blow at the gangster's head. But Tony was not there to receive it. He dove for the box, the precious box.

Tim thought the onslaught was meant for him. In the rocking boat, he stood uncertainly to meet it. His cramped legs betrayed him. He put his hand back to recover his balance. At the same instant, Tony smashed into him.

"Look out, ye . . ." he cried. But, he never finished the sentence. With wildly waving arms and legs, he disappeared over the back end of the boat. A resounding splash marked his reception into the water.

Spike scrambled past the terrified Cecilia. Tony let the box go. With a snarl, he steadied himself to meet the attack.

Without a word, the two men grappled. They swayed, and stumbled about the narrow limits of the *cayuca*, which rocked jerkily, crazily.

With horrified gaze, Cecilia watched the struggle. With arms outstretched, she strove to preserve the balance of the canoe.

LIKE drunken men in a brawl, the two men writhed and twisted.

Spike's breath was coming in gasps. He felt a weakness flowing through his veins. Tony was stronger than he. Tony had not paddled all night.

With a throaty exclamation of exultation, Tony, exerting all his strength, pushed. Spike staggered backward, hung in midair for an instant, more out of the boat than in.

Tony was quick to follow his advantage. He thrust out a fist that would send Spike into the water.

At the same instant, Celia acted. With all her frail strength, she flung herself against the side of the *cayuca* towards Spike. Even the sturdy *cayuca* could not withstand that. With a sudden flip, it was over.

Spike found himself clasping Tony in his arms. A second later, they hit the water.

Down, down. . . .

Choking, gasping, the two men came to the surface. They were face to face, a few inches from each other. In the brain of each, nothing existed but a mad desire to kill the other. Water splashed up as they grappled once more.

Tony's fingers were about Spike's throat. Stifled, Spike desperately fought to tear them away.

But the hands of Tony were like iron claws. Tenaciously they kept their hold. Spike felt his chest bursting . . . his head. . . .

Suddenly, Tony released his hold. He, too, had to have air. He began to paw his way to the surface.

BUT it was Spike now, who held on. Through the flying, screaming rockets in his brain, through the moons that danced through the myriads of stars, one small, fixed idea burned. If he could hold Tony under the water long enough, it would finish him. He would drown.

With frantic kicks, Tony strove to free himself. Spike's tortured lungs and brains were sapping his strength. His hands slipped from Tony's waist. Then, to Tony's feet. Finally, in one hand, he held a single foot. With his other hand, paddled the water. He had to keep down. He had to keep Tony down.

At last, he could stand it no longer. He had to get air. Another minute under the water would kill him. He let go of the foot.

After aeons of struggle, fighting slowly and grimly, he finally burst through the surface. For minutes, it seemed, he just lay there, feebly moving his hands to keep afloat, and gulping in vast quantities of air.

Of Tony, the calm, gray surface of

the water gave no sign. He had not come up again.

Spike looked toward the *cayuca*. Tim and Celia were clinging to its side. They called something unintelligible to him.

Wearily, he began to swim toward them.

"May his black sowl burn in hell forever!" said Tim, as he placed one arm about his exhausted brother.

"The ship?" asked Spike, between labored breaths.

"Bad cess to it!" spat Tim. "The blackguards started to put out a boat, sure enough, but they soon changed their dir-r-ty minds. It was me that did a bit o' yellin' on me own account after the auld divil pushed me out of the boat. Me voice ain't nothin' to brag about, but it's lucky we were that I had any a-tall.

"Do ye hear that, Spikie darlint?"

ACROSS the waters of the bay came the lusty pop-popping of a launch.

"It's the United States Navy itself that's comin' to rescue us. Ye remember the warship that was in the harbor, do ye not? Well, it was a long yell—but I made it."

Spike turned to look at Cecilia. In spite of the fact that she was chilled to the bone, that her arms were being almost dragged from their sockets from hanging on to the *cayuca*, she gave him a smile that warmed his whole being, that freshened his worn out body.

"I'm sorry," he said, "Celia, darlin' that the box has gone. But, don't worry, we can get divers to look for it."

"I hope," she replied, "they never find it!"

He read the meaning in her eyes.

"Celia! Celia, darlin'!"

Then, the navy launch ran alongside.

A Story of Gun-Running and Vengeance in Morocco



Ten O'clock at Tetuan

By POLAN BANKS

Author of "Black Ivory," "The Street of Women," etc.

IT was in Tangier, in the square of the Little Bazaar, that Billy Barrow ran into Tim O'Toole again. It had been two years at least since he had seen his erstwhile buddy.

The two adventurers, suddenly coming upon each other face-to-face outside the Cafe Real, fell upon each other with loud rejoicings.

For ten years they had been friends, and for nearly ten years had shared the same ventures and adventures, these two. They had been revolutionaries in Mexico, fighting first on one side or the other, as fancy pleased them.

They had gone treasure-hunting up the Platte, and fought the Austrians in the Italian Tyrol, had tried their hand at copra in the South Seas, had been Fascisti for a time in the march on Rome; had participated, in short, in a hundred reputable or disreputable affairs, in their eternal quest of profit and excitement. Sometimes they had found the former, sometimes not—but always had there been the last, and to spare.

They began to swap experiences of the past two years.

"But Tangier—what are you doing in Morocco?" asked Barrow. "Think-

ing of joining the Spanish or French? Or the Rifi?"

"DON'T know, yet," admitted O'Toole. "Landed here, as everyone does sooner or later, and thought I'd take a look-see. As a matter of fact, the Bolshies are after my skin, because of a little affair on the Black Sea, and I thought a change of climate would do me good. What jail did you break out of?"

"None," said Billy Barrow, complacently. "I made a neat little pile down in Nassau, rum-running, and came away when I got fed up. It got too tame."

"What are you doing in Morocco?" asked Tim. "The Riffs, too?"

"Partly," said Barrow. "As a matter of fact, I'm on my way to Tetuan, to meet the kid brother."

"Who, Phil?" demanded Tim, with interest. "I thought he went into the Air Mail Service back home, after the war?"

"He did. But he got fed up with it, I guess, and came over and joined up with the Spanish Air forces, fighting the Riffs. It's in the blood, I guess." He laughed.

"Last I heard of him, he was stationed at Tetuan, and wrote me that I could meet him there, since I was coming to Morocco on business."

O'Toole whistled expressively.

"Business, eh? What's in the air, now?"

"Plenty!" Barrow grinned back. "If you're not tied up in anything yourself, old man, I'll cut you in."

"You're on!" said Tim, promptly, without bothering to inquire as to the nature of the business. Anything his pal was in, he knew, could not but be interesting. That it would be profitable was likely, and exciting, certain. He drained his glass, and rubbed his hands together. "Spill it, old boy."

Barrow looked around cautiously. They were alone.

"Gun-running," he said, succinctly. "Some more Diaz stuff?" with interest.

"The Ecuador business isn't in it, with this," Billy assured him. "Abdel Krim needs guns, ammunition, and supplies, and needs it bad. What's more, he's willing to pay for it. I've got every cent I own in this deal, old man—but once it's delivered, I'll clean up."

"What's the lay?"

"I've got a ship-load of stuff, brought over from South America, which is due in the Straits next week. We're to land it somewhere between Ceuta and Melilla. The coast is pretty well patrolled by Spanish warships, of course, so there's liable to be some fun."

"And how!" added Tim, his face lighting up. "I'm in, with both feet. But where are you to land it?"

"That's one reason I'm going to Tetuan," said Barrow. "I'm to meet one of Abdel Krim's agents there, who's to tell me which place their spies have picked out as the most suitable for a landing. He's also to give me a certain note with Krim's secret signature, which calls for plenty much cash at the Banco de Bilbao, here in Tangier—to close the deal."

PRETTY dangerous for those fellows, coming like that into Tetuan," commented Tim. It was characteristic that he made no mention at all of the danger to Barrow, or himself.

"They're desperate," said Barrow. "Personally, I'm going to give Phil a wiggling for joining with the Spanish, when there's practically nothing in it, for him. If I can, I'll get him to resign, and join us on this deal. There'll be excitement enough, since that's what he wants—and hard cash in the bargain." He hesitated. "It's the cash that counts, in this game,

Tim, but I can't seem to get Phil to realize that."

"Hell, the kid's young! He'll get over that," said O'Toole. "What difference should it make to him whether the Rifi chase the spigs out of Morocco, or vice versa? You can't eat glory, can you?"

BILLY admitted that you couldn't, and they began on the second bottle of Rioja. By the third it was decided that Tim O'Toole should go on with him to Tetuan.

The next day the two Americans left by motor for Tetuan. Driving into the town about the hour of the *siesta*, they came to the Plaza Espana, the main square, and then, soon after, to the Hotel Alfonso XIII. It was a poor sort of tavern, but the best procurable, and neither of the two Americans, used to much worse fare in their travels, protested.

Only Tim pointed out that the elegant porcelain plumbing, with hot and cold water taps in the basins, were useless since there had never been any piping.

Covered with dust from head to foot, they ordered jugs of water, however, and bathed and changed to fresh white drill.

"What's next on the program?" Tim wanted to know, then.

"Luncheon," said Billy. "After that, I'm off to the Plaza Espana, and a certain conference at the arch to the Old Town. You might look up Phil, in the meantime, down at the aerodrome, and bring him back to the hotel. By the time I'll return, I'll know what's what, and we can talk to the kid about resigning and joining us. But not a word to him about what else brought me here to Tetuan. We'll have to sound him out, first.

"He's a good kid, and I know he'd hold his mouth and not give us away—but after all, he's an officer in the Spanish Service, and he's loyal. Once

he's resigned—if we can persuade him to—it'll be a different story. It won't be his quarrel then—and we'll talk some sense into him, if he seems difficult."

"He's a good kid, sure," repeated Tim, confidently. "We can sound him out, and if he wants to stick, we needn't tell him anything he shouldn't know."

"But I'm hoping he'll see it our way," admitted Barrow. "I don't like the idea of selling Abdel Krim a single bullet that might bring down my own kid brother. As a matter of fact, when I first arranged this affair with Abdel Krim's agents, I didn't know Phil was with the Spanish.

"He wrote me that, afterward. I didn't like it, then, but I couldn't back out, could I? I gave my word to the Rifis that I'd see it through."

He frowned. "As a matter of fact, Tim, I'm pretty worried. If Phil refuses to quit the Spanish, even if he doesn't join us, I—I don't know what I'll do!"

"You'll carry out your job, like you always do!" said O'Toole, heartily. "And I'll help you, come hell or high water. Mustn't lose your grip, old man. Besides, the kid will play the game. He ain't your brother for nothing!"

On this note they went down to eat, then separated, Tim to find Phil Barrow, and bring him back to the hotel, Billy to his rendezvous in the Plaza Espana.

WALKING through the sun-baked streets of Tetuan, Barrow's spirits rose. He liked Tetuan, with its hundreds and hundreds of housetops a thousand years old—its crooked streets and stormworn stone—its narrow alleys and sunken arches and gardens and iron-studded doors. Its Moors in flowing white jellabas, yellow slippers and turbaned fez, its Jews in black kaftans and black caps,

its white-haired women with hidden faces, and its Spanish soldiers with brilliant uniforms.

Just above the city was the Kasba, once a proud fortress, but now, almost in ruins, a Spanish searchlight station. Below, the river wound through fields to the little port of Rio Martin, and in the far distance were the peaks of the Beni Hosmar. Yes, Barrow liked Tetuan.

IN the Plaza Espana as the siesta was ending, he found that the city was beginning to stir. Women were watering donkeys at the fountain, and Spanish officers began to appear in the cafés. Carelessly Billy crossed the square diagonally to the picturesque arch in its southeastern corner, which led into the Old Town.

Slowly he sauntered under this, passed a mosque, and began to count the tiny shops beyond. At the second to the left, he paused before a tiny shop, which was a miniature bazaar.

A middle-aged Moor in a pink jellaba, wearing a length of white cotton wound around his fez to indicate that he was married, looked up at the American from his cross-legged seat, with inscrutable face.

"I would buy red leather sandals—from Sheshauen," said Barrow, carelessly, but eyeing the Moor keenly.

To his gratification, the merchant started, gave him a quick glance, then looked down.

"I have no sandals—from Sheshauen, señor." He gave another look at the American. "From Tangier, perhaps."

"I come from Tangier," said Barrow. "But I have never been to Sheshauen—or Adjir. I would buy sandals."

At mention of Adjir, the other's eyes narrowed.

"The señor would be a pilgrim—to Sheshauen?"

"Are you not a pilgrim yourself?"

countered Barrow, looking down at the Moor's own sandals. One was red and one green. He smiled, slightly. "You wear the shoes of two cities, *Am el Haj*—Uncle Pilgrim!"

Unsmilingly, the Moor bent down, sought a pair of shoes, and held them up for Barrow's inspection. Barrow stooped, necessarily, and the Moor whispered to him through motionless lips as he did so.

"You are Señor Barrow?"

"I don't like this pair," said Barrow aloud, and under his breath: "Yes." He stooped to examine another. "I would see the bringer of shoes. Perhaps he has a pair for me."

"That is wise, señor," said the Moor. "I am not the bringer, only Ali Hussein, the merchant. But the bringer is not far away. He has been awaiting your coming to buy his shoes."

"If he has what I want, I will buy," Barrow told him. "I have come a long way, and I go a long way further, and I must have new leather shoes."

The Moor shrugged for the benefit of passersby, as if indifferent to whether the American was ostensibly buying his merchandise or not. And as he spoke, in a low-pitched tone, he sneered, also for others' delectation.

"If the señor would like other shoes he had better climb the hill to the Kasba. There will be another merchant there, at the third bastion to the west."

BARROW threw down the shoes in his hands disdainfully.

"At what time?" he asked, very low.

"At ten, tonight," said Hussein Ali. "But be sure and come alone."

"What is the name of this merchant?" asked Barrow of a sudden.

Hussein Ali's eyes narrowed, suspiciously.

"What is that to you? He will have shoes."

"I trade only with chiefs, even

among merchants. And I must know with whom I trade. Or I do not trade at all." He hesitated. "There are other merchants—in Tangier."

At this thrust, the Moor seemed alarmed, growling in his beard. At length he spoke, mutteringly.

"I have heard of a merchant named—Sidi Malai. Perhaps it will be he. Allah alone knows."

HE gathered up his leathern slippers, as if angered that the American had spurned them, and Barrow, also playing his part, turned from them sneeringly, and made his way back through the old arch to the Plaza España. But there was a trace of excitement in his quickened step. Sidi Malai!

He had heard the name, somewhere. If Barrow remembered correctly, he was one of the lieutenants of Khareirou, the Hammer of the Spaniards, who had broken the Wad Lau line—Khareirou, chief lieutenant of Abdel Krim himself!

He remembered more now. Sidi Malai's wild crew of Berber Rifis were noted for their ferocity in battle, and were famous as daring raiders. He whistled slowly. Sidi Malai in Tetuan!

The colossal nerve of the man! He grinned. The Rifis surely must need those supplies he was going to get to them, if they sent Sidi Malai into the lion's mouth to close the deal.

As he suddenly noticed the Spanish flag flying above the Alta Comisaria building, the headquarters of El Delegado General, his grin grew wicked.

What wouldn't the Spanish give to know that Sidi Malai was in the heart of their camp? What would they do to him, if they caught him? Shoot him as a spy, most likely.

And if they caught Barrow, learning the truth of his visit to Tetuan? The same fate!

He thought of his brother Phil, and the grin faded. He hoped the kid would not refuse to resign from the Spanish Air Service.

It would complicate things tremendously if he did, particularly if he learned the truth. Thinking on these things, he hurried back to the Alphonso XIII. He was anxious to see Phil, anyway.

He was fond of him, and had not seen him for nearly a year. He had still been rum-running in the Bahamas when Phil had left the Air Mail, and taken himself off to Morocco to join the Foreign Legion.

As he walked down the corridor near his rooms, he heard voices from within, and his face lighted up. Tim had found Phil after all.

He had half feared that the kid was out of Tetuan on active duty; his last letter had been sent a month previously.

OPENING the door, he stepped into the room, with a cheery greeting half-formed on his lips. As he did so, silence fell on the two seated at the table. He stopped blankly. There was a stranger with Tim.

A young Spanish officer with an arm in a sling and many patches of adhesive tape on his face and head. The first thing he noticed almost automatically was that that neither his pal nor the Spaniard was smiling.

"Where is my brother?" asked Billy in Spanish in deference to the officer. "Has he—gone?"

Both men looked away, the Spaniard biting his lip.

"*Si, señor, he is—gone!*" said the latter.

Tim O'Toole suddenly arose and, walking quickly to his friend and partner, took him by the shoulders brusquely. Tensely, almost, he looked Barrow straight in the eyes.

"I know you, Billy Barrow," said he of a sudden. "You're a man—the

whitest man that ever lived. And the bravest. Look here, buddy—Phil is gone, like the Lieutenant here says. *And he ain't—coming—back!*"

Billy stared at Tim wordlessly. Somehow he had known the moment he had asked them his question. But the realization had stunned him. He could not speak. O'Toole put an arm around his shoulder.

Barrow looked at his friend, then, unbelieving, at the young lieutenant, who had also risen to his feet. The latter bowed stiffly, from his waist.

"I am Lieutenant Don Guillermo Ventura, senior. I had the honor to be the friend of your brother, Lieutenant Barrow. I—I saw him—die."

"He died—in action?" demanded Billy hoarsely. "You were with him?"

"He died—on duty—" said Ventura, gravely. "Yes, I was with him." He shivered unaccountably.

Barrow sat down heavily, his forehead damp.

"Tell me about it," said he quietly, but he had gone white.

"It happened a little over a fortnight ago," said Ventura, draining his glass. "We were sent out on patrol duty, Felipe and I, beyond the Rifi lines.

"We had been gone hardly an hour, and were but some twenty kilometers away, when engine trouble developed, and we were forced to make a landing. As it happened, I was at the stick at the time, and Felipe was in the observer's cockpit.

"This was in the early morning, and when we came down, I just had time to clear a hilltop when I made the landing—we had been flying low. There was a clump of trees near-by, and as we landed, Felipe gave a shout. I turned in time to see a band of horsemen dash out of the wood, and come galloping toward us, firing as they came.

"They had evidently seen us before

we saw them, and understanding we were in distress, had hidden in the trees until we were down.

"Felipe immediately opened fire on them with the machine-gun, while I worked frantically at the controls, to try to rise again. I saw several of them fall. As they came on I heard Felipe shout—and suddenly something hit me in the shoulder, and everything went black. I had been shot."

"Go on!" said Barrow tensely. He was still pale.

"When I came to," continued Ventura, "I was lying on the ground near the wood, well bound, and faint with loss of blood.

I THEN saw that we had fallen into the hands of a band of Rifi raiders—a wild-looking crew, armed with Mausers and Remingtons, and slung with two or three cartridge bandoliers apiece. All had long knives, and a few had old-fashioned Moorish swords in leathern scabbards.

"The first thing I realized was that Felipe was prisoner, too, and that the leader of the band was questioning him. The moment I laid eyes on that man I knew we were in for trouble.

"Unlike most Rifis, he was not a Berber, but a full-blooded Arab of the best stock, like Khareirou or Abdel Krim. His skin was whiter than my own, and his face the fiercest I have ever laid eyes on. On one cheek there was a great S-shaped scar—"

"But what happened?" demanded Barrow.

"Hold your horses, Bill," put in Tim. "You'll want to know that Riff when you see him again!"

"There is not much more to tell," went on the Spaniard hurriedly, with a little shiver. "To make it short, their leader didn't seem satisfied with what Felipe told him—or wouldn't tell him—and he grew so enraged at *mi querida amigo's* cool scorn that he

knocked him down with a great blow——"

"The kid was tied—his hands were tied?" demanded Barrow, breathing hard.

"But *si, señor!* Behind his back. But that is not all," he faltered.

"Go on!" commanded Barrow, with steely eyes.

The young Spanish aviator swallowed hard.

"They dug a deep grave," said he, very low, not looking at the gun-runner. "About five feet deep and three feet across. Then under my eyes—and despite my loud cries and curses—that Rifi fiend had poor Felipe buried in that grave—alive—up to his neck."

Barrow sprang to his feet, but O'Toole grasped his arm. The American was trembling.

"Not content then," went on Ventura, riveting his hot eyes on Barrow, "the devil called for a bowl of thick brown honey, and himself poured it over poor Felipe's head, and then he left him to the flies and insects and desert animals."

"My God!" said Barrow, very low, gripping the table. "Poor kid!—poor game kid;" He bit his lip so hard that the blood came and trickled down his chin unnoticed. "The dirty dogs!"

He suddenly dropped into his chair and hid his face in his hands.

"There is little more," went on Ventura wearily, and there were tears in his eyes. "They threw me across a horse, helpless as I was, and rode away, leaving poor Felipe there in the blazing sun, practically buried alive! They set fire to the plane first, however, as the flames mounted, and we were about to leave, I shouted good-by to *mi amigo* Felipe, weak as I was. I cried, '*Go with God, my Felipe!*'"

Barrow groaned, and the Irishman cursed under his breath.

"And he called back to me from his

agony, '*Con Dios, Guillermo!*—tell my brother,'" Ventura gulped. "That was the last I heard. Perhaps the honey fell into his mouth, choking his words. Anyway, we rode off like the wind, and I never saw him alive again!"

BUT you lived to tell me!" cried Barrow, springing up. "Thank God, you lived to tell me!" Tears were frankly pouring down his lean cheeks. "I'll pay 'em back for that, Phil—kid!"

"They camped that night at an oasis not far from a road, and I escaped in the dark. Early the next morning I was picked up by a plane which had been sent out to find us. Before returning to Tetuan, we hunted for that other place and luckily found it by the wreckage of the burned plane. Then I—we—"

"He was dead?" cried Barrow. "Already dead? You mean he didn't live through *one night?*"

"The jackals had already been there," said Ventura, looking away. "But I pray God the sun killed him first."

"Of course it did!" put in Tim brusquely. But Billy Barrow, throwing himself face downward on the bed, merely groaned. Barrow, who had faced death a thousand times, who had witnessed it in its most horrible forms, seemed stricken at last.

THE young Spaniard went on to tell of how he and his comrades had given the remains a decent burial, expressed his deep sympathy and, after giving another description of the Riffs and their chief, took his leave.

"I guess the gun-running is up," remarked Tim, much later.

But Barrow shook his head. His eyes were steely again, and his voice steady, though harsh.

"You are wrong, Tim. I'm going through with it. The reason I'm go-

ing through with it is because I'm going to use the landing as an opportunity to get in touch with Abdel Krim's forces. I'm going to join them if I can."

"Join them?" in amazement.

"Exactly. I'm going to join them, and then spend the rest of my life looking for the Riff scoundrel with the S-shaped scar on his cheek. When I do, I'm going to tear him to pieces with my hands!"

For a moment Tim O'Toole was silent. "Okay, pal!" said he, after a moment. "I'm going with you. And after you get through with that black-hearted devil, I'll sweep up the pieces if I'm not licking the rest of the Rifi army in the meantime!"

The rest of that afternoon Billy Barrow spent alone in his room, and the Irishman thoughtfully left him to himself, while he took a look around the town.

At seven o'clock he was back, however. Barrow was still sitting at the table as he had left him several hours before. But he showed no sign of grief other than a deepening of the lines around his mouth.

Tim said nothing, but merely wrung his hand.

"What's on the boards now?"

"I'm going up to the Kasba to keep my engagement at ten o'clock with Sidi Malai. You'd better stay behind. The Moor, Hussein Ali, said to come alone."

"Which is just why you won't!" said Tim promptly. "I'm going to be there, too. I don't trust those birds. And I'm taking my gats with me."

"Good idea," admitted Barrow. "But you'd better go first, much earlier, if at all. Hide somewhere near the third bastion to the west. If you see that nothing happens, stay where you are until we're gone, and come back later." He hesitated.

"Maybe you'd better not come, Tim. It won't be necessary. They wouldn't

dare to try any rough stuff here in Tetuan, particularly when they're so desperate for my cargo of arms and supplies."

"That's all right," returned Tim. "I'd like to get a look at this Sidi Malai bird, anyway. I've heard about that guy."

"Suit yourself," said Billy listlessly.

At nine-thirty Barrow left the Alphonso XIII and strolled through the streets of Tetuan to the outskirts, careful to take a zigzag, misleading course, in case he were being followed.

Almost exactly thirty minutes later he reached the top of the winding road that led to the brown ruins of the old fortress known as the Kasba.

Fortunately it was a moonless night and he was certain that his coming was unobserved. A few lights twinkled somewhere at the upper end of the fortress, used as a Spanish searchlight station, but below it was pitch dark.

Reaching the lower circuit of half-ruined walls, he left the road and turned westward, using all his craft to make no noise. As he walked he counted the bastions, some fifty feet apart.

The third bastion abutted on a corner of the fortress. As he approached he whistled softly, and as if in response to his whistle a tall, dignified figure seemed to materialize out of the night, and stood silhouetted indistinctly against the sky, anchored in the Beni Hosmar range miles away. Sidi Malai was there before him, waiting arrogantly with folded arms.

HE walked up until they stood face to face in the night. Dimly he saw that the Rifi leader who was Abdel Krim's emissary, was a tall, lithe Moor in a rough camel's-hair jellaba and white-bound fez, and sensed, rather than saw, a fine silk kaftan be-

neath. He carried no visible weapon and stood with folded arms waiting.

"Sidi Malai?" Billy asked softly.

The Riff nodded.

"You are Senor Barrow, the American?" he asked arrogantly, and, it seemed, a bit contemptuously.

"Yes."

Barrow stiffened and wondered if Tim were about.

"You have come, as you have promised. *Muy bueno!*" said the Rifi, and hesitated. "Your cargo—where is it?"

"It will be in the Straits next week at the latest. A full shipload of arms, ammunition, food and medicine supplies. I understand there is famine among the Rifi. It would be welcome to Abdel Krim!"

"It is!" exclaimed Sidi Malai. "It will be new life to our cause! *Allah Kerim!—Allah is bountiful!*"

For perhaps the first time in his life Barrow felt a wave of distaste for his business overcome him. New life to the Rifi cause, indeed!

Those guns he brought to Abdel Krim meant more death to the Spanish, who had been his brother's comrades in arms. The supplies, new vigor with which to carry on their atrocities against the whites. He thought of poor Phil, buried to the neck in the blazing sun, tormented by insects and heat . . . tortured Phil, the prey of filthy desert jackals!

His fists clenched at the thought, as a revulsion of feeling swept him, and the arrogant, contemptuous tones of Sidi Malai did nothing to assuage that self-scorn. The Riff must be laughing at him, inwardly, thought Barrow, hotly. Must be sneering at this American who, for money, was betraying his fellow-Caucasians into the hands of their enemies!

FOR the first time the truth of this matter came to the gun-runner and for the first time he was honestly full of shame.

He was suddenly determined to cut short the whole business, and take his loss, when the thought occurred to Barrow that only by delivering his cargo to Abdel Krim, as he had promised, could he gain access to the Rifi, and seek out his brother's killer. He straightened. This was no time for sentiment. The cargo would be delivered!

WHERE shall the landing be made?" he demanded. "Where will your men be to unload us?"

"At Punta de Pescadores," said Sidi Malai, with triumph in his voice. "The Spanish are watching the Wad' Lau and Ajdir too closely."

"Good!" returned Barrow. "We'll be there by dawn Tuesday or Wednesday. You have the paper from Abdel Krim with you, which closes the deal?"

"*Si, señor.* It has his secret signature, which you would recognize, and his secret financial agents, but none other, if I were caught." His hand explored the inside of his kaftan. He brought out a small paper, tightly rolled. "It is here."

Ordinarily Barrow would have insisted on examining it then and there, as a matter of business. But he cared little, now, whether Abdel Krim completed the payment or not. His one desire in life was to get within the Rifi lines, and seek out Phil Barrow's murderer.

Just as the Sidi Malai gave him the paper, however, he started, and the two men froze into immobility. For at that very moment one of the great searchlights at the other end of the Kasba penciled the sky with its broad white finger.

As they watched it, momentarily fascinated, it swept over the city of Tetuan in a great arc, revealed the river winding toward the little port of Rio Martin, dropped lightning-like, swept the road to the fort and

the boulder-strewn hillside, swept past the first, second and third bastions, past them, and focussed, momentarily, in the direction of the distant Beni Hosmar.

FOR a brief instant, however, the powerful light had picked them out—too briefly, perhaps, for them to have been noticed by the soldiers behind the light, but time enough for Barrow to have gotten a fleeting glimpse of the Riff's features. The cruel, beady eyes—the hawk-like nose—the lean face.

The gun-runner trembled of a sudden, as his skin went ice-cold with surprise. As he hesitated, Sidi Malai, fearful of being caught again by the inquisitive searchlight, darted back behind the bastion, pulling the American with him.

For a moment they stood there in the darkness, each busy with his own thoughts. Then, of a sudden, Barrow deliberately took a box of matches from his pocket, and made as if to strike one. The Riff clutched at his arm.

"Fool! Make no light, or we shall be seen!"

"Take your hand off me!" snapped Barrow, sharply, and as Sidi Malai somewhat wonderingly obeyed: "I must examine Krim's secret signature, before I can promise to land the cargo. Unless you permit that, you will get nothing!"

The American held the whip hand, and knew it. Although Sidi Malai was furious at this doubt of his honesty, he could not afford to resent it, right now.

"Hide the glow, with your jellaba, here in the corner of the bastion," ordered Billy, curtly, "and no one will see. A brief glance with satisfy me."

Sullenly, the Riff obeyed, opening wide his jellaba, to shield the flame of the match from view. At the same time, Billy, having unrolled the pre-

vious little parchment, struck a match.

As the light flared into life, however, instead of looking at the paper, he first threw a lightning-like glance at the Riff's face.

And in that revelatory instant, he saw! On the lean, cruel cheek nearest him, was a vivid, S-shaped scar—the very scar he thought he had glimpsed in the searchlight's glare.

The scar—*El Teniente* Guillermo de Ventura had described so well!

The match burned his fingers as he now stooped over the parchment with unseeing eyes, his mind seething with crystallized rage—demonic fury.

Slowly he raised his head, and faced the Riff there in the darkness of the bastion's shadow.

"Are you satisfied?" demanded Sidi Malai, mockingly.

"Quite satisfied," returned the American, in a hoarse voice. With one movement he placed the parchment in an inner pocket, and closed his hand over the butt of a revolver under his arm-pit.

With a great effort, he tried to make his voice flatteringly pleasant. "By the way, señor—are you the famous Sidi Malai—the chief lieutenant of the great Raisuli, left hand of Abdel Krim himself?"

"There is but one Sidi Malai!" declared the Riff, with haughty pride. "I am he!"

CHOKING with rage, Barrow attempted to bring pretended awe and admiration to his voice.

"I have heard of you, unless that other one is an imposter!"

"What dog dares to pretend to be myself?" demanded Sidi Malai, angrily.

"The one who caught two Spaniards — aviators — a fortnight ago, and buried one in the desert, alive. All Morocco is talking of it—the Spaniards are full of consternation!"

The Riff was completely fooled.

"It was an Englishman, not a Spaniard, whom I left stuck in the sand for the jackals to eat," he boasted. "That will teach them to keep out of Morocco, by the beard of Mohammed!"

In a flash the barrel of the American's gun was half-buried in the Moor's stomach.

"Up with your hands, you Rifi dog—or you are as dead as the poor fellow you've killed!" And as the startled Sidi Malai involuntarily raised his arms before the threat of the gun in his vitals, Barrow raised his voice. "Tim—this way!"

"Coming!" sang out O'Toole, as he suddenly materialized out of the darkness from behind a boulder.

AT the sound of his voice, Sidi Malai let out a yell of his own, and Barrow, startled in his turn, began to curse himself for believing that the Riff would have come here alone. O'Toole speedily undeceived him, however.

"Shut up!" he informed the Moor, brusquely, as he jabbed another gun barrel into the Riff's ribs. "Your friend is taking a nap."

He turned to Billy, continuing in English, "Hussein Ali, the merchant, came up with him before you arrived, and hid behind a rock. Luckily, I was here first, and they didn't know it. When I saw him hide, with a gun in his hand, I thought it looked fishy, so, as I was behind him, I quietly crawled up and put him to sleep with my gun-butt. He'll never know what hit him, most likely."

"Disarm this fellow!" said Billy curtly.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Sidi Malai, furiously, his hands still up as Tim speedily began his search. "Are you not really Barrow, the American?"

"I am!"

"Then why do you threaten me?"

The parchment is good—and you have nothing to gain and much to lose by giving me up to the Spanish!"

"You don't understand, yet!" said Billy, grimly.

"Neither do I, frankly," put in O'Toole, drolly.

"Have you frisked him?" demanded Barrow.

"Sure thing!" Tim exhibited two knives and a pearl-handled revolver, as the wily Sidi Malai strove to control his temper, still thinking that Barrow had made a mistake, and would soon realize where his welfare lay.

"Step back, then!" and Billy stepped back, himself. "Sidi Malai," said he, slowly but with emphasis. "My name is Barrow. And that, too, was the name of my brother—the man whom you buried in the sand and left for the jackals!"

Two oaths burnt the air, simultaneously. And that of the Riff's was one of startled fear. He was a rat in a trap, and he knew it. But a vicious rat.

"Sidi Malai, you murderer dog!" said Barrow levelly. "I have sworn to kill you with my hands, and I am going to do it!" Contemptuously he threw the gun he held to the ground at Tim O'Toole's feet. "Say whatever prayers you want to, now—because I'm going to beat you to a pulp with my hands! You are going to know a tenth of the torture you gave my poor brother!"

LIKE a venomous snake the Riff eyed his enemy, but he made no move, for he knew that O'Toole had him covered, and, too, since the Irishman had first addressed Barrow in English, Sidi Malai had no inkling of the fact that his henchman, Hussein Ali, lay unconscious among the rocks.

In fact, he believed that the Moor was but biding his time to take the

two Americans by surprise, and he knew he must stall for time.

"Come, Señor Barrow," said he, oilily. "What I did was done in wartime—and my men insisted on it. I am not to blame. Besides, your brother is dead, now, and you will gain nothing by killing me. On the contrary, you will lose much. Abdel Krim will learn the truth. He has a long arm."

I AM through with Krim," said Barrow, levelly. "Through with all you murderous brutes. If you must know what I intend doing, the moment I get back to town I'm going to the Alta Comisaria, and offer El Delegado General my shipload of arms and supplies as a free gift to Spain, in memory of my brother. And now, you cowardly dog—come on!"

Simultaneously with his words, the American sprang at his enemy. Sidi Malai, realizing that he was unarmed, and was inviting personal combat, knew that he was safe from O'Toole for the moment, and confident that Hussein Ali would soon appear, leaped to meet the attack of Barrow with alacrity.

As the lithe, powerful Riff attempted to close in with his enemy, Billy gave him a stinging blow upon the jaw. He staggered, then, bellowing like a bull, leaped in again, savagely.

Wiry and hard as steel, he was a glutton for punishment, was Sidi Malai, and, as he knew nothing of the western art of boxing, attempted to get at grips with the American, striving to reach Barrow's throat.

Although the gun-runner would not have been averse to this, ordinarily, since he was no mean scrapper as a wrestler, himself, Barrow meant to punish the Riff a bit before he finished him off.

Always, as he fought, he saw his kid brother—his Phil—in his mind's eye

. . . buried in the sand to his neck, tortured by insects attracted by the honey, literally roasted alive by the blazing African sun—mutilated by the skulking, ravenous jackals! The horror of the thought whipped his fury to a white heat.

And so it was that, with horrible deliberation, he scientifically beat the Riff to a pulp, as he had promised. An enraged bull, the powerful Sidi Malai could never crash through the American's guard. With each rush he met a crashing, punishing fist, rock hard and vicious.

His hawk-like nose was broken, his eyes closed and blackened, his teeth knocked out, an ear torn and ruined forever.

Blind with rage and pain he rushed in again and again, and each time Barrow, with the cold fury of an avenging angel, wrought more damage on his outraged body, and, as he had promised, gave him his first baptism of torturing pain.

O'Toole, watching, looked on with genuine awe. He had seen his buddy at work by his side in many a brawl from Port Said to Seattle, but never had he seen him wearing such a look of white fury; Barrow was like a devil loosed out of hell!

By this time, of course, the two had left the protection of the bastion, and were battling in the open. Of a sudden the wandering searchlight dropped from the distant horizon, accidentally caught them—swung away—found them again, and clung tenaciously.

THE sudden terrific glare caught Barrow full in the eyes, and he involuntarily stepped back. Sidi Malai, seizing his advantage, leaped at him with the quickness of a tiger, and for the first time broke through his guard.

So sudden and vicious was his attack that he bore the American to

the ground, and in a moment they were wrestling, each with their hands at each other's throats.

For the first time, now, the Riff had the advantage. Despite having taken a terrible beating, he still had most of his strength, as he had had no opportunity to use it. Barrow, on the other hand, was worn out through his terrific onslaught on the other.

As they struggled, he steadily grew weaker, there in the blaze of light which enfolded them, while Sidi Malai, exultant, forced him upon his back, and began to choke him with his long, wiry fingers.

JUST as Tim O'Toole started forward to the rescue, a new element entered the scene. Hussein Ali, dishevelled, but vindictive, staggered into the lighted region, bearing a heavy stone. He called to Sidi Malai as he did so:

"Hold the Christian dog down, master, so that I may beat out his brains!"

Grinning fiendishly, Sidi Malai grunted assent, apparently forgetful of Tim's presence near-by in the excitement of the moment—or perhaps, taking it for granted that his henchman had already dealt with the Irishman—and, raising his bloody, battered face, turned it aside, out of the way, as he held Barrow pinned down by the throat.

"Strike quickly—and may Allah guide thy arm!" he cried exultingly.

Standing erect over the helpless American, Hussein Ali, raising the small slab of rock high above his head, began to describe with it the fatal parabola which would end upon Billy Barrow's horror-stricken face.

A pistol cracked once—twice.

Hussein Ali pitched forward in the midst of his downward movement, and the heavy stone crashed down full upon the unexpected Sidi Malai's skull, with a sickening crunch.

The two of them—the bullet-pierced Moor and the battered Riff—fell dead together upon the American's body, there in the glare of the searchlight, even as the excited shouts of running soldiers came near.

A moment later O'Toole, whose marksmanship had so timely come to his pal's aid, was pulling Billy from under the bodies of the other two.

Barrow was soaked with their blood, and gasping for breath, but, otherwise, was apparently unharmed. Tim helped him to his feet, just as a swarm of Spanish soldiers descended upon them.

An apoplectic officer faced them.

"What is the meaning of all this, señors? Who are you?"

"One of those men is—was—Sidi Malai, the Riff leader," said Tim. "The other was—is—Hussein Ali, the merchant. Both were spies of Abdel Krim. Neither will ever spy any more, if you ask me."

"But who are you two gentlemen?" the goggling officer wanted to know.

"I'm just an interested bystander," said Mr. O'Toole, grimly. "And this is the Boy Avenger—and *what* a boy!" he added, affectionately, clapping his arm around his pal's shoulder.

"Take us to Headquarters, and we'll tell you all about it. And some more about something else," was an afterthought, thinking of the cargo coming in.

I KEPT my word, didn't I, Tim?" I asked Billy, weakly. "Don't you expect that Phil knows—I kept my word to kill that murderous scoundrel?"

"Sure the kid knows—" returned Tim, gently. "Come on back to town, old boy. All this exertion has made me thirsty; I want a drink."

Between a file of awe-struck soldiers who acted as special guard of honor, the Messrs. Barrow and O'Toole returned to Tetuan.

A Thrilling Serial Novel of the Mexican

The RED HAWK of the RIO

A Three Part Serial

By EDGAR L. COOPER

PART I



THERE was a big moon over the Pecos. The Val Verde country lay bathed in misty, mellow light, its couleés and barrancas, mesas and hills, its reaches of shadowy mesquite and chaparral.

Southward flowed the Rio Grange, a writhing silver snake under the full moon of Texas; northward rose the dim, low-flung ramparts of the Medina mountains. Far out on the plains coyotes yipped their eerie litany, now and then an ocelot gave voice to its whimpering cry.

But save for those noises a hush, awesome in its intensity, lay over that great, mysterious plateau stretching from Mexico to the Staked Plains.

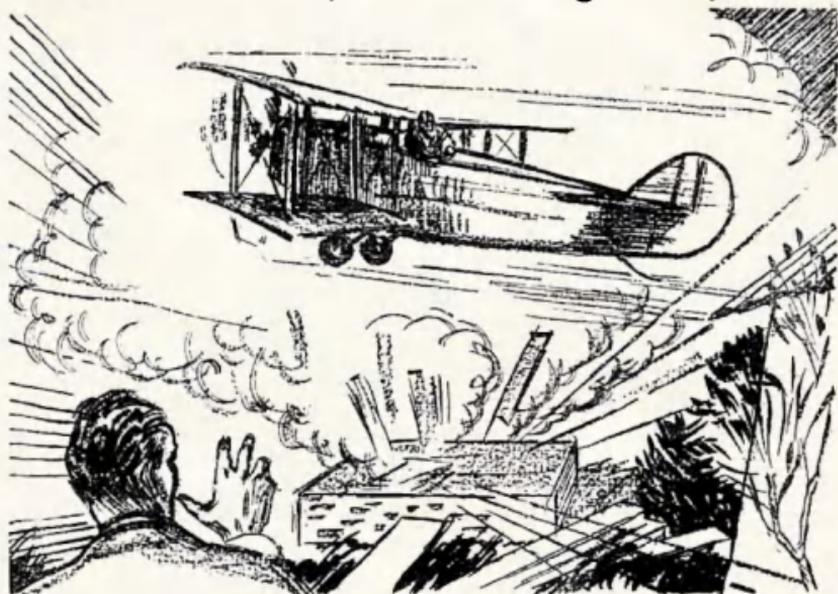
BUT down at the Slash-T rancho, thirty miles north of the Rio and spreading its far-flung acres between the Pecos and Devil's River, lights gleamed in the low adobe hacienda

and the sound of music wafted out onto the still, cool air.

In the main room of the ranch house two men sprawled in easy chairs, the stubs of many brown paper cigarettes cluttering the ash stand between them and a bottle, siphon carafe and glasses resting upon the wicker table at their elbows. From another table in a corner of the room came the clear, undistorted music of a radio dynacone speaker, the receiving set beneath it tuned in on a coast-to-coast chain program. The broadcast was unusually good, and both listeners seemed to be lazily enjoying it as they sat on their necks, burned cigarettes and sipped at their drinks.

The house and room itself were as typical and picturesque of the Southwest as the two unmistakable borderites who occupied it. Built of yellowed 'dobe with walls three feet

Border and a Mysterious Night Sky Rider



thick and roofed with red Spanish tile, it sprawled around a flagged patio on three sides, the fourth being enclosed with a low cactus-crowned wall cut by a central arched gateway.

The main room reached clear across the front of the *casa*, its hardwood floor dotted with Navajo rugs and the skins of goats and wild animals, the creamy stucco walls decorated with colorful *serapes* of bright weave, Aztec clay plaques and mounted antlers.

Just above the inverted lazy U of a Spanish fireplace reposed the massive head and spike-tipped horns of a famous Texas longhorn steer, its spread reaching more than eight feet. And the whole place was lighted by electric bulbs powered by its own plant.

TOLLIVER of the Slash enjoyed all the luxuries and conveniences of a city despite his remoteness from

Santone or El Paso, and would not have traded places with any urbanite alive. This was his castle, and from it he could look to the horizon in four directions and call the intervening leagues his.

His face lean and burned the color of old saddle leather, his close-cropped hair tawny as a cougar pelt, his gray-green, magnetic eyes half-closed, he stretched his steel-sprung, whipcord body comfortably and relit his Bull brownie, watching the smoke spirals curl ceilingward. King Tolliver, better known from El Paso del Norte to Padre Island on the Gulf as "Tex," cattle baron, free-lance adventurer and gun-slinger, was indolently enjoying himself. He glanced at his companion, grinned lazily.

"The old life of Reilly, eh, Keno?"

Keno Curry nodded and snapped a match to his *fac*. *Compadre* and *segundo* of Tolliver's was he, a

former outlaw, smuggler and Long Rider, and one of the fastest guns on the Border. Thin-faced, hawk-eyed, rusty-haired, and in his supple, slim flanked body was the strength and agility of a pinto cayuse.

In many a tight situation and close go he and Tex had stood shoulder to shoulder, their six-shooters licking red, and each knew that they could depend upon the other until the dealer flipped out the last card in the deck. In the days of *la guerre* he had been a veteran machine gunner of a famous division, thrice wounded, and in his war bag reposed a *Croix de Guerre* and a D. S. C.

A very salty hairpin was Senor Curry, and as wise in the ways of the 'squite country as any lobo wolf that prowled its savage wastes.

Tex Tolliver had been a fier. And fast on the way of becoming the leading American ace when November 11th put an end to hostilities. A hard-bitten combat pilot, Western bred and raised, with the love of the air in his blood like champagne, extra dry, and a typical exponent of the survival of the fittest in sky jousts, he kept on flying after being demobbed.

Independently wealthy, orphaned, the only descendant and sole heir of old "Pecos" Tolliver, king-pin and cattle baron of the Valverde, he was able to afford any hobby he chose and play it to the sky.

The planes bearing the Slash-T brand on wings and fuselage were the very last word in airships, and Tex Tolliver, natural-born birdman that he was, could take off on a postage stamp, turn them wrongside and inside out, then land on an army blanket.

Keno Curry held down the rear cockpit. There was exactly ten months difference in their ages—Tex, thirty-two, being the elder. And their escapades were the talk of cowcamp and rancho, *cantina* and general store

all along and on both banks of the Rio Grande.

GENTRY of the long rope and *contrabandistas* of the river hated and feared that unholy pair more than they did sheriffs, State Rangers, Border Patrol and Customs Service all put together. For Tex Tolliver was the fastest gun in the Lone Star State with hideout or hip holster—nobody could even touch him, no less beat him to a draw, no man had ever stood against him.

And Keno, who had shot through leather when occasion demanded, was a close second. The Slash outfit, as a result, was given a wide berth by the border fraternity and international dealers in wet steers, blotted cows and rustled horseflesh, and the hard-boiled gang of waddies who held down the bunkhouse and rode herd on the spread were let severely alone. Riders of the crooked trail passed up that juicy, tempting layout from sheer fear of consequences, for Tex Tolliver and Keno Curry were worse than Northwest Mounties in going after and nailing their man.

As the sagebrush poet said, "They hewed down their tree and to hell with where the chips flew." A sentence that summed the two of them up with neat exactness.

Their bottle of made-in-Mexico Old Taylor was half empty and the music of the Silver Fizz Eskimos beginning to pall a little when the San Antonio station on the nation-wide hook-up to which they were turned in suddenly cut off from that hook-up and a police gong began clanging in the studio. *Bong! Bong! Bong! Bong!*

BOTH Tex and Keno pricked up their ears a little. It was a recent innovation at WOU, that gong, and was followed by a broadcast of some urgent police item such as a

shooting, robbery or jail break of importance, or of some local criminal activity. Tex and Keno listened to the clamor without a great deal of interest, but when it subsided and the voice of the announcer followed, they sat up like two jack-in-a-box at the first words.

"Border Patrol attention!" it rapped out. "Urgent and imperative. An unknown plane, at 8:30 tonight, flew over the town of Sheffield, in Brewster County on the S. P. Railroad, and raked the main street with machine-gun fire.

"Three people were killed, one a woman, and seven wounded, two of them seriously. The murder plane flew off to the east in the direction of Sanderson. Nothing is known about the type of plane or the kind of bullets used. All Border Patrol fields are warned to be on the lookout for this airship, and to take all steps possible to apprehend this aerial assassin.

"Sheriff departments and Ranger forces also take warning. Plane last reported headed east from Sheffield. Any later news or developments will be broadcast from this station."

The microphone switched back to the National hookup; Tex Tolliver and Keno Curry stared at each other questioningly, the same thoughts clicking through their brains. What the hell! The pilot of that murder ship must be haywire, a maniac, or else have an almighty fanatical grudge against Texas.

At any minute he might shoot up another town, kill some more people that had a right to live. The fellow evidently had a fighting plane with a gun shooting through the prog—Tex's lips grew grim as he realized the possibilities.

What if he should fly over San Antonio, Houston, El Paso! Imagine him diving between tall buildings and pouring a leaden hail into crowded

streets. He could massacre scores of people, and who would identify or catch him? In a few hours he could be hundreds of miles away with any sort of speedy crate. What was to prevent him shooting up isolated ranch houses, or travelers along roads?

THE gong clamored again, frantically and insistently. "Death plane reported at Livingston," clicked the announcer. "Fired at automobile party on highway, slightly wounding one man. Plane still traveling east. *Border Patrol, alert!* Warn all residents of Rio Grande area to be on lookout for murder ship and take precautions."

Tex Tolliver nodded slowly to himself. The fellow had a fast bus, all right. Livingston was some fifty-odd miles from Sheffield, this side of Sanderson, and the pirate must have slipped right by the Sanderson patrol. Also he was traveling toward the Valverde country, and darned quick.

Only fifteen minutes had elapsed between broadcasts of his activity. At this rate and direction he would soon wing over Slash territory. With a word to Keno to keep an ear open for further news, Tex left the room and strode out doors, listening.

For maybe twenty, twenty-five minutes he stood motionless, eyes scanning the moonlit starry expanse, his ears keened. The air was clear as a bell, and there wasn't enough wind to blow the cigarette smoke out of his eyes.

The Western night was so still he could almost hear the steady thump of his heart. Far to the south toward the Rio, and evidently at a great height, his acute hearing caught the faint wild bee hum of a speeding motor—a hum almost a whisper.

Tensed like a coiled spring, he

waited, absently scratching his right eyebrow with his forefinger. The far-away buzz died, and for ten minutes there was silence. The *llano*, beneath the brilliant moon was a shade darker than the star-splashed sky, that was all.

BUT the yipping of coyotes had suddenly stilled, and out in the corrals a horse snorted nervously. The loud speaker in the living room still blared its blatant broadcast, its voice carrying far.

Then suddenly, directly overhead, a motor burst into roaring life; a white flare plopped into vivid radiance and floated down.

It's ghostly, milky glow illuminated casa and bunkhouse, hangar and corral, like a devil's arc lamp, and between its lazy fall and the background of stars Tex Tolliver saw a diving, speeding bat whose prop bit earthward toward the buildings of the Slash like a plummeting meteor, a skirl of struts and wires in its wake.

In half a dozen strides Tex gained the shelter of the arched stone house portal and crouched there. Keno, coming to his feet like an India-rubber man, joined him at the same moment.

"What the Sam hell——!" he began. . . . A blinding flash drowned his question, followed by a thunderous explosion. The flare of it lighted the whole bailiwick for a split second in a ghastly, sinister flashlight, then heaven and earth seemed to rock. The stout adobe ranch-house quivered; fragments of sun-baked clay slivered down from the walls.

There was a crashing, rending, squealing down toward the barns and sheds, followed by shouts and loud questions as the crew came piling out of the bunkhouse. With an oath Tex leaped from the shelter of the stony archway and raced for the hangars, Curry pounding at his heels. That

hatched sky-egg was no little fellow, certainly.

The whistling motor of the ghost-ship broke into song again, and its bat-like wings and fuselage peaked again above the rancho not over five hundred feet high. Above the din of its engine came a faint tattoo, and red stabs danced in front of it. A hail of bullets drummed down on the adobe house, spattered the patio, nicked fragments of tile from the red roof.

SINGING hornets raised little vol-canoes of dust from the hard-packed ground; peppered around the milling cowboys and sent them scuttling to cover like prairie dogs hunting their holes.

A horse screamed in agony and went down; another; a third. Animals in lot and corral started a miniature stampede, and a pen full of half broken fuzztails crashed the wooden gate and scattered wildly over the countryside.

Tex reached the hangar, unlocked and slung open the doors, jumped for the dragonfly red monoplane standing just within. He vaulted into the pilot pit, then hesitated, his hand on the ignition key. No go.

The ghost-ship was leaving, its prop boring straight upward into the night and climbing like a scared monkey. The roar of its motor seemed to shake the earth as the plane darted still higher, its dim shape blotting out star after star. Tex swung to the ground again; stood in the door of the hangar, staring after it with a look in his narrowed eyes that wasn't pretty. No use trying to catch that Roman-candle, he thought grimly.

ITS speed equalled that of either crate he owned. High, high it shot, carving a screaming chandelle toward the moon, then leveled off in a graceful arc. It keeled about, heading southeast. Its black shadow cut

across the Big Dipper; its roar faded to a whisper. Soon against the far horizon it passed away, and the bright little stars were glittering again in an empty sky.

Tex Tolliver, hard-faced and green-eyed, took stock of the damage. Luckily the bomb had missed the ranch-house, landing between it and the electric lighting plant and blowing out a crater like the blast of a nine-point-two.

Several window glasses were broken in the *casa*, and minor damage done to the outbuildings and corrals, but no casualties were suffered on the Slash-T either by the bomb or machine-gun save three killed horses and a fourth that was wounded so badly it had to be shot. But the cursing waddies tomorrow would have a sweet job rounding up those scattered broncs.

"I don't know who you are, brother," muttered Tex vindictively, "but I do know that you're gonna land in hell with your back broke for this night's stunt. *Por la cabeza de Benito Juarez, yes!*"

Keno, studying his compadre's visage in the flare of a match, followed him into the house with a shadowy grin on his Indian-brown face.

There was going to be hell afloat and the river rising mighty pronto; he knew the signs and the significance of that oath—"by the head of Juaraz!" Nobody was going to smack the *senor* of the Slash and get away with it, not any. Still grinning without humor, he busied himself with Durham and brown papers.

There were no further reports of the mystery plane that night.

Next morning the red dragonfly in the hangar was gone over to the last cotter pin by Tex and his grease monkey, Link Spillane. Spillane had been a mechanic in Tex's squadron in France, knew a ship from prop to fin

and could tune an engine like a musician tunes a harp.

Keno, who knew little of airships, but a great deal of machine-guns, sat hunkered down on his heels just outside on the apron, the stub of the inevitable cigarette between his lips. The sunshine was bright and warm, the blue sky cloudless, the far-flung prairie clear etched in the high air.

SAVE for that gaping crater being refilled by ranch hands, and the scars of numerous bullets on roof and wall, the incident of the night before might have been some lobster Newburg dream.

Keno, an eye squinted against the smoke of his "quirly," stared at the sleek cloudster speculatively. From prop to tail-skid it was a thing of streamlines and sheer beauty, clean as a hound's tooth, with speed, sturdiness and power fairly radiating from every strut, wire and bolt.

Wings, fuselage and motor hood were painted a cochineal red, with the Slash brand stroked in black upon the lower wing surfaces. A two-place open cockpit monoplane, the last word in airships, a special-built and all metal job was *El Halcón Rojo*, known from El Paso to Santone, Santone to Matamoras, as "The Red Hawk." And it had cost King Tolliver a pretty penny.

"A powerful string of dollars, placed end to end," Keno expressed it.

IT poised there in the hangar as if ready to leap into the air, a super-mechanical perfection of the latest thing in engines—a 600-horsepower Corsair, twelve-cylinder hexagon, whirlwind air-cooled motor. Its peak speed was well over two hundred miles an hour, with a ceiling of 18,000 feet and cruising radius of 1,000 miles fully loaded.

She was faster than any Border

patrol pursuit ship on the Rio, and was equipped with everything—compressed air shocks, brakes, self-starter, supercharger, a powerful searchlight, earth inductor compass, twin magneto ignition.

Special storage compartments were built in the fuselage for cargo and reserve fuel; the cockpits, sides and flooring, as well as prop and motor cowl, were treated with a yet unheralded veneering discovery that rendered them practically bullet proof. And there were scarfs on both pit coamings for machine-guns.

Yes, the job had cost Tex Tolliver a mighty pretty penny, for the hexagon motor was not yet in commercial production, and that armoring substance was a closely guarded secret of its inventor, former A. E. F. friend of Tolliver's, who was dickering with the Government regarding it.

HE made a special trip to Texas to varnish the Red Hawk, and swore Tex to nine kinds of secrecy about the entire operation.

Tex, Keno and Spillane were mounting the two Browning machine-guns on front scarf and rear tounelle, and had trundled the ship out of the hangar onto the apron in front to put on the finishing touches when the hum of an approaching car attracted their attention.

It was traveling from the direction of Del Rio, the county seat, and the trio needed but one glance to see that it belonged to high Sheriff Sam Dragoo of Valverde, and carried its owner and another passenger. The two-year vintage automobile lurched around a corner of the hacienda and bucked to a halt before the deadline, its radiator hissing and steaming.

"Howdy, boys!" greeted the minion of John Law, climbing stiffly out. He was a big-boned, heavy-set and grizzled veteran peace officer of the Border, serving his eleventh year as

sheriff of Valverde County. He had known Tex since he was a kid, and there was a strong bond of friendship between them. "Want you to meet Markley here—" jerking a thumb toward his companion, "of the Rangers. He's new down in this district from the El Paso outfit."

THEY shook hands with the tall, leather-faced, lean man whose features were aquiline and eyes cold and gray. And the bulge in his right hip pocket wasn't a bottle of liquor, either, Keno noted. The sheriff asked if they had heard the news.

"About our little night flying playmate?" grinned Tex. "Heard a little."

"Yeah?" The officer slowly twisted a cigarette and lit it, his shrewd eyes traveling around the rancho, then coming to rest on Tex's with an unspoken question in them. Tex nodded, busy with his own makings.

"He called on us a little after ten," and left his card."

"Left 'em at other places, too," rumbled the sheriff. "You got off light, boy. A bunch of people comin' out of a picture show shot up at Sheffield, another hombre plugged at Livingston, and then he cut loose a mess of bullets into Langtry. Luckily didn't hit anybody, same as he done here.

"His red lights were seen over Brackettville, and later over Spofford, flyin' high. All the patrol boys from Del Rio and Eagle Pass wuz up in the air, but didn't glimpse hide or hair of him. Don't nobody seem to know where he come from, or went to. It's plumb mysterious."

"Didn't anybody get a squint at his bus?" asked Tex.

Sheriff Dragoo shook his head. "No more'n you did, I reckon. Maybe not as much. You find out anything 'bout how he looked?"

TEX slowly exhaled tobacco smoke, eyes on the tip of his fag. "Yeah," he said quietly, "a little. It was a single seater monoplane, and fast as a bat out of hell. Capable of two hundred miles an hour, and then some. And the bird tooling it is no novice—he's a sky jock, handled her like a feather duster. And that egg he laid here belonged to an ostrich, not a pigeon. He seemed right anxious to make my acquaintance."

The officers were silent a minute, both looking at him thoughtfully. Then, "Wonder why he was so set on messin' you up, Tex?" queried the sheriff slowly. "Seems sorta like there wuz somethin' personal in the way he cut didoes over the Slash. For he followed the S. P. tracks east pretty well until he got in your region, 'cording to reports. Yuh have any idea of somebody who owns a flying buggy that's got it in for you?"

"No, not any." Tex shook his head. "Of course there are plenty of aerial smugglers and hijackers who wouldn't be above taking a crack at me and *El Halcón*; plenty of river rats and 'squite racketeers that would dry gulch or bushwhack me where my suspenders cross, but I can't see them pulling that hombre's stunt of last night. No, sir. That was the work of an out-and-out fiend or haywire maniac, maybe both.

"And he's got a super ship that's gonna be hard to catch, for he can thumb his nose at the Patrol crates. D. H.'s mean nothing to him, and he can outrun their Folsoms. I'm afraid, *amigos*, this is going to be a country-wide sensation before it's finished."

"It's already got Texas by the ears," said Markley, speaking for the first time. "All downstate papers are hitting the front page with it in half section black scareheads. And us fellows on the ground 'pear to be pretty well out of it, far as doing anything's concerned. Guess it's up to you high-

flying hombres to put the kibosh on him."

Tex smiled slightly. "Looks that way. And a pretty large order, if you ask me. Do you realize that this killer has bombs and a machine-gun, and covered more than seven hundred crow miles last night from point to point of contact? From Livingston to Spofford? And ten to one and a bottle of *tequila* he has a hideout across the river, from which he can strike here, yonder, anywhere. This Border's a long stretch, gents."

SHERIFF DRAGOO nodded, running his hand through his graying hair while wrinkles of worry carved his seamed face. "You're right son," he said heavily. "But I'm shovin' out my bottom dollar that you're starting on his trail, an' now right pronto. That's what I drove out here to see yuh about. If anybody can put a quietus on that fly-by-night murderer, you and Keno are the lads. I'm bettin' on yuh."

He looked at Tex hopefully; Markley stared narrowly, quizzically. Many times had Tex Tolliver been urged to take assignment in the Border service—in Customs, Immigration, G-men or the State Rangers.

Always he had refused, because he wanted to play his hand his own way, unfettered by regulations and untrammelled by governmental red tape. Too, he knew several hombres who rode on the left hand of the law, with reward pictures in sheriff's offices, that were as square shooters, in their fashion, as anybody would find between there and where the wind came from. Men whom he could call friends.

Just as the slaty-eyed, harl-faced Keno Curry had become his *compadre*, and, expressing it in the lithe *buscadero's* words, "He would go through hell and back on a lame cayuse for Tex Tolliver."

And old Sheriff Dragoo of Val-

verde, wise in the ways of the Southwest, knew these things, too. And, in addition, knew that Tex would follow a rampaging bandit or renegade patiently as an Apache until he got him; that he would camp on the trail of this sky pirate from reveille to taps, after the bombing and machine-gunning of his rancheria.

THAT last appeared, to the sheriff, mighty like a personal sort of thing. He knew a lot of hombres that would give a heap to know that the owner of the Slash was dead and his Red Hawk out of commission.

Those twinkling gun hands and that lightning swift plane were hated and feared among the border riffraff as much as the ship's namesake—the red Mexican hawk—was feared among the feathered and furred denizens of the mesquite country.

So when the veteran peace officer looked hopefully at Tex, the *senor* of the Slash nodded shortly, with an odd light flickering into his strange eyes so that they glowed like a cat's.

"We're having a go at this," he said, words as clipped as his nod. "Keno and me. And in our own way. Now that that's settled," he suddenly smiled, "suppose we adjourn to the house and have a drink on it. My Chino has a concoction all his own which we call a 'hushpuppy.' Tastes just about like it sounds, but it'll rip the hobnails off your boots."

"I'll drink my likker straight," said Ranger Markley. "None of those Duke's mixtures for me, 'specially if a Chink mixes it."

"Live and learn," replied Tex lightly. "*Andiamo*, gents."

The grinning Washee, cook and general factotum of the Slash's bachelor household, proudly brought in his cocktails, amber-hued in sweating tall glasses and embellished with slices of salted lemon. The saturnine-faced Ranger poured a stiff jolt of the

straight red, with a grimace at the other three bumpers.

"*Salud*," he said, raising his brimming pony. "Here's hoping it don't kill you, Sheriff."

"Humph," grunted Drago, licking his grizzled mustache and setting down his empty glass. "If you'd drunk as much Injun whiskey as I have, *amigo*—with a live rattler dropped into every barrel to flavor it, an' a plug uh terbaccer to color it after it wuz cold-decked with kerosene and slue water—well, this Chinee high-ball would taste like a shot uh sasparrilly juice to yuh, Markley."

HE turned to the grinning Tex. "Gotta be joggin' back to town, son—'fore that there conglomeration explodes in my stomach. Yuh got a free rein and a fast pony, Tex, an' you're ridin' double with this curly wolf Keno. Hop to it and ketch that air bushwhacker—I'm countin' on yuh. I'll be keepin' in touch with you boys. *Hasta luego*."

For just a moment he let his wise old eyes rest on a framed snapshot of a young aviator in trim uniform, a 220 Spad for background, setting on a table in the room.

Then, two minutes later, accompanied by his taciturn, straight-drinking Ranger friend, the high Sheriff of Valverde was rattling and bumping back along the road to Del Rio, easier in mind and more expansive in disposition. He had *mucho* confidence in Tex Tolliver—and respect for his drinks.

TWO days passed. And two nights. Many hours of sunshine and dark when *El Halcón Rojo* cruised, apparently aimlessly, over an expanse of mesquite and chaparral, cactus and sage, winging along the air lanes from Sierra Blanca to Laredo, then following the serpentine twists of the Rio Grande, then doubling, back

tracking and zigzagging like its tawny bird of prey namesake.

Above the red and black Chinatis of the Bend, high over Sanderson, Marfa, Valentine, along the shiny rails of the S. P. down to Uvalde, Carrizo, Hell's Skillet, people stared upward and saw the red plane high against the blue. Several times it landed, and in strange, out of the way places.

Not once did Tex and Keno sight the marauder. Many ships they saw and passed in the sky—Border Patrol crates, fast Army scouts, big biplanes of the Air Mail. But the vandal kept out of the sky in daylight, well-hidden in his unknown eyrie.

Both nights, however, he struck like a diamond back rattler. The first right under the noses of the Sanderson patrol on that graveyard stretch of S. P. track between that town and Marfa.

A PILE of old ties laid across the track, and a red flare between the rails halted the crack Transcontinental flyer, the all Pullman Sun-kissed Limited, and when the fireman climbed back into his cab he found a slim, wasp-waisted fellow standing beside the engineer, with a black silk handkerchief around his face and a Colts .45 automatic in each fist.

Under the menace of the guns both locomotive toolers were trussed up in Mex knots, swiftly and expertly, then the slender Jesse James hopped to the cinders and worked over the express car.

And he entered with gats blazing, dropping all three startled occupants without a word of warning or a Chinaman's chance. A brakeman, coming on the run to investigate, was downed in mid-stride; the excited conductor knocked hell west with two lead slugs.

Five sacks of registered mail and express packages—seventy thousand

dollars worth of new-size Treasury banknotes, the masked bandit tossed from the car door, then ran up to the engine, unleashed the helpless engineer and fireman, and ordered them to haul tail for Marfa and points west.

The two, witnessing the shambles behind the tender, and having as high a regard for their lives as the average human being, didn't pick daisies in obeying.

Four dead men and one desperately wounded, and loot averaging a cool hundred thousand was the coup's toll. And the masked outlaw made a clean get-away, for posses scouring the region found that the desert winds had broomed any trail he might have left behind him.

That he came and departed in a plane was undoubtable, for one man could not have carried all that plunder far afoot, and a car or horse would have left plain signs in that rugged region.

TWO persons in outlying and remote ranches reported they had heard a plane traveling south around two o'clock in the morning, the approximate hour of the holdup, but whether it was a patrol plane of the masked bandit's was a moot question. Tex and Keno, at that hour, had just turned in after five air hours toward Laredo, eight hundred miles from Marfa.

And the following night, despite redoubled precautions of a score of alert battle planes, the phantom boldly struck again. This time on the south end of the Border at Rio Grande City in Starr County, far from Marfa, and dropped three high explosive bombs on Fort Ringgold.

Considerable damage was done to barracks and storehouses, two soldiers killed and eighteen injured, several fires started. Phosphorous flares lighted his aim, and he flew low. But here he left a message, a

scroll of paper wrapped around a lead weighted steel arrow which landed and stuck flush in the center of the parade ground.

And upon it, written in a neat, mechanical hand in English was:

The contents of the express car last night yielded many pesos with which to purchase torpedoes, bullets, and gas bombs to be used on *Tejano Yankis*. And until the province for one hundred miles north of the Rio Grande, unfairly wrested from Mexico by a grasping, greedy people, is ceded back to its mother country by the unspeakable gringo, *Tio Sam, El Garrote Negro* (the black bat) will continue to levy tribute on what is called the State of the One Star both in money and in blood.

And the missive was signed by the black bat, rampant upon two white crossed bones, flying above a grinning skull. A sinister coat of arms, truly. That of an arch-devil, or a maniac.

Meanwhile, there was action and plenty of it. Radio sputtered incessantly; telegraph instruments clicked; grim-faced and hard-eyed pilots stood by their ships in the flights at El Paso, Marfa, Sanderson, Del Rio, Eagle Pass and Laredo. More fast army scout planes were rushed from San Antonio; swarms of Federal men got under way. The Mexican government was asked to conduct a country-wide search. On the third day it was a nation-wide sensation.

It was a big day for the newspapers. Glaring headlines leaped from front sheets screaming versions of the mysterious bandit and killer styled *El Garrote Negro*, riding through the night for hour after hour above that deadly Border country, ranging the sky, and swooping down upon helpless victims.

HIS plane equipped with bombs and machine-gun bullets, with now the threat of poison gas; a menace to the entire Border and the State in general. The whole Rio

Grande country was sore, scared and resentful, and the entire U. S. was watching and wondering why in hell the whole damn Border Patrol couldn't catch the madman.

Before nightfall a terrific force of public sentiment was buzzing from Canada to the Gulf, from Frisco to Boston.

On the fourth day the identity of the black pirate seemed to be cleared up beyond a doubt. The Federal agents who had been investigating everybody and everything pertaining to airships, sent in a batch of code news containing some very enlightening and hitherto secret information pertaining to recent happenings at Sausalito Naval Air Station, California.

A brand new type Boeing Fighter, radial-motored and air-cooled all metal job, a vest pocket, lightning bolt pursuit ship that was being tried out in strictest secrecy, was missing; had been mysteriously stolen from its hangar.

A couple of sentries were knifed in the affair, and a hangar non-com badly injured. The Department had been keeping the loss sternly under censorship, for reasons best known to themselves, and only rumors had leaked to the outside world of the theft.

ANOTHER bit of belated news dovetailed with the first item exactly. Not far from the Naval airport was the aviation school at Clayburn, where night flying, advanced navigation and technical courses predominated.

A young Mexican student aviator there, Faustino de Allende, one of the cleverest and most brilliant pilots in that highly advanced school, had suddenly disappeared about the same time as the theft of the Boeing scout. A few weeks previous he had been in

a nasty crackup, and spent a fortnight in a Frisco hospital on account of a bad smash on his head.

Though seemingly not a fracture of serious importance according to medical authority, various fellow students at Clayburn reported that he had acted "queer" upon his return.

Two under two, with a line drawn beneath both, calls for a four. The facts very plainly pointed to de Allende as the thief of the Navy Scout, the pilot of his self-styled Black Bat, and being mad as a hatter to boot.

Tex Tolliver, that fourth day, slowly shuttled these facts in his head. The night previous the Bat had again struck, even more daringly and viciously, despite all efforts of the infuriated aerial patrolmen.

And this time he not only sent a mail plane crashing on the San Antonio-El Paso flight, but shot down a fleet scout escort as well, apparently diving upon them like a ghost out of the moonlight without a sound of warning until the rat-tat of his machine-guns lanced the darkness. And the stunt took place on the very outskirts of Alpine.

The pilot of the scout ship was killed outright, but the mail plane ferryer lived almost two hours, and was able to give a fairly clear version of the happening. The Folsom pilot went down, riddled, at the first blast of that totally unsuspected killer on his tail—the slower biplane didn't have a chance as burst after burst of bullets raked cabin and fuselage. And the black ship disappeared as mysteriously as it appeared.

Tex, in possession of the decoded and secret information of the G-men, knew that the stolen Boeing pursuit plane was capable of better than 200 miles an hour, had twin guns synchronized to fire through the propeller, and worst of all, had been fitted with the as yet unknown Tempelhof

silencers, the secret invention which enabled its cylinders and exhausts to function silently when the pilot chose, save for a negligible whir of the prop.

No wonder the ship had appeared like a noiseless phantom, struck wantonly, swiftly, then faded like an apparition. It was a mighty sinister situation—one fraught with dire possibilities.

About de Allende. Perhaps the fall out in Clayburn had knocked him haywire, put some sort of bone pressure on his brain, and made buried impulses come to the fore strongly.

That queer, one-man declaration of war against Texas seemed to indicate that; the demand for a ceding of territory one hundred miles deep north of the Rio Grande to Mexico.

YET Tex Tolliver was not wholly convinced that the Black Bat was a maniac or praecox victim—some subtle denial, some uncanny faculty deep in his brain refused to admit it. But he knew, beyond the smallest doubt, that Faustino de Allende and El Garrote Negro were one and the same person despite a contrary despatch from Mexico City stating that the young *charro* aviator was en route to Europe to take a vacation and recuperate from a slight accident in California.

His people, who lived in Torreon and were very wealthy Mexicans of high caste, utterly ridiculed the idea of Faustino being the Border marauder, and indignantly denied his having any connection with the disappearance of the Boeing plane.

De Allende, it was further learned, had been a star aviator in the National Air Service, and was on detached leave to attend the highly reputable and specialized school of Clayburn to take the most complex and ultimate technical courses. Now he was taking a deserved rest.

THE *Americanos*, politely concluded Chapultepec Castle with a shrug, had best look somewhere else for their Black Bat. The affair was unfortunate, and all co-operation possible would be given in apprehending this person should he be violating Mexican soil and neutrality in his depredations.

So much for that. Several persons south of the Rio Grande were laughing up their sleeves.

Tex, whose modes and sources of information were not exactly what many persons might call ethical, knew several things he hadn't put out to the perplexed and harried authorities. But his undercover investigation hadn't unearthed where de Alende had his hidden tarmac, or where he got his supply of high-powered bombs. To obtain machine-gun ammunition would not be difficult—no harder than to dispose of the loot rifled from that S. P. express car.

And it appeared that Senor de Alende had a confederate or so on this side of the river, or else his choice of that particular train and night had been devilish lucky.

It was practically useless to hunt him in the night sky. There was a chance in ten thousand, maybe, of making contact. A chance so slim it wasn't a chance at all.

And patrolling over the most deadly dangerous country imaginable, the Texas Border, in dark flying above the mesquite and chaparral, was going to cause lots of casualties and wash-outs in the patrolling force. It looked like it was going to be a nice summer for U. S. airmen. Yet—Tex grinned tightly—there were more ways than one of skinning a cat. And the Senor of the Slash knew all the ways.

That afternoon he and his greaseball again went over every inch of the Hawk, and in addition attached a rack under the fuselage. Keno, who

had gone to Del Rio earlier in the day, returned; Tex held five minutes confab with him at the hanger.

Curry's face slowly widened in a grin of understanding. "By God!" he said admiringly, "that's what I call a 'sta bueno idea, Ace! Take a drink on that, huh?"

"YEAH, pronto." Tex grinned in return, unlocked the door of a small rock hut close by, and they went down a flight of stone steps leading to a deep underground cellar. A second stout door swung open to the touch of a key, and the vaulted room behind it was a veritable arsenal and amma dump. Tex pointed to a row of objects carefully shelved on a wall; nodded.

Five minutes later he and Keno were in the sunshine again. "Now we'll get outside of that drink, *compadre*," he said. "*Vamanos.*"

Tex Tolliver glanced at his wrist watch, and the radiolite dial read five minutes past eleven, P. M. He downed the remainder of his highball, walked over and snapped off the radio, donned leather coat and helmet and looped his goggles around his neck. Keno, strapping on his cartridge belt, followed him out of the ranch house into the brilliant moonlight and across to the hangar where the shadowy form of El Halcón stood at the deadline on the apron. Two punchers, squatted in the shadows of the hangar, got up as they approached.

"Heard any news over the air, skipper?" one of the cowpoke guards asked.

"None so far tonight," replied Tex, squinting at the wind sock. "Where's Link?"

"Comin' up," sang out the mechanic emerging from the hangar door. "Everything's jake, and the goose hangs high, Senor. The eggs are in their nests, all sittin' pretty to be hatched."

TEX peered beneath the fuselage; two light but deadly bombs hung in the rack. He lifted himself over the rim of the cockpit and settled at the controls, motioning the mechanic that he wanted to speak to him.

Keno was already in his doghouse, helmeted and coated, the red tip of a brown paper quirly glowing at his mouth.

"Hold down the radio until I get back," Tex told Link Spillane, "and catch any report on the Bat. Be sure and mark down the *hour*, sabe?"

"Gotcha. 'At all?"

Tex nodded, made contact, cut in the starter, and the powerful engine burst into full throated roar. Two, three minutes he jazzed the warm motor, then advanced the throttle and released the brakes. The slick cloudster was off, streaking over the hard ground and leaving it in a graceful half zoom.

The acres of the Slash-T, Valverde County and the lights of Del Rio slid behind the undercarriage, and the silver skein of the Rio Grande curled underneath.

A moment later they were above Mexico, violating the neutrality of two countries in an armed invasion with bombs and machine-guns. Tex and Keno kept sharp eyes upon the sky in every direction, but no plane showed against the stars.

The Corsair sang a silky song of power as the trim craft rocketed southward, the wind keening through struts and wires. The two passengers hunched low behind the windshield, for at their altitude the air had the bite of a bobcat.

Tex whistled a gay tune in cadence with the roar of a full throttle as they drove along high in the night ceiling over the drab waste of mesquite and cactus, that vast desert of Coahuila called the *Bolson de Mapini*. Few people lived down there; it was

the abode of snakes and tarantulas, coyotes and vinegarones.

If the motor conked now it would be fine with a capital F, for no plane could land in that unbroken sea of pronged branches. And a chute drop would be just about as bad, even if they landed safely, for the region was bandit infested.

NOW and then Tex scanned a map of Mexico spread on a board and attached to the dash, conned his compass. Flung a glance at the smut black earth below. Keno, his hands resting near the searchlight switch and bomb levers, dozed now and then as mile after mile sped backwards under the tail fin in so many fractions of minutes.

The course was southeast, a gentle circle, and within an hour and a quarter the scattered lights of a fairish sized town twinkled below. Tex cut the gun to half throttle and spoke through the phones.

"There she is, buddie—the big *ciudad* of Zaragoza. Guess most of the colorado maduro citizens are asleep, but they're due for a rough waking up. I don't think we'll need the searchlight with that full moon, but when I signal, you let loose those eggs. Got me?"

"Uh-huh," said the now wide awake Keno. "And gimme a chance to spew a little lead outa my typewriter—don't forget that. Ace."

KENO CURRY tightened his belt, settled his helmet and prepared to enjoy himself. He classed the majority of denizens south of the Rio in the same category as rattlesnakes, and had about as much compunction in killing one as he did a diamond-back.

But he knew Tex's plan didn't include any wholesale murder of in-offensive Mexicans in Zaragoza, and

that the pilot would pick his targets with uncanny accuracy.

But, Keno shrugged, if his own rear machine-gun should slip a little, accidentally, well—it would be just too bad for whoever got in the way. He smiled grimly as Tex cut out the engine and the Red Hawk dropped earthward in long, slanting circles.

Down they went, noiselessly save for the whine of the wind and swish of the ticking prop, and the streets and houses, plaza and churches of Zaragoza swayed upward like an advancing fist.

The gleaming metals of the railway line led away north and south; the station, switch yards, freight depots and water tank lay just below the ship's nose. Numbers of freight cars and two locomotives stood idle, while a midnight hush lay over the sleeping town.

Now! Tex Tolliver's hand and arm went up in a signal as he pulled back the stick and even keeled the plane. Keno yanked the bomb lever viciously, and a small black ball went plummeting groundward. Five, ten, fifteen, sixteen—seventeen. . . . Keno's count ceased as a vivid flash and a bang split the night silence, and a nasty geyser leaped from the railway yards.

It was a direct hit on the water tank, and the girders and beams, wood and water went cycloning skyward in a mass of smoke and flame. Debris rained on the neighborhood.

"Hot dam!" howled Keno. "Who in hell says I can't lay an egg! Guess that woke those *pelados* up, huh?"

Tex was banking the plane, swooping now over the plaza with the Corsair roaring like a tornado. His arm shot up a second time, and Keno jerked savagely, then leaned overside to watch the bomb's fall. It struck flush at the entrance of the municipio, the city hall, jarred the staid old adobe building to its roots, and broke every window pane in it.

It gouged out a crater in the square, and sent slivers of steel and hunks of rock and dirt hurtling against adjacent houses. Keno swore viciously at the miss, but before its dust had fairly started to settle Tex's prop Browning was beating a tattoo of bullets all over the plaza, filling it with hundreds of little dust spurts that zipped and whined and ricocheted.

IT was not his plan to shoot up a lot of innocent people, but to ground-strafe the town enough to thoroughly scare the inhabitants, as well as bash up some Government property.

If Ciudad Mexico was covertly laughing about the harried Tio Sam and his slippery Black Bat, well—the senors would laugh on the other side of their face, after this night.

As the Hawk roared above *Calle Gallardia*, the high street of Zaragoza, Keno Curry, furious because of his miss on the plaza, shoved his thumbs against the trips of his Browning and held them there, raking the flanking stores and houses with a sleet of lead.

Over the railroad yards again they thundered, with prop and doghouse guns spitting; bank and up the *Calle*, a second time; zoom above the square and another rafale of fire.

Tex, leaning overside, dropped a slender arrow, and its weighted tip went true into the middle of the plaza.

On a piece of paper tied to it he had written, in Spanish: *Warning. If this city does not pay me a levy of Ten Thousand gold pesos, before the end of the week, I will return and blast it from the map. You have seen a sample of my power. My agent will learn if this will be done; your mayor will receive certain instructions where to pay the money. You have five days to decide between life and death, citizens of Zaragoza!*

And Tex had signed it the Black

Bat, and drawn the grisly coat of arms beneath. That ought to put the fear of God into 'em, he thought grimly.

And as he pulled back the stick of the Hawk and climbed straight up, into blue heaven, his last glimpse of Zaragoza showed him a town in the grip of terror. Grinning, he gained his altitude, then peaked for the Rio and home, 180 miles distant.

The following night he repeated the foray. Flying high over the Rio, unseen, he flew almost to Monclova. One bomb demolished a railway culvert near Obayos; the second seriously damaged the right of way bridge at San Blas.

The one street of the hamlet of Gutierrez was roweled with machine-gun bullets, and the fifty odd inhabitants of Cerro Loco thrown into wild panic by the swooping, thundering, lead spitting Red Hawk that dropped from the sky.

Although chased by two Yank patrol ships when recrossing the Border, Tex and Keno soon out-distanced them and landed on the T of the Slash without discovery, well satisfied with their two night's work.

The papers next day brought broad grins to both their faces. The startled powers at Ciudad Mexico were on the prod, and no mistake. It was all very well, the bombing of Texas towns and murder of gringo citizenry, but the like treatment of places south of the Rio was another matter altogether.

Five people had been killed at Zaragoza by bullets, and many wounded, so stated the report. Much property destroyed. And now, two National Railway bridges smashed, delaying train service, and the inhabitants of two other hamlets strafed from the sky.

EVERY effort was being made to apprehend this unknown assassin, and Government planes were be-

ing rushed north from Valbuena immediately.

Also a heavy garrison had been sent to Zaragoza accompanied by three army planes to protect the town threatened with destruction. The whole northern frontier would be combed in search of the fiend, etc., and so on.

"That's the stuff to give the troops," applauded Keno. "Hell and repeat—right. Where do we go next time, Ace?"

"Nowhere, tonight," Tex replied slowly. "Things are coming to a head, buddie. Notice that the Bat didn't fly last night? Or at least there's no reports of any deviltry. Kinda think we've got him worried, with our two-time stuff.

"We will just hang around a while, keep our eyes and ears open and let things hum. The State officials and G-men on this side of the creek are as much up in the air about our Mex raids as the *colorado madura's* themselves."

Which was right; muchly so. Papers speculated variedly upon the weird freaks of the night assassin—his bombing the Border Patrol air-drome at Eagle Pass and the Mexican town of Zaragoza the same night, gave a startling twist to the situation. Two hangars and one ship were destroyed at Eagle Pass, and eight men wounded.

And then, last night, the sudden inactivity on the Texas side. But despite various theories and certain wild suggestions of the newspaper scribblers, the concensus of public opinion remained that the Black Bat was a raving maniac and needed to be put out of the way at once.

With two governments on his tail he shouldn't last long, no matter where his hidden tarmac was, so they reasoned.

One person maybe, besides those in the know at the Slash, could have told

a great deal and made a good guess in regard to the sudden preference of the Bat for Mex National railroad bridges and rolling stock.

And that person was Sheriff Sam Drago of Valvedo County. He met Tex on the streets of Del Rio that afternoon, and favored him with a mighty quizzical look.

"Looks like our maraudin' *amigo's* kinda changed his stomping grounds a little," he remarked. "Likewise that the shoe don't fit so good on the other foot—south of the crick. Sorta funny, ain't it?"

Tex returned the scrutiny, and a smile of understanding passed between them. "Things may get funnier," he said impersonally. "And pronto, sheriff. I've got a riata loop made, and she's laying smack dab across a trail.

"Somehow, I have a hunch that somebody's going to step into that loop before long, and get the *honda* jerked tight against their legs. Feel it in my bones, just like I feel this change of weather comin' on."

"Uh-huh," nodded the officer. "It'll rain before mawnin. Dry spell's due to git broke. Yuh need any help in hawgtyin' this customer, son?"

"Might," nodded Tex. "Get word to you if I do, old-timer."

"Uh-huh," repeated the sheriff, his wise old eyes thoughtful. He turned to go, then looked straight at Tex. "Be careful, boy," he said quietly.

TRUE to his and Sheriff Drago's predictions, the weather did change, and with all the unwarning suddenness of Texas climate. The past six weeks had been hot and dry, with no rain save light and infrequent showers. Toward sundown that afternoon heavy banks of black clouds appeared

on the whole western horizon, and in the still, sultry air came the ominous growl of thunder. The *llano* was still; its winged and furred denizens, sensing the approaching storm, had taken to cover.

"Looks like she's gonna be a good one," remarked Keno, an eye cocked speculatively at the darkening heavens. "No sky hoppin' or radioin' to-night, Ace. Think I'll celebrate and grab some shut-eye for a change."

HE was right. At a few minutes past six the storm broke over the Pecos country in a hurricane of wind, hail and rain. Great streaks of lightning struck across the inky sky, reddening the boiling clouds and flashlighting the countryside, while the peal and clap of thunder was incessant.

Ropes of wind-driven rain pounded the windows and tiles of the hacienda, making one continual, drumming roar. The drought was broken, and with a vengeance; the brassy, sizzling heat wave cooled.

Their supper eaten, drunk and smoked, Tex and Keno went to bed early, made comfortably drowsy by the beat of the rain, the rip of the wind and the effect of several highballs.

Though a sound sleeper, any noise instantly awoke Tex Tolliver. And, like a wild animal of the mesas, he was awake all over and his every sense qui vive when he snapped open his eyes, his nerves and muscles tense as a fiddlestring.

A blinding beam of light shone full in his face; a viselike grip of fingers gagged his mouth; on his bare throat he felt, and saw, the needle point of a razor edged knife resting there like a poised bee, ready to sting.

Does Tolliver Escape From His Mysterious Foe? Is de Allende Captured? For the Answer to These and Other Questions Read the Next Thrilling Installment of THE RED HAWK OF THE RIO.

LEGION STEEL



Savage, Marauding Berber Tribes and Valorous Legionnaires Clash in this African Story

By PETER FORREST

BAYONETS! Thin, black blades, jabbing home and coming out—red! Two legionnaires, side by side, defending an entire mountaintop!

Legionnaire Don Lewis braced himself against the rocks. A savage, gleaming knife blazed in the sunlight. He thrust — again — again — grunting.

Thrust deep into the flapping white folds of the Berber's robe. The black face of the native turned gray, sick with agony. Howling, he dropped his blade clanging on the rocks, whirled, and pitched, to twist for a moment before he was still.

Legionnaire Lewis did not watch him. He had no time for that. They were coming fast now, rushing out from behind the rocks—six, seven, eight of them.

"Got one!" Don Lewis shouted over his shoulder to Georges Dupont.

"Bon!" yelled the Frenchman—firing point-blank into the face of a Berber, and leaping to meet the next one with his bayonet.

Don Lewis sprang like a cat to Dupont's side, and together they carried the fight to the attackers. Two legionnaires with bayonets battling a shrieking group of Berbers with knives—two jaguars facing a relent-

less wolf pack. Blindly, primitively, they fought.

LEWIS used his gun both for clubbing and stabbing. A heavy blade crashed down on his rifle barrel, sending the weapon spinning. The American grappled with his assailant, knocked him out and hurled him from the great ledge on which they were fighting.

And then it was over. Three natives were scrambling back among the rocks and huge boulders. Five were huddled white heaps—and two grim, sweating young legionnaires went about the dirty job of tossing four limp bodies from the ledge to join the one Lewis had sent crashing.

As they were doing this, a bullet tore into the slaty soil at their feet. Dupont grabbed his rifle—poured lead after the fleeing trio.

A Berber, burnoose flapping, fell heavily from the crest of a boulder two hundred feet away. The legionnaires chased the last two on the double-quick, the pace for which the Legion is famous—but the natives got away. The *djellabas* could be seen more than a hundred yards off—as they made for the desert below.

Lewis and Dupont returned to their ledge. Lewis whipped his binoculars from his side and raked the desert which spread away from the base of this mountain in the High Atlas. A desert tawny, cruel, glaring up at the hot sun of Africa.

"There's more of them down there, Georges!" he snapped. "Take a look. The horizon. This bunch just now—they came on ahead to get us." He jerked his thumb at their heliograph apparatus.

"*Oui*," agreed Dupont. "To destroy thees signal post. They saw the flashes of our mirror, eh?"

"Yeah. Savvy guys, they are, I'll say."

"They are coming in thousands,"

cried Dupont, staring through the glasses. "A beeg raid, Don! They will wipe out our outpost at Moussa! They come toward us, toward the pass down below."

But Don Lewis was already at the helio, feverishly operating the mirror which, reflecting the sun, sent dots and dashes of blazing light across the ranges of the mountains.

He was trying to get the attention of the garrison back at Moussa, which lay out on a sun-scorched plain, beyond a low, dun-colored range. Many kilometers stretched between the outpost and the signal post in the High Atlas.

"Don!" shouted the excitable Frenchman. "Have you forgotten our own company? Warn them, too!"

"God, yes!" breathed Don Lewis—and swung the helio around, tilting the mirror down. Legionnaire Dupont had referred to the antlike company under the command of Captain Maurice Giroux, far below in the great gorge-like pass between this mountain and the next.

HOURS before, Captain Giroux had picked Lewis and Dupont, two inseparable friends, to establish the signal post on the craggy heights. Giroux's company was out looking for trouble, and he wanted to be forewarned.

Native spies, back at Moussa, had brought rumors of much trouble, new trouble, brewing in the *kasbahs* of the Berbers. The savage, marauding tribes were planning a gigantic raid on the legionnaires who had dared to occupy tabooed territory.

"If, from the mountaintop," Captain Giroux had ordered, "you see signs of this raid, flash a warning to Moussa first, then to me. Our lives are in your hands. We have been sent to block and hold this pass against the Berber, and we depend on you to let us know when they are coming."

Don Lewis, red kepi pushed back from his sweating forehead, labored at the heliograph. Beside him, Dupont focused the binoculars on the party of soldiers in the shadowy depths of the gorge.

"They are not getting your message!" exclaimed Dupont miserably.

"What are they doing?"

"Lying down. Smoking. Drinking from their canteens."

"And Captain Giroux?"

"He is standing up. Looking up toward us. But he does not see the helio flashes. The sun is bad."

"Good God! And we have been trying to signal him for ten minutes!" Don Lewis swore fluently. "They'll be wiped out! Overwhelmed, with no chance to get ready! The Berbers—are they near now?"

Dupont swung around with the glasses. "An hour—half an hour, perhaps. It is hard to tell."

"I've got to try to warn Moussa again," said the American bitterly. He slanted the mirror.

AFTER five minutes of signaling, Don Lewis gave it up. Moussa could wait. Once again he tried to get Giroux's attention down in the gorge. And again, Legionnaire Dupont reported grimly that communication had not been established.

"Georges," said Don bitterly, "one of us has got to get down there to let them know. They're trapped, but they might still have a chance to retreat or at least die fighting—not just be surprised and butchered like rats."

"It is death for the one who goes down there," Dupont returned soberly.

"It's probably death for whoever stays up here, too," Don Lewis reminded him, shoving back his kepi and lighting a cigarette. "When those damned *slurs* get here a number of them'll swarm up here and capture

this signal post. You can bet they'll know there is one up here. They're savvy."

"Try the helio just once more."

THE American did so, with the same result. Before leaving the apparatus, however, he sent message after message toward Moussa.

"We'll toss," he said tensely. It would be hard either to leave Georges and go down below, or to stay here while his buddy went. One might survive—the chances were that both would die. In either case, it was hard, bitterly hard. They had always fought side by side.

Don tossed a franc. "Tails!" he called. "Tails I go."

"*La tête!*" cried Dupont. "The head!"

"It's tails," reported the American. "I go, Georges." He picked up his gun, slung on his pack and held out his hand. "Good luck, kid. I'll be back—if I can."

"Bon chance, Don, my friend. *Dieu*, we are such fine friends. It is very sad."

"I'll say." Don gripped the brown hand of Dupont. "But what have we always said? We are—legionnaires first, friends second. Right?"

"Ah, *oui*. Don, I think we shall die this time. I shall send messages constantly to Moussa while you are gone."

Solemnly, they stood to attention, faces set, straight, eyes level.

"So long, Legionnaire Dupont!" said Don, saluting stiffly.

"*Adieu*, Legionnaire Lewis," and Georges brought his hand smartly to his forehead.

THE American wheeled, and disappeared among the rocks and gullies of the mountainside.

The descent, though dangerous and difficult, did not take long. Captain

Giroux spotted Don Lewis and made his way up to meet him. Lewis, out of breath, bruised, and fatigued by his mad scrambling downward, told crisply what they had seen and how they had hopelessly tried to warn him with the helio.

"*Bien*, Legionnaire Lewis. You had tried also to warn Moussa?"

"Yes, many times."

"Very well. We retreat to a more strategic position. You will come with me."

"But—but how about Legionnaire Dupont?" demanded Don.

"This is war, *mon petit*. War—you understand? Dupont is lost. Perhaps we are lost, also. We must hold back the Berber until the Moussa outpost can be reinforced. You are a *bon soldat*. I need you here."

"But captain—"

Giroux, however, had turned away. Correctly, he had put the need of the Legion before any personal considerations. He knew well what his order meant to Don Lewis—but what could one do? "It is war," he said to himself, and shrugged regretfully. Then he brought his command to attention, and gave the order: "Fixez!"—to fix bayonets.

Quietly, he explained the situation to his command: "You will die like men of the *Légion Etrangère*. You will be outnumbered. The Berber will fill this pass like vermin. You will hold them back as long as you have breath in your bodies. Is this not what you will do, my little ones?"

An affirmative shout rose from the throats of his sun-browned fighting men. Kepis were pulled on more tightly. Thin bayonets stood like spears against the sky.

"We shall wait behind rocks, concealed," added Captain Giroux. "We have one machine-gun. That is our only hope."

A few minutes later not a legionnaire was to be seen in the gorgelike

pass. Each large boulder on the irregular rocky sides of the pass was a small fortress, however, manned by a sharpshooter in a kepi.

There was silence.

Don Lewis was stationed near the shadowy gully which led into the route he and Dupont had chosen as the best way up the steep mountain-side. Near the V of the pass, beyond which lay the open desert, Giroux knelt behind a rock, snub-nosed automatic in hand, eyes intent on the spot where the first of the attackers would appear.

Don Lewis thought: "Giroux is right—and also wrong. He needs me here—he needs any additional men he can get. But Georges may be killed up there, and the warning may not get through to our Moussa outpost. I am needed up there. I am on signal duty, and my greatest duty is, not to Captain Giroux, but to the *Légion Etrangère* as a whole! And that's that!"

ON his belly he slid farther back into the gully, then rose to his feet as he moved out of the sight of those in the pass. Following the circuitous, craggy route he and Dupont had taken previously to reach the summit, he put all his panther-like strength into that upward race with Death.

At one point he came into view—so that Giroux's attention was called to him. A bullet whistled through the left sleeve of Legionnaire Lewis.

He knew that it meant death for him now, no matter what he did. He was disobeying his officer in the very face of an enemy attack!

They probably thought he was deserting, running away! He was being shot down unceremoniously, by order of his captain. It was necessary to do that, Don knew. Discipline. War.

If he were not killed, he would be court-martialed and most likely exe-

cuted. He was done for. A wry grin twisted his grimy features.

WAVING sardonically to his comrades down in the pass, he grabbed the top of a jutting rock and swung himself up to the ledge. He could see from there the boulders which concealed his buddy, Georges. The helio was working. The red kepi of Legionnaire Dupont showed above the jagged rim of the breastwork. But Don was still too far away to shout.

Then he heard shots, and whirled to look downward. The *slurs* were pouring into the pass, white burnoosees flapping in the golden pathway made by the sun. Long-barreled rifles spat, horses reared, and riders were hurled from their ornate saddles as the Legion machine-gun began its metallic hiccoughing.

Don Lewis stared, fascinated—and torn miserably by two emotions. He wanted to be down there, bayoneted rifle gripped in his two strong, brown hands, fighting with his comrades, showing the hated Berber what Legion steel was like!

But there was Moussa! Moussa lying on that quiet plain, undermanned—Moussa, a symbol of Legion progress into this barbarous territory.

If Moussa were destroyed and its garrison massacred, these white-robed hordes, drunk with victory, would ride like ghouls of hell far and wide, freely killing and plundering and making off with the coveted guns of the Legion! Moussa *must* be reinforced.

Captain Giroux and his men were fighting for their lives, Don could see that, and his heart ached for them. But he, Don, had another fight before him; for at that moment, a group of horsemen wheeled and disappeared into that gully which he had quitted less than half an hour past!

They had seen him! Or perhaps they had seen the winking eye of the

heliograph—for the sun was reaching into the pass by this time! They had seen the signal post and were coming to destroy it—in earnest this time.

Don went over the rocks like a mountain goat. A shot zinged against his canteen! He flattened himself against a gaping fissure on a cliffside, waited, with rifle poised. A camel's hair burnoose showed briefly and Don shot the man through the head.

Then he climbed again, perspiring, ripped by the rocks in his haste. A slug tore through his kepi, whirled it from his head. He recovered it, halted, watched for the sharpshooter. Another bullet burned a crimson brand along his right forearm, but he paid no attention to it.

A robed figure darted between two boulders. Don held his fire, aiming steadily—and got him in his next dash for cover.

The darting figure lay still, sprawled, with talon-like hands scrabbling in the red gravel, then stiffening. A long rifle slid a foot and stopped.

Don had time now to see how things were going down in the pass. The machine-gun was busy. White-clad forms lay like bags of laundry scattered through the pass, and riderless horses, with wild manes like white, golden-brown or glossy black pennants in the sun, galloped through the vast gorge. More Berbers were coming.

IN some places legionnaires were engaged in hand-to-hand combat, their viper's fang bayonets licking at the *djellabas* that crowded in from all sides.

Up above, the helio had stopped its intermittent flashes. Had it been shattered by a wild shot? Had Georges been killed? Don Lewis, with a cry, rushed upward, gasping for breath.

His brown sleeve was soppily with blood, but he disregarded it. Georges

lay dead or wounded up there—but, more important than that, the helio had stopped! And no connection might yet have been made with the command at Moussa!

FIFTEEN minutes later, Legionnaire Lewis dragged himself over the rock breastwork, wild-eyed, looking like a man who had been lost in the desert for weeks.

"Georges!"

But Legionnaire Dupont did not answer. He lay face down, head pillowed on one grotesquely crooked arm, his rifle clutched in an outstretched hand.

Don turned him over frantically, calling: "Georges! Say something, kid! For God's sake, say something!" He shook him, searched hurriedly for the wound—and found it on the side of his friend's head. A flesh wound—not serious. Georges was not dead. He had been stunned.

The young Frenchman murmured. "Ah, *mon ami*. Are our comrades—O. K.?" He grinned through white lips as he used that Americanism in broken English.

"They are fighting. You are all right?"

"*Oui*. Never mind me, Don. The helio—it is broke! A shot. Then I was shot. The world went black for me—"

Don grasped the heliograph, found it shattered as he had guessed. Bits of the mirror lay on the ground at his feet.

"Did Moussa reply?" he demanded.

Legionnaire Dupont shook his head slowly. Both men gazed, white-faced, at each other.

"We can do nothing," said Dupont.

Don pondered, shrugged. "We can die like legionnaires," he said simply. "Down there, in the pass, Giroux and the others are dying. Can you shoot, Georges?"

"Shoot? Can I shoot? *Nom de*

Dieu, a legionnaire never stops fighting! Give me my rifle!" Dupont crawled to the boulders and peered over.

"They come! Ah, those peegs! *Cochons!* It is George Dupont who laughs at you. Observe, Don, how I send them to hell—there's one—*diable!* Another. Death to the *slurs!*" His rifle spoke repeatedly, viciously.

Yells and native babblings rose from the throats of the half dozen Berbers who were making their way toward the signal post. Bullets whanged against the rocks.

"Pick 'em off, Georges!" cried Don. "I'm fixing the helio." He had gathered up the fragments of glass and was rapidly fitting them back into the frame, much as one fits the broken crystal of a watch. To his surprise, they stayed in place, and in a few seconds he was flashing Moussa desperately.

Through his binoculars he could barely see the distant outpost—a mere dot, innumerable kilometers away. If the message got through, there would be an answer. A flicker of light, repeated pinpoint points of sun-gold far out on that brown waste where Moussa drowsed.

HE heard a deep grunt of agony and looked around sharply. Georges was slumping to the ground. The savage cries from below were renewed. Lewis stood on tiptoe. They were still a few minutes away.

He could waste no time in shooting now. Nor could he help Georges. The helio was all important. With the face of a Buddha, and with deadly, calm precision, he sent the long and short flashes. He spelled out the words:

"BERBERS — LARGE FORCE — RAID — GIROUX OUTNUMBERED — MOUSSA IN GRAVE DANGER."

The helio spun out of his hands as

a bullet crashed into it. Slugs raked his flesh in three parts—his right shoulder, his side, and again on his side.

HE ducked, but not before he had reeled under a sizzling chunk of lead that buried itself in his left shoulder. He felt dizzy, weak, but kept his head enough to unsling his rifle. He would pass out any minute now; he knew that. Somehow, he didn't care—

Then he caught himself, mopped his sweating forehead with a wet sleeve, tucked the rifle under his chin and sought for the single marksman who had gotten the drop on him.

There were two of them. They had wormed their way back up and around a gray pinnacle farther along the ridge, attacking from an unexpected quarter.

Even as Don found them, bullets whipped against the rocks—and he pressed the trigger slowly. With a grunt of satisfaction he saw a rifle hurtle into the air, saw white-clothed arms flailing at the sky, saw a *slur* pitch down the precipitous slope.

He waited for the other to appear. For a long time there was no sound, and he could not discover any Berbers in either direction. Laying down his rifle cautiously, but within instant reach, he turned the binoculars on the bottom of the great gloomy gorge where the pass was.

All was quiet down in there. He could make out many still white forms, and a number of darker figures—all silent. No movement.

Turning the glasses out toward the desert, he saw the reason for this quiet. The horde was still swarming down there, but the riders had turned aside from the pass, probably thinking it manned by a large force of legionnaires. Giroux's machine-gun had them checkmated at that point.

They were losing nothing by this

maneuver, for there was another pass, more difficult to traverse, but a pass, nevertheless, a few kilometers down the line. It was toward that pass that the *slurs* were now streaming.

Don knew it would bring them closer to Moussa, and he groaned—partly with physical pain, partly with disappointment. He had failed, and Moussa was doomed.

One of the greatest catastrophes in the history of the Foreign Legion was taking place, he felt; and in some strange way he felt responsible for it.

How long the heliograph had been out of commission before he had repaired it, he did not know. Had he arrived sooner, instead of stopping to shoot it out with his pursuers, he might have saved it.

The sun had been good at that time, he remembered, and the full glow of an unbroken mirror might have caught the eyes of those watching back at Moussa.

As it was, doubtless a critical hour or more had passed while he had made the trip up from the pass—while Georges lay unconscious and the helio unoperated! Precious minutes! Life and Death had gambled for supremacy—and Death had won!

IT was his fault—his fault. Half delirious, he cursed himself.

Nothing mattered now. Georges was dead. He, Don, would be dead soon. Berber knives would torture him for days as only the Berber knows how to torture; or, if not that, then a court-martial.

"Damn everything!" he yelled. "Yes, damn the Foreign Legion even! It killed Georges. It'll kill me—kill us all. Cattle—legionnaires—to hell with legionnaires—"

And then a tide of white robes rose before his eyes, and long blades glared in the sunlight. Barbaric yells filled his ears.

But what was that sound, heard be-

yond the yells? Familiar—oh, God, it was— Or was he crazy? The Legion! A long, clear, sweet bugle, echoing against the blackish, cavernous mountains of the High Atlas!

"Aux Légion!" shouted Don Lewis. "Vive la Légion!" And he became a fighting devil again with a bayonet like a viper's fang, the long, thin bayonet of the Legion. Again and again it tasted the blood of the *slurs*.

But it could not go on. A rifle butt rose and fell, and Don Lewis crashed to the ground, senseless.

He came to slowly. Some one was bathing his face. He was shirtless, and there were fresh bandages on his shoulder, arm, and sides. He heard voices, saw moving men—not Berbers, but men in the scarlet kepis of the Legion of the Strangers!

Where was he? There was the sky overhead, darkening. Was it the same day? He guessed that it was.

Yes, he was still up in the High Atlas, and there was the breastwork of boulders. His rifle—and Georges Dupont, lying beside him! Georges!

"We are not dead, you see," murmured the Frenchman. "You saved my life, Don, and the Legion saved yours. The Legion always comes—"

Don smiled. They would fight together many times again. Everything was all right.

But that court-martial! Opening his eyes widely, he stared at the legionnaires, all of whom seemed intent on some distant point. He heard Captain Giroux's voice, crisply dictating:

"That is the helio at Moussa. Take this down, Corporal Ivanovitch. Moussa says: 'W-a-r-n-i-n-g r-e-c-e-i-v-e-d. S-u-m-m-o-n-e-d r-e-i-n-f-o-r-c-e-m-e-n-t-s. B-e-r-b-e-r r-a-i-d u-n-s-u-c-c-e-s-s-f-u-l. M-a-n-y e-n-e-m-y d-e-a-d—'"

Don did not listen to the rest. He knew all he wanted to know. He and Georges had not failed.

Then he became aware that Captain Giroux and the six men with him had all turned and were coming toward himself and Georges.

THEY were the survivors of the **L** gay, nonchalant dozens of men who had smoked and chatted down in the pass before the *slurs* had come. Giroux himself was a man who had been through hell. His tunic was in shreds, and his scarlet kepi rested on the back of his head in a manner not at all becoming an officer. It was then that Don Lewis saw the true legionnaire in Maurice Giroux—a brave and gallant man, a *bon soldat*.

"Moussa is saved," said Giroux. "Your messages got through all right. But you, Legionnaire Lewis, you disobeyed me! You were ordered to stay with us below—and you ran away!" He was ferocious now, stroking his mustaches and glowering.

"That is true, my captain. I have nothing to say. You can have me court-martialed and probably shot. I don't give a damn if you do either."

Georges Dupont blazed: "*Sacre de nom de—* Captain Giroux, if my good friend thees American is shot, after what he has done for us to-day, I will—"

Giroux held up his hand.

"Be still, *mon petit*. Your captain has something to say about this. And first I say, there will be no court-martial. Court-martial, indeed! Instead, for both of you, the *Medaille Militaire*, and Maurice Giroux himself will send the recommendation! Why? Because you are both legionnaires after my heart, and I salute you as comrades!"

Captain Giroux and six men in rags stood to attention in the sloping amber rays of the setting African sun, and brought their right hands sharply to the salute of the *Légion Etrangere*. And two wounded soldiers, smiling, weakly replied in kind.

GREY GOLD



*White Men and Savage Natives Struggle to Possess
the God Andriamanitra in this Strange Story
of Adventure in Madagascar*

By JACK DeWITT

TOWARDS the native there bounded on the breakers a canoe, balanced by outriggers and paddled prow-on to the beach by a lone white man. The brown youth ran high-stepping into the sea until he seized the starboard outrigger of the tiny dugout and helped the laughing white man beach the craft.

"Matisio, you black imp of faithfulness," laughed the white man as he bounded from the boat and seized the youth by both shoulders. "You waited, although I was three months late."

"Shining one," began the Malagasy native, "I give my word one year and three months ago. I wait as I said."

"Waited for the queerest rendezvous ever made between black and white in Madagascar," smiled the white man, half musingly. He looked back out to sea and watched for a moment the long streamer of hazy smoke which marked the trail of the small tramp coastal packet that had brought him.

"Your friend Andrianofin is captain of the little boat, Matisio," explained the white man. "He thought I was

crazy when I shipped with him, showed him my discharge from the Legion and asked him to bring me along the coast and put me off the boat within easy reach of this strip of sand."

YOU were delayed, White Brother?" asked the Malagasy, and the white man saw that he had something more to say.

"Three months, Matisio," he explained rapidly. "We didn't get back to Tamatave as soon as we expected when I parted with you in the hills. I was three months late getting my discharge from the army." He laughed shortly. "Donated Madame France and the Foreign Legion a little extra service."

"I thought you had left for—" Matisio puzzled over the word.

"America," supplied the white man. "No, this gold hunt is necessary before I go back to America, old friend. Madagascar has given me nothing but fever so far. Fever and hard work. I intend to try to take the gold from it. The gold that you and I located when we came into the hills from the other side a year ago."

"White men have come and have killed and have gone and have come again while I wait for you, Brother Whom The Devils Never Strike," murmured Matisio in the soft vowel-ed Malagasy tongue.

George Crawford, late of the French Foreign Legion, with two years' service in Madagascar, two in the scrub-dotted desert of the Sudan and a single year amid the dubious pleasures of Moroccan garrison towns, stopped with his hand on the dugout prow as he was about to haul the boat higher up on the beach, and stared at Matisio in amazement.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Three white men come from the sea. I have a hut in the jungle and I watch." Matisio indicated with his head the pale green of the tropic for-

est which bordered the only narrow strip of strand along a hundred miles of Madagascar shoreline. "The white men tumble out of boat and roll something to sand. That night I creep closer to listen. I hear strange language like yours when you don't speak French or Malagasy—when you swear—"

CRAWFORD smiled in spite of his intense interest in the Malagasy's words. "I know—English—go on," he prompted.

"They have rum; much rum," continued Matisio. "In the firelight they fight. One, two men are killed, and one crawls away along the sand. He come back and try to move the thing, but he weak—bad hurt. He bury the thing that roll from the boat by scraping sand over it, then he get into boat and paddle slow away."

The Hova "boy" paused in his narrative and again jerked his head, this time toward a scrub-crowned dune on the little beach. Crawford looked. At the foot of the knoll, bleached bones showed whiter against the silver shingle. He nodded and Matisio went on.

"It is the time of Fandroana festival with the Betsilios on this side of the country. O, White Brother of the army. The Betsilios are in the bush. I hear them as I watch the white men fight. Next day they come out, naked, sneaking to the beach and dig out the thing which the white men kill each other for and take it away on a raft, up the river."

"What did it look like?" demanded Crawford. "What was this thing like, that the white men spilled blood over?"

"It was large, tall as a man and wider, shaped like a man, only rough. I hide in the jungle when I see the Betsilio men making their raft to float what they said was the earth form of Andriamanitra, the Fragrant One."

"Thought it was a god, eh? Well, this is getting good," mused Crawford. "Big as a man, you say. What do you think it was, Matisio?"

"Gold," said the black quietly but firmly.

The Legionnaire laughed loudly and long, much to the disgust of his companion, who stood with set expression until the laughter subsided, then, "Gold," he repeated.

"A hunk of gold big as a man? Matisio, gold has gone to your head. How'd they ever handle it—gold's heavy, you know that," grinned Crawford.

"There were many of them, White Brother on whom the sun shines," replied Matisio. "White men would fight only over gold, nothing else." The Malagasy paused. "Unless it would be women," he ended and smiled.

"And as this thing couldn't have been a woman, you're absolutely sure it's gold," said Crawford.

"Listen," and Matisio knew that his next words would cast all doubt from the white man's mind. "One month go by, another month. White man who crawl away, he come back. Three others with him. They look t the beach where strange thing was buried. They talk fast together. They see where raft wood has been cut. They go through jungle to mouth of river. They read more signs. They start up river."

WELL, I'll be—" Crawford suddenly changed his expression from one of bantering good humor and looked seriously at Matisio. "Hova prince, I should have known you better," he said. "That's gold all right, but your native imagination made the hunk as big as a man. It's big enough, no doubt, but I remember the tales you told in your own village when I shot the wild cattle on the plains back inland, before we de-

ecided on this gold hunt. Your imagination fooled me, but now——"

"As big as a man, rough shaped—bigger than a man," insisted Matisio.

"What color?" demanded Crawford.

"The color of the throat of the forest dog," replied the Malagasy.

"Pale grey," supplied the white man. "How in—— could gold be pale grey?"

"Sea water deep in the boat," suggested Matisio. "Perhaps, Son of the Sun——"

"Maybe," corrected Crawford. "I don't know much about the effect of sea water on gold, but this country was the stamping ground of Captain Kidd. The ancient gold of Ophir was supposed to come from hereabouts before something busted and tore Madagascar loose from Africa and made your home an island——" he was musing aloud.

Matisio, who knew this adventurer better than he had ever known any other white man, knew him from many months together at the inland Hova villages, saw by the change of expression, the sudden narrowing of the eyes, the tightening of the lips, that the American was impressed. Soundly impressed.

"We go up the river, Matisio, at once," Crawford broke a silence of several minutes. "If it's gold we'll get it. Plain to me that it is bloody gold by now. Men fight over that which comes to them easily—or dishonestly. Are you game?"

"Matisio follows the Son of Brightness," murmured the black in the soft Malayo-Polynesian tongue with its hint of ancient Arabic, which is the Malagasy.

II

MATISIO was the first to detect the signs of human life in the dense lowland jungles at the creek edge. For three

weeks the white man and his friend had pushed their dugout, now shorn of its outriggers, up the Madagascar river.

One day, after three weeks of traveling, Matisio squinted his keen eyes against the glare of midstream and singled out a hanging vine which touched the water as did a hundred others that made up the network of the pale green jungle edge.

Crawford confessed that he never would have seen a difference between that vine and any other. But Matisio swung the dugout swiftly to the spot and seized the vine rope with his hand.

It did not sag idly into the water as was the case with a dozen, a thousand others; it hung taut, weighted to the river bottom.

"And even that may be mud or a sunken log," Crawford was telling himself when Matisio hauled upon the vine and brought the sharp prow of a native canoe above the brown water.

"White men," murmured Matisio.

"How do you know?" asked Crawford.

The Malagasy looked sadly at his companion. Then he pointed to the place where the vine was hitched tight to a hardwood sapling back from the river bank.

"Betsilio never do that," he explained. "Native man leave things more natural."

CRAWFORD smiled his acceptance of the superior wisdom of the black. But Matisio was pointing again. A faint trail wound into the jungle growth, a trail that would have escaped the white man's notice if the Malagasy had not called his attention to it.

"They leave their boat, sunk out of sight. They go on foot. They camp near. The Betsilio brothers are close, O, Illustrious Son of Am—Amel—"

"America," supplanted Crawford, as he stepped ashore and plunged through the first strip of ground growth and giant arums to examine the trail more closely.

A moment later he was back at the dugout. "Come," he whispered to Matisio. "They've killed one of their group."

The Malagasy joined him on the bank and followed through the screen of pale green ferns and lordly arums. There on the soft earth of the jungle floor was all that was left of a white man, identified as such by the portions of clothing that the ants had left, and by the skull.

In the center of that skull a gaping hole, like a third eye socket, told the manner in which death had visited this jungle traveler.

Matisio was reading signs again. In the bruised stalks and broken arums he read the story of a struggle. He pushed back from the river to where a poinciana bush glowed blood-red in the half light of the forest, and behind the bush, half hidden in the drooping mass of scarlet bloom, he found another skeleton, picked clean by ants or larger but no more formidable jungle creatures.

"The white men fight over the grey gold," murmured Matisio.

"Before they've tried to take it from the Betsilio," supplanted Crawford. "These men were killed by bullets."

BEFORE they reached the clearing Matisio had guessed its presence from signs he had seen in the dense brush through which they traveled.

"Near now," he whispered to his companion. Matisio was sniffing the air. Some odor had come to him from the camp of the white men.

More carefully the white man edged forward. Twenty yards from where Matisio had whispered his warning, he was pushing through a wall of tall

grasses when he came suddenly into a natural clearing.

He had just time to notice a palm thatched shelter in the clearing when a rifle cracked. A bullet whined like a homing beetle past his face.

Crawford dropped at the clearing edge and rolled into the dank undergrowth, leaving his rifle plainly exposed to the view of whoever had fired the shot.

It was an old trick. Matisio, still hidden in the grasses, took advantage of it as his keen eyes picked out a white man, crouched at the edge of the shelter. The Malagasy slipped from his light colored lamba, and, naked except for his loin cloth, melted like a shadow into the jungle.

Crawford, reclining easily, his hand ready to his revolver if the rifleman should decide to walk across the clearing and satisfy himself that his bullet had indeed found a vital mark, did not move until he heard the terrified scream of a white man.

Then he looked across the clearing and saw his adversary of a few minutes before bound from the side of the shelter and clutch madly at a short assegai whose razor sharp head was buried deep in his throat.

Crawford saw the white man fall, his weakening grasp slipping from the blood-soaked handle of the spear, then he, too, quietly slipped into the bush and followed the trail of Matisio around the edge of the clearing.

Together then, American and Malagasy advanced upon the palm-thatched shelter and, meeting no resistance, parted the fronds of traveler's palm which made the doorway and glanced within.

FROM a low couch of palm leaves in the interior came the weak voice of a man muttering in French, and calling "*Dupres! Dupres!*"

Crawford entered first into the fetid interior of the hut.

"Your friend tried a shot at me, missed and has paid the price," he explained grimly.

"Dupres gone, Laverne and Scholles, the Dutchman, fought and killed each other," the cracked voice of the Frenchman rambled on. "Why are you here?"

Crawford sized up the situation rapidly. He saw that the emaciated form on the low cot was fever riven. The deadly fever of the Madagascar lowlands had held its sway with the Frenchman for many days.

Four men had followed the strange grey god of the Betsilios along the river trail, Matisio had said. Two dead beside the cached canoe, another lying in the clearing with his throat ripped out, left the sick man alone.

There was kindness in the American's words as he next addressed the Frenchman. A kindness that was not entirely simulated, for Crawford had known the agonies of the jungle fever.

"No use wasting words, Frenchy," he told the sick man. "I'm up river after that gold the niggers stole from you—"

"Gold!" The Frenchman's haggard face twisted into a fleeting smile. "Gold." Then he became serious again, and it seemed to Crawford that he had pondered a problem and found a swift solution.

"The gold is stained with white men's blood, my friend. It is hoodoo gold. But there is still a chance—"

"That's what I want to hear," cut in Crawford. "What chance is there to get it?"

"For a brave man there is every chance. The Betsilios are only one day from here."

THE American sat on the edge of the rough cot. He looked down into the sunken eyes of the sick man and those eyes suddenly shifted to

the palm leaf wall of the hut and remained there.

"I don't know what your game is, Frenchman," the American said. "But if you're willing, Matisio—that's my partner here—and I will stay with you until you are well. Then we'll go together to the Betsilios and get this god of theirs away from them."

"The niggers are mad," the sick man said. "They have had no rains. Their children have died with a plague of some sort. They are in no mood to be fooled with."

"All the better," smiled Crawford. "We'll play our hand and get this gold, if you're game."

The man on the cot shrugged his shoulders in a gesture of hopelessness.

"Men have died too often to suit me," he said weakly. "But what am I to do? I cannot remain here alone. There is a chance to get it, yes. I am with you."

"Good," responded Crawford. Outside the hut he explained the situation to the Malagasy who had retrieved his lamba and once more looked like a Roman youth with skin of polished brown, his toga girt about him.

III

UNDER the ministrations of Matisio, the Frenchman, who called himself Arthur Ferrand, rapidly shook off the jungle fever and within a week was able to take the trail toward the Betsilio settlement.

Ferrand found it necessary quite early in the new adventure to explain to the Malagasy that the unusual scent he had detected about the effects within the small hut, was a result of spilled perfume.

Ferrand, it appeared, had been a perfume salesman representing his company on some strange venture at Tamatave, when he had heard of the

grey god of the Betsilios and decided against the sale of perfumery for the chance of bigger spoils.

They circled the Betsilio village one day, these three, after hours of carefully pushing through the tangled jungle thickets. A march in which Matisio led, and whose eyes were the eyes of the party, ever alert for danger, ever peering into the tangled green ahead.

For the last few miles of their journey they were directed by the steady beat of tom-toms.

NEARER to the camp of the Betsilios the travelers heard the shouts and wails of the women and the dull chanting of the men. At last when they peered through the last wall of undergrowth they saw the source of the drum beats and the wailing.

The Fandroana of the Betsilios was in progress.

The drum beats and the dancing of these Madagascar wild men reminded Crawford of the lewd bamboula of Senegambia. But unlike the frenzied dancing of the men and women in the Yola villages, whose every motion timed in its vile suggestion to the beat of bamboula drums, the Malagasies moved dispiritedly around the dancing circle in the village center. The heads of the dancers were bowed. Their festive Fandroana had turned into a death dance to appease the gods of forest, of river and of the sky.

Matisio jerked the American's attention from the dance.

"There," whispered the native youth. "Beyond the village, another clearing in the bush, the building there must be their temple. The home of the golden god."

Crawford saw beyond the stilted, palm thatched huts of the main village, a newly cut clearing in the forest and in the center of the clearing

stood a temple of logs with roof of traveler's palm fronds. As the Malagasy had judged from his knowledge of other wild tribes on his island home, the small building housed the god which had lured the two white men and Matisio from the coast.

Across the narrow strip of clearing the three scrambled and, unseen by the mourners in the village, reached the entrance of the hut and slipped inside.

A strange odor assailed their nostrils. Somewhere in the half light of the hut interior was a substance that reminded Crawford of all the musty wine cellars he ever had encountered.

But through the dank odor was the persistent and biting scent of fresh dried tobacco. Crawford stood within the door, sniffing, puzzled.

Ferrand smelled deeply of the odor and nervously seized the American by the arm.

"The—the—" began the Frenchman and bit the sentence off before it was begun. "The god," he whispered hoarsely.

CRAWFORD sensed that Matisio was restless.

"What is it, Matisio?" he asked gently. But the American guessed as he uttered the words that the wild blood of the Malagasy had been stirred by the drum beats. The murky interior of the sacred temple had been too much for him.

"Andriamanitra, the Fragrant One," breathed Matisio. "The earth form of the Son of Zanahary, god of everything."

"There's a fragrance from somewhere, all right, Matisio," Crawford agreed. "But stick to me. I've seen you through this kind of thing before."

Speaking, Crawford strode across the hut and touched the strange god of the Betsilios with one finger. He had seen, even as he approached the

thing, that the substance was not gold. Beeswax, he told himself, but his scratching nail tips encountered a semi-brittle substance which could not have been wax in the humid interior of the hut.

As Matisio had told him at the coast, the "earth form" of the god Andriamanitra was taller than a man. But it was not gold.

Disgustedly Crawford pushed at the bulky shape and it toppled from the rafia matting and rolled like a grotesque gargoyle to the hut floor. Its shape was roughly that of a bulky torso and a misshapen head. A form that the substance, whatever it was, had achieved by accident or erosion.

Slowly the American turned to his companions. The stench in the hut undoubtedly came from the thing the savages had worshiped. He held his fingers against his nostrils and cursed in English.

"— — The damned fools are worshiping mud or wax or pumice or something. Worthless! And getting out of here may be a bigger problem than we think," he said.

But the Frenchman's breath was coming in short gasps. His eyes fixed on the grey god, glared madly in the gloom. His hands shook as he tightened his grip on the rifle. Crawford looked at him in amazement and he was about to make some comment when Matisio murmured gently from the temple door:

"The Betsilios, they have heard. They come."

IV

A HORDE of naked, screaming savages hurled themselves into the temple clearing and stood behind their leader, a gaudily painted witchman, with a headdress of lemur skins and sunbird feathers.

They screamed in superstitious fear and hatred, at the invaders of

their temple, and at a signal from the witchman, a shower of assegais swept harmlessly through the open doorway.

Ferrand, who had dropped to his knees beside the door, trembled in fear. Matisio stood behind his white master and whispered to him in Malagasy.

The moment was tense. A rush from some two hundred savages, overwrought from days of wild dancing and nervous mourning at the Fandroana, would bring death, swift and sure, to all three members of the little party.

"Tell them," insisted Matisio. "Their language is the tongue of the Hovas, and of all Madagascar, White Brother Who Knows No Fear."

And as the Betsilios paused for some sign from the temple or for the signal from their witchman, to rush, Crawford's voice rang across the clearing, chanting in simple Malagasy.

"We come to relieve you of the god that has brought pain and suffering. That has dried the lowlands. That has caused the rivers to creep into the banks. That has brought the disease to your wives and your little ones," he called.

There was a murmuring stir among the menacing Malagasies. Assegais were lowered. The witchman, evidently seeing in the white man's message an opportunity to strengthen his own fading influence on the tribe, called back:

"What do you wish, White Brothers. What have you to do with the earth form of Andriamanitra, The Fragrant One?"

Again Matisio whispered to his white companion. "Tell them to replace the form of Andriamanitra where they found it, to quiet the wrath of Zanahary, the true god."

"You have taken from beside the big seas the form of Andriamanitra

which was bathed in the blood of white men and left beside the big water to be cleansed. No rain will fall upon you. Sickness will continue to eat at the bowels of your little ones until the god has been quieted. Your own young men are afraid to touch the god, but we have no such fears; we can take it away," Crawford called.

THE witchman danced wildly before his followers. His plumed headdress waved crazily in the sun.

Suddenly and as if with one movement, the Betsilios grounded their spears and advanced with arms upraised, palms to the front, to within ten feet of the temple door.

Crawford talked at great length to the Betsilios. He talked for his life and the life of his companions, and saddled himself with the task of taking the malodorous earth-form of the Malagasy god to the sea coast.

But the Betsilios assured him that a party of their spearsmen must accompany the god to the coast. They would see that Zanahary, god of everything, was appeased, and if the rains did not come by the time the seaside beach was reached, the god again would be bathed with the blood of white men.

The shrewd witchman had turned the American's own proposal into an excuse for ultimate slaughter.

Smiling ironically at the turn the witchman's words had taken, Crawford accepted the conditions.

For three days the travelers remained prisoners in the Betsilio village, guarded day and night by fierce spearsmen, while a special dugout was prepared to float the misshapen and malodorous mass which they believed to be the "earth form" that their god had cast aside when his spirit floated to the high hills in the mists of some distant dawn.

THE American and his companion were awakened by the excitable yells of their guards long before the accustomed hour next morning. The white man left the palm thatched bivouac in which he had spent the night, and immediately a dozen spears were thrust towards him. The eyes of the warriors glared malignantly into his. Something unusual was amiss.

Crawford learned a few minutes later from the witchman that Arthur Ferrand had slipped from the bivouac which he had occupied alone, acquired a native spear, and had killed two of his guards who flung themselves upon him as he fled to the bush.

"Couldn't blame him, Hova boy," replied Crawford. "Had a chance to get away, and took it. Meant little to him to desert us. We were no particular friends of his and the gold god turned out to be mud or something."

That day the sound of pounding surf was unmistakable. The rising tide swelled against the river current and held it still. The yellow trunks of mangrove trees appeared up on the banks.

The dugouts were moored and sunk and a dozen stalwart warriors shouldered a litter on which had been placed the one hundred and seventy-five pounds of bulk which they had worshipped as all that was earthly of their god, "The Fragrant One."

The camp that night was made in the last jungle strip, a scant half mile from the sand bar where the white men had fought, and died—for nothing. Crawford thought, and where Matisio and his white friend had held their strange rendezvous with fate.

Crawford lay awake pondering plans for laying down his life as dearly as possible when the dawn mists should bring the gruesome rites of the Betsilios.

The warriors grouped about the

camp fire uttering the queer high pitched howls which they caused to ululate by tapping the backs of their hands rapidly against their mouths. They called to their gods and assured Andriamanitra, The Fragrant One, that his remains would be bathed in the white man's blood at the first flush of dawn.

CRAWFORD slipped into a fitful doze as the night wore on. He was awakened by a low voice in his ear.

"It has come, White Brother," whispered Matisio.

The white man heard the rapid tapping of rain upon the tree tops high above their shelter. Even as he listened, half believing himself to be still asleep and dreaming, there burst over the lowland jungles one of the terrific rainstorms for which the Betsilios had prayed for months.

Crawford left the bivouac at dawn and walked into the streaming rain. The camp site was littered with sodden leaves from the wrecked shelters of the Betsilios. Lying on its matting bed, pelted by the pouring rain, the god lay like the pale grey shell of a folk tale giant, bereft of arms and legs.

Andriamanitra, having brought the rain immediately his soul or whatever the Betsilios believed the mass to be, was near its sand bar resting place again, the warriors had deserted it with that odd disinterest which savage tribes hold for the gods that had achieved their purpose.

Crawford turned with a grim smile from contemplating the weird mass. As he approached the shelter again a rifle cracked from the dripping scrub at the clearing edge.

The American was conscious of a blinding light across his eyes, like a vicious streak of lightning, striking near.

He reeled in utter darkness and fell heavily to the ground.

V

WHEN he heard the rifle shot, Matisio was lying in the shelter peacefully allowing the pelt of the rain to enter his inner consciousness and drench his soul with a new faith in the gods of his people.

At the shot he lay closer to the ground. There was no excitement about this Hova boy. A glimpse through the hanging palm fronds of his shelter showed him where Crawford had fallen, and his own keen instincts told him from which side of the camp the shot had come.

Into the dank and rain-drenched grasses behind his bivouac, Matisio crawled, leaving his shelter soundlessly and without disturbing any more of the wall than was necessary for him to crawl beneath the fronds.

He circled through the bush, a brown avenger seeking the wielder of a rifle that had harmed his American friend. Rain-drenched and naked but for his scanty salaka, he slipped through the undergrowth with the silence and deadly intent of a stalking fossa.

And with the ferocious abandon of that Madagascar cat, Matisio flung himself bodily upon the crouching form of a white man who knelt, tense, rifle in hand, watching the front of the bivouac that the Hova youth had left from the rear only a few seconds before.

Arthur Ferrand, the Frenchman, one time salesman of perfumes, screamed his fright to a rain-drenched world when Matisio landed on his back and sent him sprawling into the steaming undergrowth.

But his second scream was choked deep in his throat by steel-strong fingers which groped for a second then

fastened with the deadly grip of a screw-clamp upon his wind pipe.

Ferrand flung himself upwards and half off the ground in a mad frenzy of fear which gave strength to his tautened limbs. But Matisio rode him easily from behind, knees clamped tight to the Frenchman's ribs, while those unrelenting fingers pressed deeper and deeper into the throbbing throat.

Crawford staggered to the clearing edge and stood leaning against the dripping trunk of a hardwood tree for support as he watched the last struggles of the doomed man.

HE tried to call to Matisio to desist when the Frenchman's blackened face and swollen, protruding tongue told him that the man was past all further resistance. But Matisio, the avenger, clung tightly to his prey. Clung until the last faint breath of life was squeezed from the body beneath him. Until the back-pulled head became limp upon the swollen neck and the Frenchman's limbs ceased their rapid trembling.

"Creased my forehead, the louse," Crawford stammered weakly when the panting Matisio rose to his feet again and stood, peering with intent solicitation into the bloodied face of his friend.

"He must have followed the canoes and swiped a rifle from the cache after the boats were beached. Swiped the very rifle I had my own eye on, but the blacks were too keen for me," he added a little bitterly.

"He had a reason," stated Matisio simply.

"Well, he may have had, but we'll never know what it was. The least we can do is to give him a decent burial. There's a spear back in the camp, feel like digging him in?" Crawford asked.

Matisio grunted his disapproval. But Crawford stooped over the body

of the Frenchman and slipped a hand into the pocket of the mud-stained jacket.

"We'll find out who he is if he's got any papers, and then—," Crawford choked off the words and gasped in amazement.

Matisio hurriedly dropped on his knee beside the white man and stared uncomprehendingly at a blue and white slip of paper which Crawford had taken from an oiled-silk package.

"My God!" the white man muttered. He rose slowly to his feet and returned to the camp clearing. Matisio, eyes wide with wonderment, followed closely.

Crawford walked directly to the side of the weird misshapen mass which had been the god of the Betsilios. He stirred it with his foot. "Close to a couple of hundred pounds," he muttered. "No wonder it stinks."

"What is it, Shining One?" asked Matisio. "Has the injury damaged the mind of Him Who Has No Fear?"

Crawford turned upon him eyes that were as wide as Matisio's had been a few minutes before.

"You've got a dugout hid here with outriggers and all, haven't you, Matisio?" asked Crawford.

"You know that I came down the river and I hid my boat in a manner that no man could find—" began Matisio.

"Think we can follow the coast to Tombohorane with that on board?" he asked the now thoroughly startled Hova youth, pointing a shaking finger at the grey god of the Betsilios.

"Easily at this season, Brother On Whom The Sun Shines—but—"

"Do you still want to be wealthy, Matisio?" Crawford persisted. "And own your own steamer?"

MATISIO was silenced at last. He nodded weakly and his expression was one of great sadness for this once wise soldier of the French whose mind had filled with the devils at the crack of the Frenchman's rifle.

"Well, you can be!" Crawford laughed at his friend's expression. "That stinking mass is ambergris. Ambergris," he repeated. Then he shouted the word louder as if to fix it fast in his own mind. "AMBERGRIS, the vomit of a whale. Base of costly perfumes."

Matisio still looked puzzled.

"The message here," Crawford tapped the paper that had come from the Frenchman's wallet, "instructed Fer-rand to go with the sailor who escaped after that fight you saw, and purchase the ambergris at no more than three hundred dollars a pound. Three hundred dollars a pound, and there's close to two hundred pounds. Beats gold at two hundred and fifty dollars a twelve-ounce pound. Understand, Matisio?"

Matisio was dreaming dreams. He saw the throbbing donkey engine on the deck of a small coast steamer. He saw himself in peaked cap directing the handling of the ship's intended freight. He heard the chug of turbines, small but powerful, and saw the shore line of Madagascar separated by a stretch of turquoise sea from the taffrail of a tiny freighter. He saw the docks and smelled the tar from sun scorched ropes. He heard strange tongues and saw strange faces.

He turned to his white friend and Crawford saw that a tear glistened bright on one dusky cheek. Or was it a raindrop?

"Matisio understands," he said.

The STREET of BLOOD



A Breath-Taking Story of Grim Warfare in Red Russia

By **GLENN FERRALL**

Author of "The Pauper Knight," "The Winged Victory," etc.

FARRON watched the Red soldiers marching up the middle of the street. He knew they were coming to him. For months he had known they would come to force the peasants to relinquish their land.

Peasants stopped wherever they were and glared at the two squads. Women poked out their tongues. The mighty Sergey lumbered out of the vodka house, his scarlet shirt freshly stained, and roared: "Cat-sap!" The sergeant whitened and the soldiers glowered. Feodor Koronsky, the G. P. U. officer, said sharply:

"Keep moving."

They halted in front of Farron's

cottage. The peasants were moving slowly toward them. Sergey shouted into the vodka house. Three kulaks—more prosperous peasants—came out and followed him up the street.

Koronsky's cold eyes narrowed. The sergeant barked a command. The two squads formed in two lines, back to back. Koronsky mounted the three wooden steps and rapped on Farron's door.

"Come in," the American said.

HE was sprawled in the one easy chair, his long legs crossed, stretched out in front of him. A cigarette burned in the hand that

hung over the arm of the chair. Koronsky stiffened. His predatory eyes, his cruel mouth, his ruthless face, all revealed his rage at Farron's affront to his dignity. Farron half smiled and said:

"Won't you sit down?"

Koronsky stalked forward, his eyes blazing, and snapped: "I've come to tell you, Farron, that you're ordered out of Kharsovo. You know why."

"Certainly I know why. You want to confiscate my farm in your damned collectivized farm system."

"We're abolishing personal farm property. Every kulak and peasant works on government land on an equal share with the Soviet government. You know that. You've got to get out."

"Have I made any objections?" Farron said quietly.

"You haven't made any move. And the kulaks are encouraged by your defiance to defy us. They apparently look on you as some sort of leader."

"Well, I have been the general manager of their farms, forming a kind of syndicate that put them on a profitable basis. You can't blame them for hating to leave their homes and sharing equally with shiftless peasants without a rouble to their names."

"We've no time for personal wants. The government orders collectivized farms. The kulaks and peasants obey—or take the consequences." The officer grimly emphasized his last words.

Farron said: "I know. Siberia or the northern forests for them. Well, you can't ship *me* off to a slow death!"

"No," Koronsky said, "but we can imprison you until your government takes you out of the country. And our prisons are not very pleasant. And you might resist arrest and a guard would have to shoot you." His voice had lowered and he seemed to be gloating over the American, as he looked down on him.

"Koronsky," said Farron, "you can't threaten me. I'd leave for the sake of peace, but I won't be driven."

The officer whitened at the familiar use of his name. His loud words choked out: "You won't? I'll show you how much I can threaten you! I'll do more than threaten you. Do you see those soldiers out there? They'd be glad to stick their bayonets into you."

"Would they? See those peasants out there? They'd be glad to wrap their fingers around the soldiers' necks too." Koronsky looked through the window. The shadows of dusk darkened the street. Dark blots loomed on four sides of the lines of the soldiers, whose bayonets glimmered dully.

"Get out before I throw you out," Farron said. His legs were taut and his body swayed slightly forward. His arms swung loose at his sides.

KORONSKY strode out. He spoke to the sergeant. The soldiers formed in squads, and marched briskly toward the railroad station. Their bayonets gleaming in the dusk were the last things visible.

Farron stepped out on his porch. The peasants and kulaks still stood in four dark clots and watched the disappearing soldiers. When Farron came on his porch, they moved forward, the four groups merging silently into one huge blot in the center of the village street. The light from the vodka house lay like a pale rug on the street. Somewhere in the distance a dog barked. The peasants and kulaks were waiting for Farron to speak. He said:

"Men, you haven't got a chance of winning, but—"

"They haven't given in over at Vladimieff," one shouted.

Farron knew that, and he also knew it was a matter of time be-

fore they did. He said: "But if you want to resist, I'm with you."

"We'd rather die than be sent off to Siberia!"

"And we won't give up our homes!"

A dull roar rose from the crowd. Farron shouted to make himself heard:

"I defied the G. P. U. You know they don't threaten. That officer will be back with a company of soldiers from over at Barsacow."

The roar grew louder, sweeping through the darkness like a great wave. The surge of their earthy strength vibrated in the sound and it rolled over the American, tingling his nerves, and sending his blood pounding through his veins and his pulses beating fast. His eyes flashed and he yelled:

"Then get ready. Stepan, you fought in the Tsar's Army. Get your old rifle. How many others have arms?"

Two others had rifles and two had pistols. Stepan had an old sword he had captured during his campaigns. Farron yelled:

"Stepan, we'll turn over your rifle to Michael. He's a good shot. I'll make you my lieutenant, with your sword. You'll take charge of the pitchfork brigade. Every man who has pitchfork or scythe, bring it. Those who haven't, bring large, heavy clubs. And every man bring a knife, even if it's a bread knife. Listen, men!"

They fell silent. The whistle of the train shrilled through the night. They heard the engine puffing out of the small station. They could see the reflection of the headlights. Farron yelled:

"There goes the G. P. U. officer to Barsacow to bring back soldiers. Hurry for your lives!"

Deep, guttural snorts and hoarse bellows swept through the crowd as they scattered in all directions, their

feet pounding in the dirt street. Farron had to move fast. Koronsky would come directly to his cottage. The soldiers would fill the street. That would be an unstrategic position for his men.

He walked up the street. Cottages lined it at regular intervals. The broad crossroad leading to the farms on the right also led to the depot on the left. That flat station would be a stronghold for the soldiers. He couldn't meet them there.

Faint yellow squares showed the position of the peasants' houses. That would give the soldiers a long range advantage. He hurried back down the street toward the other end of town. Here the cottages were more scattered. The last cottage sat close to the old stable. Across from the stable bulked the squat, square outlines of the granary.

FARRON quickly formed his plan. He ran to his own cottage. The peasants were already forming. Their dark faces were lighted with a new fire. Their plodding bodies were alert. Farron dug in his closet for his rifle. It gleamed dully from its recent oiling. Out of his desk he took his heavy .45 automatic. He strapped his worn holster to his belt, and slid in the smooth steel of the pistol.

In his right trousers pocket he dropped the few extra bullets he had for his automatic, and in his left pocket the half-dozen rounds for his rifle. It was a desperate stand, practically doomed—but it was a fight!

The men were milling about in the front of the cottage. Their heavy voices boomed through the night. When a newcomer arrived, a shout went up. Some one was burning a pitch torch and the red glare lit up Farron's room. When he went outside he counted the men. There were some sixty. Half a dozen were graybeards. One bent in the middle and hobbled

with a limp. He wielded a pitchfork with one prong missing. Farron said to him:

"Vassilyi, you stay here in my cottage. Keep a light burning. When they come, tell them I'm at Ivan's—the last cottage. The rest of you follow me."

AT Ivan's cottage Farron posted his men. The din of their tramping feet and hoarse shouts was terrific. A shot was fired accidentally. Farron sent several men into the granary through the windows in the back. They were to bar the great front doors. The soldiers would have their backs against the solid wall of the granary and would have to fight hand to hand.

In the middle of the old stables was an ordinary house door, for the entrance of pedestrians. Here he posted his three rifles. On the right was the double door for horses. Clustering behind this were fifteen or so men with pitchforks and a couple of scythes, and about ten men with clubs. At their head he placed Stepan, the ex-soldier of the Tsar's Army, with his captured sword.

On the left was another double door, swinging on a ramp for carriages. Standing on this was another fifteen with pitchforks and another ten with clubs. At their head he placed the mighty Sergey, who wielded an enormous bludgeon and carried stuck through his sash a broad-bladed kitchen knife. He detailed to each group, one man with a pistol, for the psychological effect of firing as they charged. Farron had the pitch torch extinguished.

The village was dark, with blinds fastened tight on the windows of the cottage. Even the vodka house was dark and empty. Under the orders of Farron the men gradually quieted down. Over the whole town a dark

brooding silence lay. The hours dragged by.

Suddenly the long shrill whine of the train pierced the night. The deep rumble of the peasants began again, the tension vibrating through their voices. They could hear the clanging of the bell, and the train shuffled to a stop.

Farron said: "Not a sound now. You all know what to do. Wait on the soldiers—and on me."

His body felt light as he climbed the porch of Ivan's cottage, next to the stables. There was a low snarl from the stables. Then he heard the heavy thudding of the feet trampling.

He saw the dark body, like a great serpent, swing into the street. He saw them stop before his cottage. There was not a sound. It looked like about two companies. The yellow oblong of light suddenly fell across the porch of his cottage. The crippled old peasant was talking to a stockily built man.

IT was not Koronsky, but some officer. The sharp commanding voice floated down the street, but the words were unintelligible. The yellow oblong vanished. An order was barked and the two companies of soldiers started down the street. Farron caught the glimmer of bayonets and he could now hear the steps in unison of two hundred men.

He stepped back into the house. A split second later, came the thud of rifle butts on the dirt street.

Almost immediately he heard a rap on his door. He jerked open the door. A young officer with bulking shoulders and a jagged scar on his face held a pistol pointed straight at Farron's chest. His mouth was drawn in a determined line and his eyes glittered as he saw Farron. Farron saw the two companies stretched in squad formation. The officer said:

"You're under arrest. Will you come peaceably or—"

"I'll come peaceably," Farron said.

THE Russian relaxed. The pistol drooped slightly. His breath escaped in a dry sigh. Then Farron struck. His right hand swished in a downward streak. The impact was loud and clear in the dead silence. Farron felt the tingle shoot through his knuckles to his wrist. Then the officer was staggering backward. He teetered on the edge of the porch, toppled backward down the two steps. Farron swooped up his rifle, which was leaning behind the door, and leaped off the porch. He cleared the falling body in his jump. He whirled and sped toward the stable.

Another officer shouted: "Stop!" Then his pistol cracked twice.

Farron heard the bullets ring past him. The center door was opened as he neared it. The third bullet furrowed through the wood. The door was banged shut. Then the soldiers went into sudden action. They had been stunned by the quick blow and the dark shadow racing toward the shadowy bulk of the stables. Commands rose, sharp and shrill. The shuffle of the soldiers mingled with the loud cries. Farron peered out of the door.

His blood rushed hotly now. His eyes gleamed and his fingers tightened on the smooth cool steel barrel. The companies were moving into two even lines. The officers retreated behind them. The officer he had struck staggered from the cottage across the road. Farron looked for Koronsky. He was not in sight. The officer, now between the two companies, shouted:

"Come out and surrender! The whole town is under arrest! You can't escape!"

Sergey, the mighty peasant, shouted: "Come in and get him!" Instantly

the whole body of peasants and kulaks took up the cry. Echoing out of the stable, it was a thunderous torrent of sound. It was earthy and untamed, dark and ominous. "Come in and get him!"

Silence followed the challenge. There was a whispered conference among the officers outside. Then the first one yelled again:

"Either come out and surrender or be fired upon!"

"Here's your chance to surrender, men," Farron said.

They bellowed their defiance. The officer barked a sharp command. The lines of rifles rose to the shoulders. They glinted as they pointed steadily toward the door. Farron said:

"When they fire—rush!"

HIS own last word and the "Fire!" of the officer came together. The street shook with the heavy discharge. Farron saw the flame belch from the lines of rifles. The impact of the heavy-calibred guns crashed against the walls of the stable. A peasant groaned. Farron kicked open the door and fired. The clean, clear crack sounded alone on the tail end of the volley. It was like a signal.

The double doors at both ends of the stable were flung open and the peasants gushed into the street with a deep-throated roar.

The two pistols among them started banging. The rifles of the three peasants, lying at Farron's feet, cracked together. A startled scattered volley broke from the soldiers. Officers shouted frantically. Farron was taking slow aim, and squeezing his finger tight on that little curved steel tongue.

THE soldiers were backing away in disorder before the two dark waves that rolled toward them with fearsome bellowing. At points on their front livid jets stabbed at the

surging horde. Farron saw a peasant bend swiftly forward in the middle, and sprawl in the dust. He saw another spin around and plunge forward on his face. His rifle clicked empty.

The peasants were too close now for a shot at the soldiers. He reloaded with quick dexterous fingers and shouted to the three peasants:

"Reload and follow me!"

When the peasants swarmed over the soldiers the force of the savage impact stirred the blood in Farron. His teeth ground together, his lips twitched back, and he bounded forward, his eyes swiftly traveling over the front.

The clatter of clubs against skulls, pitchforks clanging on bayonets, muffled roars of rifles fired against bodies, hoarse cries and muttered curses, the shrill scream of an officer, groans, the shuffle and trample of heavy feet in the dirt, sang in his ears. The dust rose in a thick mist. The glint of pitchfork and bayonets cut through it. A scythe gleamed as it cut a wide path on the right.

Farron saw the point of attack. At the extreme right the soldiers were sliding along the wall of the granary, past the last peasant. They were forming a flanking movement. An officer jumped out in front of them. Farron's rifle came up swiftly. The sharp crack came with the first words of the officer. The words were choked off, and the officer slumped.

Then Farron was rushing toward the soldiers.

"Come on!" he yelled to his three men with rifles.

He was pressing the trigger as he ran. The rifle was held straight out from his hip. He heard two cracks from the rifles of his own men. The fire blurred suddenly from the soldiers. Farron felt a hot sting furrow along his collar bone. He heard a man behind him gurgle and the soft

plop of the body in the dirt. The other two fired again, and Farron's rifle clicked on an empty chamber.

Another volley belched from the soldiers. Farron heard the lead sing by him. A heavy load ripped through his clothes on his right side, searing his flesh. The steps of one of his men suddenly ceased. Then he was in the midst of the soldiers, swinging his rifle.

The bayonets clanked off the stock. A sharp cool pain cut across his shoulder, ripping his shirt. His arms tingled when the heavy stock struck solid. He saw three soldiers backing off to get a shot at him. Two men danced in front, their bayonets poised. He heard no sound from his last man with the rifle.

A BLOW crashed out of the darkness. He felt himself spinning, a heavy throbbing pain shooting through his head. He knew he was falling. He saw nothing. He felt a soft impact shake his body and he knew he was on the ground. A heavy boot crushed in his stomach and blackness overcame him.

When he came to there was no one around him. His head ached. He felt the thick sticky blood clotting along his skull and trickling down his neck. His mouth was like a blanket and his throat was parched. All throughout the village he heard sharp bursts of firing. Occasionally there was a shout. He rolled over slowly and drew himself to his feet. He swayed, stumbled over a still body.

The street in front of him was strewn with hunched dark bodies. Of moving things it was empty. Suddenly, in the distance, a dog barked furiously. He heard the echo of a shot and the dog was silent. A minute later the bloodcurdling scream of a woman pierced his brain. The soldiers were capturing the women of the peasants! Farron had but one

move left him. He must find Koronsky.

HE stumbled down the middle of the deserted street. Beyond the station he heard the cry of another woman. Three shots roared at his right. A bullet skimmed across his stomach. He turned. His weakness vanished. He saw the stab of flame between two cottages and a bullet sang by his head. His automatic had jumped into his hand and it was spitting lead into that alleyway.

He heard a groan, a scuffling of feet, then silence. He plunged on down the street. Back in the village there was a single shot. Near the depot he heard a sudden volley and silence.

That would be where Koronsky was. His brain was not working clearly, but his nerves clung to that grim purpose. He wanted that thick neck between his fingers. A man who warred on peasants and their women. He stumbled into the crossroad that led to the depot. He saw the low building, huddling low and dark. Stepan's voice rang out from the darkness:

"Come in here! The soldiers are defending the depot. There must be seventy-five of them!"

A heavy volley rang out from the dark building. Bullets sprayed the dust around Farron, sang by him. He reeled toward the space between a cottage and a store. Stepan was huddled in there with a dozen peasants. A couple of them were handling the unfamiliar rifles of the soldiers. Farron didn't know he was reeling. He said:

"We've got to clear that depot! You men crawl behind the cottages back to where the fight began. Bring back all the rifles and cartridge belts you can. Where's Sergey?"

"He's across the street, nearer the depot, with a dozen men."

"Is that all we have left?"

Stepan was silent for a minute. "There may be a few scattered around."

"Well, we've got to get Koronsky! Get going, men. No! Wait!"

They all turned and saw the red flare light up the side of the depot. In its glare stood four cowering women. One of the peasants groaned; "My wife."

AN OFFICER'S voice rang out, clear and harsh in the silence: "Either give up Farron or we will kill the women!"

"Tell them I'm dead," Farron said.

"He's dead!" Stepan yelled.

And across the street, Sergey's voice boomed: "He was killed by the granary."

There was a moment's silence. The officer was talking with some one else. Then he shouted again:

"You men are all under arrest. You stay where you are until morning. If anyone moves toward the depot, we'll kill the women!"

Farron said: "Tell them you'll surrender now if they'll return your women."

Stephan shouted: "We'll come up now, unarmed, and submit, if you'll give us back our women."

There was another consultation. "Come ahead. Unarmed. With your hands in the air."

Farron said: "They'll put you in the stable. I'll be there, hiding. I'll have some rifles too and plenty of ammunition. When we get the women safely in there we'll give them a surprise attack. Go ahead now."

"My friend, you have already helped us enough. You are bleeding. Escape while you can."

"Get going, Stepan. They'll think something is wrong."

He watched the twelve men move slowly into the street with their hands uplifted. From the other side came thirteen, led by the giant Sergey. All

that was left of sixty. Tomorrow they would be marked out and executed. And he with them. Surely his life couldn't end in a peasant uprising in a little Russian village!

NOW he crawled behind the cottages, inches at a time. Twice he saw small bands of soldiers, and he lay still in a shadow. When he reached the cottage next to the granary, he crept back to the street. All was silent. He stood up, peered cautiously around the corner.

"Who's there?" bellowed a voice.

Farron pressed himself against the wall. He eased his automatic into his hand, holding the barrel. He saw the gleam of a bayonet, then a burly soldier moved warily forward. Farron leaped. The butt of the pistol cracked against the skull. He waited a long time after the Russian slumped to the ground. Then he crawled on his belly to the double door that was sagging open.

It was grisly work unstrapping those cartridge belts. He wrapped them around himself. His body was covered with cartridge belts. Then he started dragging rifles together. Dragging the rifles he crawled to the double door that was sagging open.

Farron crawled toward the back, among the refuse and dust. The floor trembled. A rat scuttled across his shoes and dropped to the floor below. He could hear the men at the front of the stable.

He heard the tramp of the peasants' boots on the rotten wood of the ramp. The officers barked swift orders. Farron had all the rifles against the rear wall now. He laid his body in front of them, his face to the wall, his hands under him.

They were marching the peasants into the old horse stalls. They were coming nearer him. He could hear the shuffle of the men. His heart was thumping loudly against the wooden

floor. His pulses beat quickly and his breath was caught in his throat. Under him he heard a cracking sound.

He felt himself sliding. His heart leaped and his breath stopped. There was a startled exclamation from below, a cry of terror.

HE GRABBED at one of the rifles. A harsh splintering snapped in his ears and he was hurtling downward. The rifles clattered and banged. He crashed into timber and trash and bayonets. An officer shouted. Farron rolled over. Several soldiers were throwing rifles up. Farron swooped one up and ducking low, raced the half dozen steps to the last stall. Bullets sang over him, thudding into the wood. Then he was safe in the stall, the rifle held steadily.

Then he heard the cold voice of the officer:

"Farron, our guns are trained directly in the stalls of the peasants. If you don't come out, I'll give the command to fire."

A great roar went up from the peasants. "Don't come! We'll rush!"

For a flickering second he thought of rushing out, yelling to them to follow. But he couldn't see them butchered. He said: "I'm coming out—with my hands up."

About seventy soldiers and three officers were watching him. Every rifle was leveled at the shoulder. He thought they might fire at the slightest sign from an officer. His face was calm, composed, and he walked slowly forward, with his hands above his head. An officer snapped an order and the rifles Farron had collected were gathered up.

He was ordered back in his stall. The soldiers spread out along the opposite walls, their rifles covering all the stalls. The gray light of early dawn filtered through the cracks in the stables and showed every man, every eager finger.

FARRON lay on the floor. Beyond him the peasants were murmuring. In a few hours another detachment of soldiers arrived. It was a very small detachment, only two squads and a major. But each squad carried two machine-guns. These were placed at intervals, covering all the stalls. The original company busied themselves on some mysterious duty. Soon the peasants learned what it was.

They went to each stall and nailed heavy slats across it. The last one they came to was Farron. He watched them without expression.

Six rifles were held rigidly on him. The eyes of the officer glittered menacingly and the four men with hammers banged in the nails.

The slats came a foot higher than his head. When the last nail was driven in, the officer grinned maliciously and nodded to some one out of sight. Feodor Koronsky, the G. P. U. officer, stood before Farron.

Farron kept his face composed and looked indifferently at the officer. Koronsky looked at him with hatred. He said:

"You see how much I threaten. Perhaps you'll talk reasonably with Major Damuroff."

A tall portly officer stepped into view. His distinguished face held more tolerance and a wider intelligence than Koronsky's. He said:

"You have made it very difficult for us, my friend. Won't you leave peacefully now?"

"Yes, on two conditions. That the peasants will have their homes restored, and that I'll be allowed a five minute talk in private with Koronsky."

"You have nothing to say to the officer," the major replied.

"I have a great deal to—say."

"Well, that's impossible."

"Then, you'll have to hold me prisoner."

Damuroff shrugged. "That will be

easy. You can witness the execution of your friends.

"Only those in the rebellion—after we confine the rest of the kulaks and peasants."

THE machine gunners were moved outside, stationed in front of the stable. All day women and children and old men were herded into the old building. They huddled in the old carriage space, across from the stalls. The air was stifling and oppressive. The atmosphere of doom closed over them.

Late in the afternoon, after the sun had set, the stable was cold and gray. Major Damuroff came to Farron. He said calmly:

"You may leave now, if you like. Otherwise, you will be killed with the rest, American or not."

"I will not leave the peasants," he said quietly.

The major shrugged. "Resisting arrest, you know." He walked away.

A woman sobbed softly. Farron saw the children staring and the old men turned their heads.

"Ready!"

He heard the click of the rifle bolts at the front of the stables.

"Aim!"

A peasant in that stall cried out: "No, no!"

"Fire!"

The sharp discharge rattled through the old building. A woman screamed. A child leaped up and his mother pulled him down, covering his eyes. The women were sobbing. One old man jumped up. "Stop!" he yelled. "Stop!" He rushed toward the front of the building. A revolver barked twice. The old man stumbled and fell.

"Move on to the next stall," the major commanded.

FARRON felt his stomach sink emptily. He stood up and leaped against the slats. He shoved.

"Ready!"

Farron lunged heavily.

"Aim!"

Farron lunged again. The sweat broke out in cold drops on his forehead. The wood cracked as the sharp "Fire!" sounded. In the sharp rattle, Farron plunged with all his force. The wood splintered. Those in the next stall heard it and plunged and tore at the wood. All along the wall the men plunged and threw their mighty bodies against the wood. The women were weeping steadily and the children screamed. The old men covered their eyes.

"Move on to the next stall," the officer said.

The peasants in that stall were tearing at the wood. "Let us out of here! Let us out of here! You can't shoot us down like this!"

Farron felt the slats giving away. He dropped all caution now and lunged furiously. The next stall gave way. Major Damuroff snapped:

"Aim and fire at them!"

Farron staggered clear, gripping a slat in his hand. The discharge burst in his ear. The three men who stumbled out of the stall plunged to the ground. One of them was the mighty Sergey, who kicked and writhed. The stall in front of which the men were standing now belched out three men. "Fire!" the officer cried. He turned to Farron, aiming his automatic. Farron threw the wood. The sharp bark of the pistol and the crack of the bullet in the wood came together. Damuroff's arm was flying upward, the pistol sailing through the air.

The soldiers were bayoneting the three men who had leaped on them. The slats in the two remaining stalls were giving away and the men fighting and tearing through. The major whirled and ran toward the door. Farron started after him, his legs chopping upward in the swift strides he once used in starting off tackle. The

officer sensed that he was being overtaken and drew in his breath to yell.

His wide shoulders lunged into the legs of the officer, his strong arms gripping his ankles. The man crashed to the ground, his breath knocked out of him. Farron's right fist rose once. It cracked against the Russian's skull and his body slumped inertly.

HE WHIRLED around. The women and children were swarming forward. Their eyes were maniacal. Three peasants lay on the ground with three soldiers. Three peasants grasped the rifles of three soldiers and they were swaying together. Farron sprang forward. His right fist crashed three times, and the soldiers slumped to the ground.

The last stall gave way and Stepan and two peasants tumbled out. One of the other soldiers staggered to his knees. A peasant boot cracked against his skull. One of the peasants staggered up. His eyes were wild. He started rushing toward the door after the maddened stampede.

Farron, and the six peasants, joined the rush. The frenzied mob were rushing down the ramp. The six peasants dashed out of the old double doors at the other end. Not a shot had been fired outside. Farron shoved a straight arm against the middle door and staggered into the street.

The machine-guns were trained on the two doors. Several squads of soldiers were between the machine-guns, uncertainly holding their rifles. Koronsky was standing directly in front of Farron, yelling wildly.

"Shoot! Shoot!"

But the machine gunners looked at the women and old men and the six wild-eyed peasants and strangely made no move. The soldiers saw Farron and then they brought up their rifles. Farron leaped as Koronsky turned. His right hand clamped on the officers wrist. Koronsky's pistol

was knocked to the ground. Instantly he hurled forward his left fist.

FARRON DUCKED. The blow bounced off the top of his skull. Then he was in, his right fist coming up in a quick uppercut. Koronsky brought both arms around Farron's ribs with amazing quickness.

Farron felt his ribs being crushed. His breath came pantingly through his choked lungs. Koronsky squeezed so crushingly that Farron's arms were cramped. Farron worked feverishly with his fist, pounding, pounding.

The skin was ripped from his knuckles, and his short punches seemed to do no harm to that rocklike face.

In desperation, he shoved the heels of his hands against Koronsky's face and pushed. As he heaved backward, he twisted and writhed. The grip clung. But Farron had gotten the upper part of his body back. He slashed down with his right fist. It cracked across the eye.

Farron squirmed further back and shot forward his whole weight in another over-hand right. Koronsky's arms fell away and he staggered back. Farron was on him, pounding, slashing, ripping, with two bleeding fists. He felt the clawing hands at his windpipe. He shook it off. He felt a

heavy knee barge into his stomach, like the thrust of a pole. His breath gasped out. He slashed again.

The giant toppled backward, reeled, and collapsed. Farron wavered dizzily. The nausea from the knee-thrust welled up in him. His breath burned out through his tortured lungs. But Koronsky didn't rise. He lay there, an inert bulk.

Then Farron heard Major Damuroff's voice behind him:

"Why didn't you fire, men?"

A young officer said: "We are tiring of killing our own people—those women and children and old men, and those half-crazed peasants."

FARRON saw that the street was deserted, save for the knot of soldiers. The peasants hadn't been rushing to fight. They had run off to their homes. Damuroff laid his hand on Farron's shoulder.

"Well, you had your five minutes with Koronsky. I think I can see that you'll get the other conditions: that the peasants may keep their homes. This has been happening everywhere. It is not good. . . ." He shook his head. "You'll be going now, I guess?" Farron smiled.

He said: "Yes. Wherever there's fighting for the underdog."

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A Story of the Murderous Cult of Bahowini in India



The Black Avatar

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

SHADOWS cast by the huge horizon moon danced through the jungle. The treacherous leopard crouched overhead among the branches; the snake, coiled at the edge of the jungle trail, drew back his head, ready to strike. But it was human beasts whom Dane and his Sikh servant, Rampat, feared the most.

Something rustled and was still; an owl hooted, but Rampat knew it was no owl.

"Sahib, these be devils whom the Black Avatar has summoned to aid him and his Thugs," whispered Rampat.

"These be only men," Dane whispered back. "Remember the one thing I warned you of: at the instant when you feel the noose about your neck, strike upward with the knife, and sever it. Else you are dead before your body strikes the ground."

Moving with every nerve alert, every sinew tense, the two advanced like shadows into the deeper recesses of the jungle, Dane's hand on the handle of the revolver in his belt, the Sikh fingering his short dagger.

The sounds about them ceased, but the feeling of imminent danger had grown more intense.

Dane felt sure, however, that the

Thug assassins who had been aware of his every movement had planned the ambush in the clearing just ahead of them.

Ostensibly they were an officer on a shooting trip, and his servant, but Dane was well aware that the murderous band which had dogged him knew him for what he was—the American in the Indian Political Service, whose name had become a word of terror to wrong-doers throughout the length and breadth of the peninsula.

A GAIN the owl hooted, and another owl replied from the opposite side of the clearing. Tensely poised, each of the two men waited; and now Dane had exchanged his revolver for a knife of razor edge, like Rampat's. Dane knew that only a miracle of a lucky shot would stop two Thugs, holding the *romal*, the knotted noose whose strangling jerk means instantaneous death.

Yet, strangler though he is called, the Thug does not kill by strangulation. One jerk in the hands of the two experts, and the victim's neck is dislocated; if he is not dead before his body touches earth, the job has been badly bungled.

At any instant now the leap might come, and it would come swift as the leopard's.

It came. Four Thugs leaped out of the scrub into the clearing. They came in pairs, two against Dane, two against the Sikh, and, stretched invisibly between each pair, was the murderous scarf.

Their speed was incredible. To attempt to evade the noose by flight, meant certain death. The Thugs counted on their victim's flight, and their limbs moved in complete unison.

No other man could match their speed. Dane did not try. He felt the *romal* touch his neck, and, before the murderers' hands could tighten it

into a steel-defying roll, he had whirled and slashed upward.

The knife, ground for that very purpose to the keenest edge that the well-tempered steel would take, bit through the roll. The fists of the Thugs, extended at the full length of the arms, suddenly freed, shot backward and collided with their faces.

Each of the would-be murderers dealt himself what was nearly a knockout blow. Dane was free.

He had heard a cry from Rampat, but their understanding had been that, in case of a double attack, it must be each man for himself. And Dane had not done with his own particular pair of ruffians.

As they leaped to their feet, he dropped the knife and drew his revolver, equipped with a silencer. It spoke twice, and each muffled detonation was a snarl of death.

One of the Thugs collapsed, a blue hole in his forehead trickling red; the second, with the back of his head blown away, had become instantly a mere inert lump of flesh.

DANE paused hardly an instant to assure himself that the two Thugs were dead.

He whirled, and saw that Rampat had succeeded in slashing the noose. One of his assailants was writhing on the ground in his death-agony, his head half-severed from his body.

The other, mad with fanaticism and bhong, had the Sikh by the throat with one hand, while in the other, raised aloft, was a blade that glistened in the moonlight.

Just in time, Dane pressed trigger again. Shot through the heart, the last of the four Thugs collapsed, dead before he struck soil.

"Sahib," panted Rampat, "there is one more!"

He extended his arm, and, at the

gesture, a lurking figure crashed through the jungle and sped away along the narrow trail by which Dane and Rampat had come.

As it disappeared, Dane caught a glimpse of a thin, cruel face and a pair of gleaming black eyes.

Then he leaped forward to overtake it. He quickly outdistanced Rampat, who, stout of body, like many Sikhs, was quickly left hopelessly behind.

Yet, fleet though he was, Dane realized with something of chagrin, that he was being outsp rinted.

For three or four minutes the chase continued. Then suddenly the trail curved, the jungle grew thin, and the man vanished as swiftly and as silently as a caracal.

And simultaneously, with one of those amazing transitions that only India can show, there appeared, in place of the jungle, a slope in the valley beneath.

HOWEVER, this did not surprise Dane, who had known that these things were there.

Realizing that the fugitive had succeeded in eluding him, he stopped upon a rocky ridge which extended above palace and temple. It was a with massive boulders piled up in fantastic array, possibly the work of the primitive natives who had been expelled by the Aryan migrants in the earliest dawn of history.

Rampat came puffing up. The Sikh was badly winded, and he was bleeding from a knife-scratch across the cheek.

"That way he went, Sahib," he said. "See, into these rocks."

Revolver in hand, Dane forced his way into an opening in the ridge, and found himself in a narrow passage, a natural fissure in the wall hardly wider than himself, and so

overhung by scrub growth that only a minimum of light seeped through.

For perhaps fifty yards Dane pursued his way into the heart of the ridge. At times the trail descended so steeply that it was with difficulty he could keep his feet.

ended in a wall of massive stones, made by human agency, probably in the remote past. Squared, and put together without mortar, the stones would have defied anything short of artillery.

"We go back to where we camped," said Dane. "We shall keep watch in turn through the remainder of the night, Rampat. Tomorrow we go to the palace."

HIS Highness Chunder Ras wiped his forehead with a damp silk handkerchief, for it was hot, even under the peepul trees in his Highness's gardens.

His mild, spectacled black eyes were turned on Dane's in apologetic surprise.

"What you tell me distresses me exceedingly, Mr. Dane," he said. "It is possible, of course, that among the half-million of my subjects there are a few who have been guilty of Thug-gery. It is very difficult to stamp out the last remnants of this debasing superstition. But when you say that the government is displeased with me, surely that is unjust.

"My record as a Cambridge man, Bachelor of Arts with honors, obviously guarantees that I am doing everything in my power to spread the blessings of enlightenment."

"I am not questioning your highness's record," replied Dane coldly. "The fact remains that the Thug fanaticism, which was believed to be extinct, has been revived within your principality. In the past five months there have been seven murders with the *romal*. The cult of the murder

goddess, Bahowini, cannot be permitted to reestablish itself."

"Furthermore," he added, "my servant and myself, while on our way night in the jungle, not four miles from here. The marauders used the *romal*, happily without effect."

Chunder Ras sat down; he was trembling violently.

YOU will pardon me, Mr. Dane—the heat—and your news upset me," he faltered. "But how comes it that you camped all night in the jungle, instead of accepting the palace hospitality?"

"Because," answered Dane, "the existence of the ruined shrine of Bahowini, not far away, and the fact that this devilish cult has been revived, led me to expect developments."

Without replying for the moment, Chunder Ras drained his iced drink through a straw. When he spoke again, he had in measure recovered his self-possession.

"Mr. Dane," he said, "I hope you are not suggesting that it is a matter of small consequence to me that a political officer of the Indian Government should be attacked within so short a distance of the palace.

"I shall leave no stone unturned to apprehend all persons connected with this outrage. However, it is my belief that the men who attacked you were simply thieves. The cult of Bahowini is dead."

"I regret to appear to contradict your highness," answered Dane, "but the sacred pick, the emblem of Bahowini, is carved on the temple adjoining the palace. True, it was carved there a long time ago. But it has not been removed."

He leaned forward. "I have reason to believe," he said quietly, "that this cult has been revived for political purposes—for the purpose of spread-

ing dissatisfaction among those who serve the Raj, and terrorizing the bulk of the population into sedition."

Chunder Ras smiled acidly. "My dear sir, let me show you how wrong you are in one detail at least," he said. "The temple with the pick carved on its stones is now a theosophical institute, presided over by a member of the Calcutta Theosophical Society.

"It is devoted to the pure worship of God, and designed to wean away the minds of my subjects from idolatry. The carvings date back to the time when the temple was devoted to heathen ritual, and it has simply not been considered necessary to deface the exterior by removing them.

"But, my dear Mr. Dane, let us stroll over and have a talk with Brother Harendita, who is really an excellent fellow, and will quickly convince you of the injustice of your suspicions.

"You must really forgive me, Mr. Dane, but a man who rowed in his college boat, and won the hundred yards dash against Oxford and Yale, is hardly likely to tolerate such a degraded superstition as Thuggee."

He rose, a gentlemanly, athletic figure in his suit of shimmering silk, and led the way across the palace grounds.

Passing through a little gate, Chunder Ras conducted his guest across a spacious court shaded with peepul trees, and so up the steps of the temple.

BUILT in the conventional style of a Hindu temple, the edifice nevertheless had an air of modernity about it, due to the awnings over the windows, and perhaps the words *Theosophical Institute*, carved in plain Roman letters over the door.

Dane was astonished when he had passed inside. The place was not a

temple at all. There were no altars, no statues. It was, instead, a chapel, a lecture hall with a desk, an institution.

At the entrance of the Rajah and the English representative a courtly, black-robed babu, with a chubby black face and clerical collar, came out of a room behind the pulpit. He made a profound obeisance.

"Oh, hello, Babu Gomashta, let me introduce you to Mr. Dane, of the Political Service," said the Rajah. "Where is Doctor Harendra?"

"The Doctor has been called away to attend to a sick member of the Society, Your Highness," responded the chubby assistant.

"Too bad! I should have liked Mr. Dane to meet him," said Chunder Ras. "Mr. Dane is very much interested in our Institute, Gomashta. Won't you show us around?"

DANE'S preconceptions, gathered from the pick and other heathen emblems sculptured on the exterior of the temple, were completely shattered as he accompanied the chubby, smiling babu through the Institution.

It was the last corner of India where one would have expected to find such a place. There was a reading-room, containing copies of most of the vernacular papers; there were shelves of theosophical works in Hindu and English; there was a fair library.

Dane listened as the babu plied him with information and statistics.

"Did you ever hear of the Black Avatar?" asked Dane, with purposeful suddenness. And as he spoke he watched the faces of both men keenly.

They shook their heads. Not a flicker of a muscle on the face of either betokened surprise.

"The Black Avatar is supposed to be at the head of the men who are attempting to revive the cult of Bahowini," Dane continued.

The Rajah laughed heartily. "It seems to me that I do remember hearing something about a black Avatar," he answered. "But we are always having revivals in these days. Dismiss the whole idea from your mind as a fiction, Mr. Dane. Let us go back to the palace."

Dane was to remain at the palace for a day or two, in order to go into certain matters of business in connection with the Administration.

Dane was pondering, trying to fit together some obscure ideas in his mind, when there came a tap at the door of his room, and Rampat entered.

"Sahib," he whispered, "there be eyes that watch us in this place. I feel them. Let me watch over the Sahib this night within this room.

"If the attack comes, it will not come from without, Sahib. Neither from the passage, where I lie, nor from the window, for there is no way by which an assassin could enter."

"Whence, then?" asked Dane.

They looked about there. There was no access to the room from without.

"See, Sahib!" cried Rampat suddenly, pointing to the large Calcutta carpet that covered the floor. It was a trick of light from the oil lamp on the wall that showed an edged rim, representing two sides of a square, underneath the texture beside the foot of the bed.

THE two men exchanged glances of surmise. Then, without uttering a word, Rampat went down on his hands and knees and began pulling out the tacks that held the carpet in place.

That was in itself unusual, that a carpet should be nailed down. And the tacks were set unduly close together—less than an inch apart.

It took Rampat some fifteen min-

utes to remove the tacks around a considerable section of the wall, and when he tried to move the bed in order to get at the edge of the rug behind it, it was discovered that the head was clamped to the floor.

AND then Dane saw that it had not been necessary for Rampat to remove a single tack. For there was a large flap of carpet underneath the bed, separate from the rest, and not nailed down.

Dane threw it back, disclosing a small trap door, with an iron ring in it, but it was fastened on the underside, for it was impossible to lift it.

And the legs of the foot of the bed rested on the trap door.

Before either man could speak there came a slight click from the door. A key had been turned in the outside. The soft, almost inaudible sound of bare feet moving away was audible.

Rampat would have leaped toward the door, but Dane's fingers compressed his wrist like steel talons. And Rampat stopped. He had not made a sound.

"They mean to murder us, Sahib!"

Rampat's voice came in a whisper. Dane nodded. Rampat touched him on the arm and pointed downward. Dane's feet were just on the edge of the trap door.

"Listen, Sahib!"

The faint murmur of voices became audible in the room. The sounds came from beneath the trap. A clang followed. The bed dropped, hung by the head, and underneath was unfathomable blackness.

Then a faint light flickered far below. At the same time there came a shuffling of feet outside the locked door.

Dane and Rampat, leaning over the trap, could see that a long ladder at one side led down to the bottom of the pit, and down turbaned heads and

white robes showed against the lamp that was held in a man's hand.

Without a moment's hesitation, Dane began scrambling down the ladder, and Rampat followed him.

But it was rather a leap than a scramble. Dane was at the bottom in a moment. His feet collided with a nude body, eliciting a grunt of pain; he slipped and went sprawling, and felt a voluminous robe envelope his head.

He flung it off him, reached up, and grappled with a human form. By a miracle of luck his fingers fastened upon a wrist that clenched a dagger. With the exercise of all his strength, Dane brought the arm jerking down toward the naked body.

A scream of agony followed. Dane felt the blade go home, heard the flesh rip. With a moan the man dropped, leaving the dagger in Dane's hand.

On either side a man was closing in, one heavily clad, the other wearing only a loin-cloth. Not far away an old man was still holding up the lamp, whose light was reflected on the two villainous faces. Near by Rampat was engaged in a struggle with other assailants.

THE old man had let the lamp drop. It crashed on the stone floor and went out.

In utter darkness the fight went on.

The cellar seemed full of assassins. Somewhere near Dane two men were struggling fiercely, apparently by mistake, since Rampat was on the other side of him.

A third man leaped at him, and a blade gashed the skin of his shoulder. Then Dane had an instant of illumination. The man had passed him, but a sixth sense told him that he had turned.

Suddenly Dane released the wrist of the nude assassin with whom he had been struggling. He leaped aside

and, as he had expected, the two ruffians came together, each mistaking the other for the Feringhi.

The two blades went home simultaneously, and either man dropped, screeching and writhing in his death agony.

Then fell a sudden silence, broken by the thudding of fists against the door of Dane's room overhead, the crash of a splintered panel. Dane felt in his pocket and found his matchbox.

THE tiny flame of a match showed that the cellar contained only himself and Rampat, three dead men upon the floor, and a fourth half propped up against a wall and breathing in the stertorous way that indicates approaching death.

Dane knew the fourth man instantly. He was the one in the robes who had first assaulted him, and he was bleeding heavily from an internal wound.

But Dane recognized him, with amazement, as the mild-mannered babu, Gomashta, who had conducted him over the Theosophical Institute a few hours before, and babbled of pure religion.

"So it is you," said Dane. He struck another match and looked about him. The cellar was small, but there was a door at either end. "What is behind that door?" he asked.

"The seven," whispered Gomashta.

"The seven who, it was supposed, were murdered with the *romal*?" Dane demanded. "Why are they kept there?"

"For the sacrifice tomorrow," whispered the babu.

"I knew the great sacrifice was to be tomorrow, but I did not know the seven had been kept alive."

"Doctor Harendra knew that you suspected. That was why your death was ordered. The curse of Kali on

those who led me along this road of death."

His head slipped down on his shoulder, and his body seemed to huddle into the floor. By the light of another match Dane saw that he was dead.

Dane detached the keys from the dead babu's girdle.

Inside, huddled upon the floor of a smaller chamber, Dave found the seven who had disappeared, supposed victims of the strangler's cord. They had all been servants of English officers, and it was known that their disappearance had been part of an organized campaign to terrorize all native employees of the Government.

THEY were all in a state of emaciation. Their arms and ankles were chained to staples in the wall, and enclosed in fetters.

At the sight of Dane and Rampat in the light of the match, they started into a sitting posture, rattling their chains and crying out for mercy.

Quickly Dane began gathering up the weapons that strewed the floor.

There were five daggers; and in a pocket in the robes of Babu Gomashta was a cheap revolver, with every chamber loaded.

Dane went back and stuck a dagger into the loin-cloth of each of five of the captives. To one man he gave the revolver.

"Take care that these are not discovered," he said, "or I cannot save you. Tomorrow morning when they lead you forth to the sacrifice, you must show yourselves to be brave men."

"Sahib, our chains! Are we to remain here?"

"The chains and you remain. It is necessary that you be taken into the temple, in order that I may lay hands on the Black Avatar. Do you know who he is?"

"We know nothing, Sahib. Some of us have lain here for weeks, and only of late did we understand why we were brought here."

"Remember to keep silence, unless it be to bewail your fate," said Dane. "And make no resistance until I come, even though you stand before the altar itself."

The door behind was splintering in turn, and the voices were yelling in demoniac chorus. The matches were nearly gone, but enough remained for Dane to find the key to the door that led out of the smaller cellar, and to open it and pass through with Rampat.

DANE locked the door behind him. He had a pretty accurate idea of what he was going to find on the other side of it.

The two found themselves groping upward along a narrow passage in the darkness. It ran up steeply, so that it would have been insurmountable, but for rough edgings of stones set in the ground, which served for steps. Dane counted fifty-seven of these before a faint light came filtering down from above.

The passage had levelled off, the walls were faced with stone. The side wall of the temple loomed up. The passage evidently led into the temple basement.

Rampat caught at Dane's arm. "Sahib, this place, you know what it is?"

"Yes," answered Dane, "it's the other side of the wall we saw last night."

It was very dim there. Hardly a ray of moonlight straggled down.

Dane was feeling the wall, stone by stone, trying to find the egress through which the murderer had passed.

It was by sheer chance he found it. He had tripped over a root projecting

out of the ground, and fell violently against the wall.

He put out his wand to save himself, felt the stone yielding; and a section nearly as tall as a man swung round upon a pivot.

Dane got upon his feet and found himself looking through the opening at the trail beyond.

They crept through the orifice, and Dane swung the stone back into position. For a long time they waited, while the moon slowly crossed the sky and began to dip behind the temple.

Now the two men could hear the measured tramp of the crowd as it came toward the temple. Cries broke out, the screaming of a fanatic, the excited chatter of voices, the harsh shouts of a priest. Over all the drums, insistent, maddening.

"Well, Rampat, the fun's starting," said Dane, "and the odds against us are pretty big ones. But if those fellows succeed in hiding their knives, we'll show these Bahowini dogs a time lively enough to suit them."

He put out his hand and swung the stone cautiously upon its pivot. Nobody was in the inner passage.

Whatever means of escape the fanatics imagined that Dane and Rampat had taken, it did not occur to them that they might have solved the secret of the stone, least of all that they were planning a come-back.

"Follow me!" said Dane, making his way through the orifice.

THEY reached the fork of the trail, turned, and made their way along the alternative passage, until a sudden turn brought them up against the temple basement, or, rather against a hedge of aloes that separated the basement from the passage.

Dane pushed his way through the hedge, and the roofed entrance to the basement appeared in front of him,

with a small window at the side. But the basement was much larger than the hall above it.

It was the same size as the hall, the reading-room, and the offices, and it was much deeper than it had appeared to be when viewed casually the day before.

The sight that met Dane's eyes was a fearful one. Immediately opposite was a gigantic statue of the hideous goddess, Bahowini, or Kali. In her hand she held the sacred pick, around her neck she wore the necklace of skulls.

WITH red, protruding fangs and serpent girdle, she stood upon the prostrate body of her husband, the god Siva.

Before her was a low, flat altar, with a stone basin at one end. In front of this altar were ranged three priests of the goddess, in robes of crimson, and at one side was the dreaded form of the Black Avatar.

A tall form, clothed completely in black, the head hooded in black, so that nothing of the face was visible, he stood in front of the stone basin, in his hand the sacrificial knife.

Behind him, guarded by subordinate priests, were the seven victims. They wore only loin cloths, their limbs were unbound, and they stood as if stunned by terror.

The Black Avatar was chanting an invocation, to which the drums kept up a throbbing undertone.

"The sacrifice!" yelled the mob. "Kill! Kill! The holy goddess commands her sacrifice!"

The drums thundered again, and the conches blared. Cymbals clashed in unison, and a mighty roar filled the temple as the victims were dragged forward to where the Black Avatar awaited them, his knife unsheathed.

Suddenly the whole scene was transformed. The captives had obeyed

Dane's precepts up to the last moment; now, whipping out the daggers from the loin cloths, they precipitated themselves upon their captors.

The Black Avatar leaped aside just in time to save his life, the priests rallied about him, but the mob, screaming and panic-stricken, made for the door just as Dane and Rampat burst through.

Dane emptied his revolver, and each shot accounted for a man. He cleared a space about him. The mob was in wild disorder, those in front pressing back, those behind trying to force a passage to the door.

Then the Thug nooses came into play. Two men, each holding an end of the cord, sprang with incredible swiftness at Rampat.

His dagger, buried to the hilt in the breast of one of them, hardly checked their forward impetus. It was a shot from Dane's revolver, hastily reloaded, through the other's brain, that saved the Sikh.

Two more of the assassins had dropped a noose around the neck of one of the captives, and the crack of the vertebra sounded like a pistol shot. The man was dead before he touched the basement floor.

Nooses against knives! On all sides pairs of Thugs were bounding forward, the stretched cord between their outthrust hands. For a few moments the issue looked a doubtful.

THREE of the prisoners had fallen dead with broken necks, but, though the dead assassins littered the floor, they still came on.

With knife and revolver Dane and Rampat fought the menace. And suddenly the tide turned. The assassins broke and fled. And there, slinking away behind the altar, was the Black Avatar.

Dane leaped toward him.

The man fought with the strength

of a devil. It was only when Dane brought his revolver muzzle smashing down on his skull that he grew limp.

He swayed, and Dane caught him and flung him down upon the altar. He pulled the hood from the face of the half-conscious man.

But Dane had known all along that the Black Avatar was Prince Chunder Ras, the Cambridge man, "gone fan-tee," returned to the dark archaic faith of his ancestors.

CHUNDER RAS opened his eyes and glared at Dane. He writhed and struggled, and a torrent of curses broke from his lips.

"You played a cool game, Highness," said Dane, "but you slipped up badly when you referred to your having won the hundred-yards dash against Oxford and Yale. You must have run nearly as fast as you ran the night before, after we laid out those four Thug friends of yours in the clearing."

The capture and unmasking of the Black Avatar had taken all the heart out of the resistance. The priests were scurrying away like rats into holes and corners. The terrified crowd had vanished. The assassins were dead or gone.

Dane and Rampat, with their four rescued prisoners who had survived the fight, hurried back along the tun-

nel, the Prince, still dazed, with them. When Dane swung open the revolving stone and hustled him through, he groaned. "A hundred thousand English sovereigns if you will forget all that has happened," he pleaded. "In my treasure vaults—and more, if you want it—"

Dane's answer, in the vernacular, was an expressive but untranslatable one.

Once upon the ridge, the six hurried along with their prisoner as fast as they could go. A scurrying mob of fugitives fled in haste at the sight of them. Nevertheless, they were glad when they struck the trail that ran through the jungle.

"We can keep them at bay now, Sahib, if they try to follow us," said Rampat.

"They won't try," answered Dane.

"No need for further anxiety over me," smiled Chunder Ras. "I am sorry to have been the cause of so much trouble, gentlemen. But a Prince cannot suffer public indignity, and besides, I am a Cambridge man."

Swiftly his hands shot up behind his head. Between them was the deadly noose, a mere rolled scarf, but held by a master of the horrible art of Thuggee.

The hands shot down before Dane could leap forward. The crack of the dislocated vertebra was heard. Chunder Ras pitched forward on his face, quivered an instant, and was still.



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